

MOVE IT LIKE... CHRISSY NICHOLS DIRECTOR, ATLANTIC PACIFIC GROUP



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Chrissy Nichols, better known as Chrissy, is a great example of what women can offer to – and what they can achieve in – logistics



LEADING FROM THE FRONT

But having failed to get a job with the British national papers, despite at that tender age literally knocking on their doors in an attempt to get work as a junior reporter, her eye was caught by the potential for work with a 'paper agent', H H Pegg. Her endeavour and confidence secured her a post there, though it turned out that that wouldn't be as a reporter – the 'paper agent' bought and sold paper rather than produced newspapers.

Nevertheless, Chrissy learnt much about international buying and selling, and she subsequently moved to a new job with a ship chartering and liner agency company, Glover Brothers, that had the same international focus.

From there she moved to Morline, a part of Anglo-Soviet Shipping. Learning the ropes of international shipping – bookings, bills of lading, letters of credit and so on – she also got the opportunity to travel.

And she caught the travel bug. So Chrissy left the UK for what was supposed to be a three-month backpacking trip. It turned out to be a six-year journey, with plenty of experience gained in logistics in parts of the world such as Cyprus, Greece, Australia and New Zealand.

In the last of these, Chrissy's efforts on behalf of a company involving less-than-container load (LCL) bookings on the Japan trade saw the business take more consolidations in her first week of work than it had ever done previously. The boss offered her a job not least on the strength of that, and she was with the company – in a division of it that would eventually come under Japanese giant NYK's wing – for three years.

Then it was back to the UK, and a position at Direct Container Line, a non-vessel operating common carrier (NVOCC), where she started as an inside sales coordinator. Chrissy quickly rose through the ranks, becoming general manager as well taking on other responsibilities. Though she was with DCL for a total of 12 years, her thinking had turned to new challenges.

Atlantic Pacific

Chrissy Nichols married her husband, fellow Atlantic Pacific Group director (as well as CEO and chairman) Ashley Nichols in 2000, and together they registered Atlantic Pacific Global Logistics that same year (though it didn't yet trade at that time).

Traditionally a male-dominated industry, she has pioneered a route from starting out 'at the bottom' to being a co-founder and director of the fast-growing freight forwarding, supply chain and container haulage business, Atlantic Pacific Group, while being asked to give inspirational speeches to international freight industry bodies, being a driving force in charitable foundations and a trustee of the Lady McAdden Breast Cancer Trust, and now even being chosen as the first chairwoman in its 70-year history of the London Freight Club (LFC).

She has demonstrated just how much women can contribute to the freight industry and is using her prominent roles in the sector to tell her story and to encourage other women to follow in her path in a business that she loves and that she believes holds out so much opportunity for enjoyment as well as being a satisfying, fulfilling career.

To start at the beginning

None of this was obvious when, leaving school at 15, she initially looked to a career as an air hostess, anticipating the rich travel opportunities that would be on offer. However, lacking both a requisite additional three inches in height and three years in age for this preferred employment, she took to her second choice – to work as a reporter.

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The Atlantic Pacific Group has offices across the UK, as well as in Ireland and even in the US, and consists of four different components:

- **ATLANTIC PACIFIC**: a freight forwarder and provider of supply chain solutions, was established as we have seen in 2000. It has offices in Basildon, Felixstowe, London Heathrow and Manchester in the UK, as well as Dublin and Cork in Ireland. Plus, an office in Chicago in the US was opened in January this year
- **KILLICK MARTIN**: a familiar name in British freight forwarding, went into administration in 1999, but Ashley and Chrissy registered the name in 2017 and then reactivated the business in 2019 under the leadership of a former UK managing director of Damco, Paul Gallagher. Ashley acts as chairman and, he says, Killick Martin has enjoyed tremendous success in recent years, being recognised for such by winning the British International Freight Association (BIFA) European and Supply Chain Management Awards in 2021 and 2022, following being a finalist for a BIFA award in 2020
- **FREEDOM LOGISTICS**: an air freight forwarder and a specialist in temperature-sensitive shipping based at Heathrow Airport, was acquired in 2022
- **PORT EXPRESS**: a container haulage business, was founded in 2004. From its bases in Felixstowe, Southampton, Birmingham, London Gateway and Doncaster, it operates a large fleet of more than 100 vehicles and 200 trailers

Ashley had worked for many years in freight forwarding, much of that time as a senior executive with Maersk. His father had also been in the business, and Ashley had always wanted his own freight forwarding company. Atlantic Pacific began trading in 2001, with his father initially in charge, but within a couple of years Ashley and Chrissy were leading the effort and looking to expand.

“We had been in the industry a long time, people liked us, and they wanted to join us,” says Chrissy. “We wanted it to be a family business, with no big company type anonymity,” adds Ashley, “and that is how we have kept it.”

Indeed: “That’s what continues to make it special today,” says Chrissy. “It has a different feel when it is a family business, and we still have friends and family involved today.”

Moreover, the company has grown much quicker than they could have expected, she continues. From a strength of 10 or so staff in the early 2000s, the Atlantic Pacific Group now employs more than 200 people. What’s more, Chrissy observes: “As a company, you are only as good as your staff, and we have fabulous people, some of whom have been with us from the beginning.”

The Group as a whole offers bespoke, highly tailored services to its many customers across a broad range of capabilities, says Chrissy: everything from supply chain management to trucking, warehousing and even air charters. “We are also extremely proud to have had an early focus on sustainability, with Atlantic Pacific Global Logistics holding its environmental ISO since 2009. Across the Group we have also been presented with 11 industry awards since 2006.”

Contributions to the community

Away from day-to-day Atlantic Pacific operations, Chrissy is the founder and chairwoman of Unity in Community, a charitable foundation of the Atlantic Pacific Group that supports local and nationally-based charities and community events, such as the ‘Gratitude’ nationwide effort in 2021 to celebrate the heroes of the Covid epidemic, and its ‘Hares about Town’ charitable drive that supported local hospices around Essex.

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She gives advice and encouragement to breast cancer sufferers through her role as trustee of the Lady McAdden Breast Cancer Trust – and, as a survivor of the cancer herself, has plenty to offer.

Earlier this year, Chrissy attended the first Females in Freight gathering in Felixstowe to talk

about her career experiences and the challenges that women still face in the logistics business. She is an ambassador for Everywoman and a member of the judging panel of the Everywoman in Transport Awards 2023, and has been invited to work with the Institute of Export and International Trade to follow her passion to get more women and young people into logistics.

Plus, she has been asked to be a guest at the Glasgow Freight Club and to talk to BIFA’s Young Forwarder Network later this year.

And Chrissy is now the London Freight Club’s first ever chairwoman in its long history. “I always wanted to be part of the LFC, right back to the days of starting out in the industry,” she explains. “I pushed for female membership of the club then and when Ashley, as chairman of the LFC, opened it up to female membership about 10 years ago, I became the first woman to join. The LFC has a great reputation and I was delighted and proud to be accepted as a member. A couple of years later, she became the club’s first female committee member, then vice-chair and now chairwoman. “I’ve had nothing but support from everybody at the club and on the committee,” she says.



If there are too few female members of the club, it is not because current members are blocking change, Chrissy insists, and her priority is very much to encourage more women to join the LFC, and she is talking to logistics company owners and managers with this in mind.

There were 24 women members when she took over as chair in January this year and she is hoping to have 50 or so by the end of 2023.

Her other priority as chair is to see the club continue to raise money for extremely worthwhile charitable causes.

Atlantic Pacific’s own record on female equality is impressive – two of its five group directors are women, for example, and discounting truck drivers probably at least half of its managers and employees are female.

Caring and sharing

Encouraging women to get involved in the industry is certainly dear to Chrissy’s heart, as too is her desire to attract young people into logistics. Meanwhile, alongside her charitable efforts her priorities at the Atlantic Pacific Group are ensuring that the group is a ‘flexibility, caring and supportive employer, embracing equality, diversity and inclusion’ and that the group retains a focus on sustainability.

Meanwhile, the impressive growth path that the Atlantic Pacific Group has been on for more than two decades is expected to continue, fuelled by both organic growth and mergers and acquisitions.

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