

PT Hedland, Western Australia

PILBARA LOGISTICS

Pilbara Logistics evolved from a private industry project to foster relationships and better understandings with Indigenous people in the Pilbara community. The outcome was not only greater cultural awareness, but the opportunity for Geoff Stocker to develop a viable and independent machinery hire business. After seven years of operation, the business generates employment and training in northern West Australia, including 20 staff positions within Pilbara Logistics. Committed to employing other Indigenous people, Geoff has helped to create real opportunities in areas that would otherwise struggle economically and socially.

The Story So Far...



Geoff Stocker

Pilbara Logistics began from a relationship between the multinational company Brambles Industrial Services (BIS) and Geoff Stocker. BIS has a long term commitment to foster genuine, beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities in the Pilbara region. BIS describe the relationship - *'From the outset, the relationship between the parties had to be something different, something special and not simply a matter of finding a few jobs and a bit of training for members of the Indigenous community.'* Through the support Geoff received in tendering for contracts, *Pilbara Logistics* evolved into a company in its own right in 1998.

Geoff began the company with two cranes, one of which was obtained through an ATSI grant. Throughout the business's seven-year life, Geoff has identified opportunities for the business to expand and extend. *Pilbara Logistics* incorporates three key components;

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crane hire, heavy machinery hire and a waste management service named *Pilbara Waste*. *Pilbara Logistics* provides employment for over 20 people, and has a strong commitment to hiring and training Indigenous people.

Pilbara Logistics has faced challenges finding support. As Geoff explains – ‘*We have had to prove to multinational companies that an Indigenous company can be successful. The stereotypes people running the big companies have of Indigenous people don’t allow for us to be successful. It is these stereotypes that have motivated us to prove we are as good as, if not better than our competitors. Fortunately there have been companies that have given Pilbara Logistics a chance - I believe we have proved we are successful.*’

Acquiring funds to expand the business has also had its challenges - Geoff says ‘*ATSIC assisted us in obtaining our first lot of equipment. Later, when Pilbara Logistics was ready to expand we applied for bank loans . The banks didn’t want to know us! I believe when they saw that we had received earlier assistance from ATSIC and that we were Aboriginal, they assumed we would be unable able to repay our loans and remain a successful business. Once again we proved them wrong.*’



Bernard

The Impact

In Geoff’s opinion, the greatest impact of the business has been the demonstration to both Indigenous and non -Indigenous people that an Indigenous owned and managed company can achieve significant economic development outcomes. *Pilbara Logistics* has proven their ability to operate as a significant player within the marketplace.

Secondly, *Pilbara Logistics* is significant in terms of its employment of Indigenous people. Over half of its workforce is Indigenous. *Pilbara Logistics* has a special commitment to hiring and training Indigenous people living in remote communities. While the company also employs non-Indigenous people, Geoff finds real satisfaction in providing Indigenous

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people with an opportunity to gain real employment. Geoff explains – *‘We often hire local Indigenous people from remote communities where our contracts are based. There are often very few opportunities for employment or socialising in remote communities. People become incredibly bored - they jump at the chance to start work. People want the security and income employment brings, the opportunities it brings for their children. When we have time off, my workers are breaking their necks to get back to work. It is great to see the smiles on their faces.’*

Many people living in remote communities have never had the employment opportunity that is now offered by *Pilbara Logistics*. Geoff has found that despite their lack of experience, local Indigenous people are capable, quick to learn and excel when given the opportunity. The training and work experience that *Pilbara Logistics* gives has also enabled former employees to gain jobs within other businesses.

Finally, the impact of *Pilbara Logistics* has been two way in terms of its relationship with BIS. In building a relationship between organisations, a greater cross cultural understanding has resulted. BSI reports the partnership they have formed with Geoff Stocker of *Pilbara Logistics* has produced the following benefits –

- *clearer understanding of traditional culture by non-Aboriginal employees*
- *an understanding by Aboriginal employees of the requirements needed to maintain a satisfactory performance in the ‘whitefella’ working environment.*
- *opportunity provided to make a difference in the lives of members of the community through employment*
- *learning the need for a greater level of acceptance in industry and in our daily lives*
- *the satisfaction derived from the development of trust and friendship with people of another culture*
- *practical evidence on the effectiveness of the role of Aboriginal mentors in the workplace.*

The relationship has increased awareness, opportunities and broken down cultural barriers within the industry.

Success Factors

Four key factors are identified by Geoff Stocker regarding the success of his *Pilbara Logistics* business.

Determination and Hard Work

Geoff explains – *‘Developing and maintaining a business is a continual process, it takes effort, resilience and sheer hard work. We have worked even harder to prove that Indigenous people can be more successful than non-Indigenous people - proving it takes effort, commitment and ambition.’*



Eddie

Professional Advice

Geoff Stocker attributes both his and the company's success to the support and advice he has received from professionals. Geoff says – *‘Any business may become successful provided you work hard – but I believe a*

definite key to success is using professionals for advice and support. I think it's where a lot of Aboriginal businesses become unstuck, but getting support is about being professional and using the best people for the job.’

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Determination & Hard Work
- Professional Advice
- Committed Staff
- Business Planning

Committed Staff

Geoff describes *Pilbara Logistics* employees as *‘the link in the business chain’*. He attributes the contribution of his staff and their commitment to success, for the company's continual growth. In Geoff's words – *‘Without the support and commitment from the company's employees, the business could not have prospered in the way it has.’*

Business Planning

In the initial days of business development, Geoff worked with ATSIC to develop a business plan. Geoff concedes having a business plan has allowed the company to continually assess its financial position and identify future priorities.

Advice to other Indigenous people contemplating the enterprise option

Geoff says – ‘Have a go and work bloody hard! Seek professional advice from successful people that have business experience. A problem a lot of Indigenous people have is they are sent to Government agencies to talk to people with no business experience. Find people who have experience in the real world.’

For Further Information

Geoff Stocker
Owner Manager
Pilbara Logistics
Postal: PO Box 2623
South Hedland 6722
Phone: (08) 9172 5100
Fax: (08) 9172 3900
Email: Geoff.Stocker@pilbaralogistics.com.au