

L. Shaun Cawood

16 October 1962 – 24 January 2022

Shaun Cawood was one of the industry's quiet achievers, spending most of his working life in the southern South Island. He was a leader driven to improve himself and the organisations he worked for, backed by a practical ability to get to the nub of what was important, identify necessary changes and mobilise those around him to get it done. He will be remembered by his colleagues, not just for the difference he made in the organisations he worked in, but for the contribution he made to their working lives.

Formative years

Shaun grew up in Tokoroa. He was most at home in the outdoors – hunting, tramping, surfing, diving and snorkelling – and was a better-than-average sportsman and enjoyed stoking his competitive drive through rugby, basketball and volleyball. He went to school at Forest View High.

Growing up in a forestry town and loving time in the bush, life beyond school was always likely to be forestry and the forest industry. However, it came as something of a surprise when he decided to do that via university rather than the Forestry Training Centre as the family had never considered university to be an option.

Shaun arrived in Christchurch in February 1981 to begin his journey to achieve a Bachelor of Forestry Science. Two years of student life at uni halls was embraced, resulting in lifelong friendships and a new girlfriend, future wife Deidre. Vacations were spent topping up the bank account and reconnecting with home by working at Kinleith. He finished at Canterbury in 1984 with enough marks to get the degree and an invitation to join the New Zealand Forest Service.

Getting started

Shaun's trainee year with the Forest Service started at Taieri Mouth. During this time he impressed the locals by excelling at the physical work of forestry, something that was not considered the norm for forestry graduates. He particularly enjoyed the four months spent working in hauler and tractor logging crews, all of it done 'on the ground', breaking out or felling. He ended the year as the Assistant District Forester in Tapanui and, as the Forest Service moved towards its restructuring, finished as the Acting District Forester.



Figure 1: Shaun Cawood

He was then offered a position as a Logging Technical Supervisor for the newly established Otago Regional Office of NZ Timberlands Ltd. Shaun was given the opportunity to develop some of the systems needed to facilitate log sales moving away from the long-term conservancy-based contracts to a more market-led approach directed by the regional office. This meant installing and developing a sales transactions database and building an estate model to determine allowable cuts and cutting plans.

Outside work, life became about the next big step. On 20 February 1988, Shaun and Deidre married in the

Waitaki Valley. Video evidence points to a good time being had by all, particularly that table of Otago forestry legends looking somewhat younger than you do now.

Shaun and Deidre then got down to the serious business of making plans, which started with Volunteer Service Abroad in Bhutan. From 1990–1992, he was employed as a Lecturer at the Bhutan Forestry Institute where he taught four classes of Foresters and Forest Guards. This also meant developing the curriculum and writing the course notes for botany, mensuration, survey and engineering.

Getting down to business

Shaun and Deidre arrived back in Aotearoa just in time for Rayonier to complete its acquisition of the remaining government forest estate. He threw himself into turning the now privatised forestry resource into a business. First as District Forester in the Southland regional office, and then as Regional Manager, the focus was always on systems and business improvement. This meant the introduction of computer-aided design technology for the roading programme, the use of GIS technology in harvest planning, and rolling out stumpage sales as a means of increasing ROI.

Many of these systems were picked up by the wider company and rolled out as company procedures. Colleagues in the office remember Shaun pushing hard for site-specific decision-making in the development of the tree crop and the recovery of non-productive land. The biggest achievement, however, was leading the team that would be one of the first in the world to gain joint FSC and ISO14001 certification for a plantation forest resource. At the time, it was so new that proceeding required persuading the Rayonier board to vary its policy on what certification they would pursue.

It was in Southland that Shaun developed his skills and trademark characteristics as a leader. During this time, he completed an MBA through Massey University and made a concerted effort to put what he had learnt into practice. Within the management of the FSC/ISO certification he supported cross-function audits and observations to ensure team members were exposed to the full range of functions within a modern forestry office.

He learnt what worked and what did not when it came to team building. His colleagues remember rafting, bungee jumping, kayaking and team sports seemed to work well, while cutting a line through 2 m high broom almost certainly did not. Those in corporate head office remember Shaun as the dogged defender of the 'Republic' of Southland who didn't mince words in pursuit of what he thought was needed to achieve the best outcome.

Success in developing the business model within Southland and his growing reputation for dogged determination in pursuing results led to his appointment as General Manager of Rayonier's MDF plant at Maitua in April 2002, a role that continued after Dongwha's

acquisition of the plant. Reporting directly to the board gave him the opportunity to establish a strategic direction for the business and develop a team capable of achieving it.

His eight years at the plant were noticeable for his many achievements: the development of the strategic alliance with Laminex, the implementation of lean manufacturing systems, and accreditation with several environmental management and product quality certification programmes. It also proved to be his first involvement with export sales, something he maintained an interest in over the rest of his career.

It was Shaun's effort to improve health and safety record that his colleagues at the MDF plant remember most. He did not accept reliance on administrative controls as a means of keeping people safe. As a result, he marshalled the required resources to either eliminate the risk or isolate it from the people doing the work. He willingly invested in redesigning pedestrian corridors, end-to-end machine guarding, safe process interlock system overhauls and many other improvements. Lost-time injuries reduced from 4.1 per 200,000 hours in 2003 to zero in three of his last four years in the business. This was a result that would be repeated at every one of the plants he managed in the remainder of his career.

Shaun's development as a senior manager within a corporate environment was completed with his move to RX Plastics in 2010. This was a chance to prove himself in an industry in which he had absolutely no prior experience. Despite this lack of experience, his general business acumen impressed. This was a business that had experienced rapid growth that had overwhelmed its business management processes.

Tools and systems developed in the forestry manufacturing environment proved useful in stabilising business results, including bringing a high safety incident rate down to zero. He also had to learn some new processes. One that he was proud of was the introduction of a New Product Council and the delivery of some substantial new products.

Strategic leader

By the end of his time at RX Plastics, Shaun was a business leader determined to prove himself in the role of CEO or Managing Director reporting directly to its own board of directors. That opportunity came in the form of the venerable Southland Industry stalwart, Craigpine Timber Limited. When he was appointed CEO in July 2013, the first order of business was to establish how the company could have a future and what action was required to get there.

Once he had sold the plan to both the board and the bank, he set about implementing it through a board of management. Over the next four years the 'lid was lifted' on every system in the company. Total injury incident rates came down and the business was returned to profitability.

Shaun had now spent nearly 20 years managing significant groups of people and it is in this role that he will be most fondly remembered. While at Craigpine he had completed a Masters in Advanced Leadership. When asked to identify what they most remembered about him, his colleagues used words like calm, reliable, patient, respectful and a good listener. He may have been dogged in his determination to succeed, but he did not let that get in the way of a good relationship.

When things didn't work or obstacles blindsided, his 'go to' advice started with 'it is what it is.' He was also a good mentor. His approach was to help his workmates learn and expand their own capabilities by helping them overcome their challenges through suggestions on how they could resolve the situation or pointing towards the relevant resources. If appropriate, he took the lead on an issue. He would involve others to whatever extent possible to ensure they gained from the experience.

He was also in it for the fun and was a good judge of just how far he could push it. His feedback to a bidder for some forests he was thinking of selling was that the bid was just 'slightly higher than sea level.' Stories like

coasting into the petrol station as the truck ran out of gas and his need for carrot cake endeared him to his workmates.

Shaun finished his forestry career going back to his roots. He worked for IFS Growth, expanding their Nelson office while developing a lumber trading business for Aubade.

Family

Shaun took the opportunities given to him and converted them into opportunities for those most important to him: Deidre, his daughters, Sophie and Emma, and Sophie's husband Thomas. Life was not all work. He was an active relaxer all his life and he indulged his love of travel for the sake of it with trips to Africa and the US. He was an active participant in his wider whānau in Tokoroa and Duntroon. His memorial service held on 29 January 2022 was full of love and gratitude for a life well lived.

Prepared by Trevor Best with input from Deidre Francis, Don Aurik, Rhys Black, Wayne Dempster, John Holm, Paul Jackson, Paul Nicholls and Simon Callaghan.



Appeal for Funds

The NZIF Foundation was established in 2011 to support forestry education, research and training through the provision of grants, scholarships and prizes, promoting the acquisition, development and dissemination of forestry-related knowledge and information, and other activities.

The Foundation's capital has come from donations by the NZ Institute of Forestry and NZIF members. With this, the Board has been able to offer three student scholarships and a travel award each year. It has also offered prizes for student poster competitions at NZIF conferences.

To make a real difference to New Zealand forestry, including being able to offer more and bigger

scholarships and grants, the Board needs to grow the Foundation's funds. Consequently it is appealing for donations, large and small, from individuals, companies and organisations.

The Board will consider donations tagged for a specific purpose that meets the charitable requirements of the trust deed. A recent example has seen funds raised to create an award in memory of Jon Dey who was known to many in New Zealand forestry.

The Foundation is a registered charity (CC47691) and donations to it are eligible for tax credits.

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