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**Johannes Mukundja**

Freight Handler

## A TRIED AND TESTED SPECIALIST HANDLER OF TIME-CRITICAL CARGO

**Freight handlers supervise the loading and unloading of all cargo consignments, and as such, play an important role in the cutthroat, but exciting transportation and logistics sector. Meet Johannes Mukundja, a seasoned freight handler, employed by Woker Freight Services in the capital as an Air Freight Aviation Supervisor. This is his story.**

### CHILDHOOD DREAM

Born at the Onaputa village near Ondangwa in Oshana, Johannes attended Onaputa Combined School up to Grade 9, whereafter he enrolled at the Orono Senior Secondary School, matriculating in 1993. A keen learner, Johannes excelled at school.

Growing up, the radio was Johannes' closest companion and he cherished dreams of joining the NBC as a radio announcer. "I dreamed of working for the NBC's Oshiwambo Service. I really liked the voices behind all the advertisements and I imagined how I was going to read the news bulletins. Actually, I made a deliberate attempt to perfect my vernacular vocabulary and reading, because radio was all I wanted to do", he shares.

Unfortunately, Johannes' applications to the national broadcaster were all turned down. "I applied many times and went for voice auditions but were turned down every time", he notes. With his radio dreams going down in flames, Johannes realised that he had to pursue other options to earn an income and fend for himself. And so, he set off for Walvis Bay, in Erongo.

### FIRST JOB

Lady Luck was on Johannes' side, and not long after arriving in the harbour town, he was taken in by Namibia Ship Chandlers, as a trainee import/exports consultant. "I didn't have any qualifications at the time and had to learn everything from scratch. Basically, I was an apprentice - learning the job on the job. And the tutelage of experienced freight handlers really helped a lot in getting me to find my feet. I will be forever grateful to my early supervisors for their efforts in teaching me and mentoring me in this line of work", he says.

Honing his skills at other employers such as Artus Duty Free Shop and logistics powerhouses, F.P. Du Toit Transport and Kuehne & Nagel; Johannes got to learn more about the intricacies and complexities of the sector. "Although the settings differed somewhat, working at these big players in our country's logistics sector certainly helped in shaping my skill set, especially in terms of aspects such as warehousing, consignment management and advanced business processes. I was able to build up contacts, locally and internationally", Johannes notes.

“Today I am highly employable and my skill set is not easy to find. This is because I’ve worked my way up from the bottom rung of the ladder and I know everything there is to know about this work. Coupled with my stints at reputable transportation and logistics service providers, I think that it was this unique skills and experience package I possessed that opened the doors to Woker Freight Services”, he adds.

## **CUSTOMER CENTRIC**

Around 2016, Johannes was taken in by his current employer, Woker Freight Services, who learned in local industry circles about this motivated freight handler, so driven by a desire to succeed and to always render quality client service. “It was a dream move to Woker Freight Services. I was delighted to join a strong and vibrant team and a reputable logistics company”, Johannes shares.

“The logistics sector is a complex world. There are many variables that can complicate your performance. Factors such as time zones, customs requirements, tight schedules and flight delays can muddle things up. I must say that at times, the nitty-gritty and complexities nearly caught up with me, but I pushed through in learning all I could, and as fast as I could”, notes Johannes.

Freight handling requires individuals to possess good communication, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Johannes’ calm and friendly demeanour makes him to excell in the customer-centric transportation and logistics environment.

“Communicating with customers, old and new; whether its face-to-face, or via the phone, or e-mail, is one of the aspects of the work I still enjoy the most. The fact that no two days are the same; and with new clients come new freight, and new challenges. Stimulating work, indeed. You learn new things everyday and get to know new people, everyday”, Johannes notes.

## **EXCITING WORK**

Johannes appreciates that a personalised and well-executed logistics service leads to stronger client relations and loyalty. “I don’t need to tell you this, but when you deliver in a proficient manner, you work not only brings in immediate monetary gain, but ensures long-term success for the business. That’s why ownership is so important. If a client gives me full responsibility for a shipment, I take full ownership; from point of origin to the final destination”, he notes.

“At the end of the day, it’s really about building trust. In this line of work, competition is tough. You know when

a client comes back with more work, it is because they trust you with their cargo. They come back because you were able to deliver to expectations. That’s sustainable business, in my book”, Johannes adds.

Namibia’s transportation and logistics sector is an important cog in keeping the wheels of the economy running. Growing fast; opportunities are aplenty for competent and skilled freight handlers.

“Local produce need to be delivered to international markets; whereas products not available locally need to be imported from outside our borders. Take the agriculture sector for example: they need their produce delivered to overseas destinations. We help them clear their cargo. Considering the nature and destination, we advise which mode of transport is most appropriate. We then take charge of the cargo and move it, whether it’s via air, road, or sea”, he explains.

## **LIFELONG LEARNER**

In today’s e-commerce society, virtually every shipment is time-critical. Johannes values the importance of keeping his skill set relevant and current in an environment where the customer expects to be kept abreast of a shipment’s journey and delivery.

“Although not a young boy anymore, I find that I still have the energy and drive to learn. Time critical airfreight is a specialised area of logistics that not many forwarders, brokers or carriers In Namibia can handle. Some products have a limited life and as such are vital time critical shipments. We also need to ensure that high value and dangerous goods cargo, which can include highly sensitive medical products, are all treated with great care by our team. I’m one of only a handful of specialists, but we all need to stay on top of our game. And continuous learning is the only and sure way to do so”, explains Johannes.

“I have completed a good number of certificate and diploma courses over the years in areas such as the transportation of dangerous goods and cargo and freight forwarding. Others areas of training include leadership development and International Commerce Terms, or ‘Incoterms’, which are basically a set of rules which define the responsibilities of sellers and buyers for the delivery of goods under international sales contracts”, he adds.

## **CAREER CHAMPION**

Johannes appreciates the potential the transportation and logistics sector holds for driven and aptly talented individuals wishing to build a career in this line of work. “Not many young people are aware of the good

opportunities available to them. I make it a point, whenever I can, to share information and to get them to at least read up more about what this sector has to offer”, he shares. Logistics, especially as far as the airline and shipping industries are concerned, have tight schedules and exacting regulations, so the ability to constantly work under the pressure of a deadline is very important.

“I started out with the basics such as clearing and document preparation and nowadays, I tend to specialise in aircraft parts. What happens if an aircraft is grounded? The airline come to us to bring in the parts from overseas. When fixed, they fly out their passengers and bring in more tourists, again. A simple example of why this sector, and indeed the work we do, are so important to our economic growth”, he explains.

“This is indeed exciting work. You might be based here in Windhoek, but you are picking up and delivering cargo all over the world. In one day, you might deal with service partners in the United Kingdom, China and the United States of America. You need to keep track of the different time zones. Often, depending on the nature and priority of the cargo, you might end up with very little sleep as you track progress from one country to another”, Johannes highlights.



## CHALLENGES

The goods and cargo transportation value chain is a complex process, often requiring meticulous planning and coordination to ensure delivery. As a seasoned logistics expert, Johannes is very familiar with the challenges that arise from time to time. And although his work is not always smooth sailing, he deals with the pressures generated by delayed deliveries and frustrated clients.

“You do your part. You book the shipment. The airline accepts it and confirm that the cargo will be delivered tomorrow. Then, on the departure date, you receive an email that your cargo didn’t leave, because a document

was not correct, or the size of the shipment was too big, or the aircraft was full. These are the kinds of challenges we face”, he notes.

“These challenges are an adrenaline-rush. It is what makes the job worthwhile. I tend to see opportunity in them. Sometimes, you need to think outside of the box, and come up with innovative solutions. Often, there’s not much you can do to fasttrack a delayed shipment and then the best you can do is to communicate openly and transparently with your customer”, Johannes highlights.

Away from the office, Johannes enjoys spending time with family and friends. However, he never loses sight of the cellphone, because a customer might just require his assistance, and he has to be available.

“I often look back on my life and I appreciate the direction it went into. Although I was disappointed for not being able to pursue my boyhood dreams of becoming a radio host, I have no regrets for ending up in the logistics sector. My work at Woker Freight Services gives me purpose. It gives my life meaning. I am happy here”, he shares. “And nothing beats a happy customer calling you to say thanks for handling their cargo and for ensuring that it reached its destination on time. It’s a thrill, always!” he concludes.

Johannes Mukundja: Sensible, confident and customer-oriented. His drive to succeed in a cutthroat service environment continues to propel him to greater heights. His story teaches us that he, who serves best, often profits the most; that customer service is not so much about what we do, but more about how we do it. He continues to work his dream. He is living his passion.

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