



Meat: Matthew Nelson

HUMAN RESOURCES
MANAGER,
FLETCHER INTERNATIONAL WA

“You don’t need experience; if you have an open mind, you’re one step closer to forging yourself a great career in the red meat processing industry,” says Matthew Nelson, Human Resources Manager at Fletcher International, WA.

Even though he had friends working at one of the larger companies, the meat processing industry wasn’t Matthew’s first thought for employment; he had his sights set on becoming an accountant and had even completed a diploma in accounting at TAFE.

However, after seven months of looking for a role with one of the few large accounting firms in Albany, WA, Matthew decided to look into work at the local meat processing plant. This move put him on the path to a successful 13-year career at Fletcher International WA with eight of those in Human Resources. Matthew says he has been able to gain new skills by working a number of different roles, including working in payroll for four years – a job to which he was able to apply his accounting knowledge.

At the age of 26, Matthew was promoted to Human Resource Manager, where he now oversees the employment of new staff, managing staff turnover, and undertaking performance management for approximately 400 employees on site.

Matthew initially presumed working in a meat processing plant was a messy job. Like many, he was expecting “gore and blood”, but he now concedes that the assumption couldn’t be further from the reality of this clean, sanitary workplace.

In fact, when talking to potential new employees at job interviews, Matthew tells them that working in meat processing is rather like the meat section at Woolworths; neat, organised, and with minimal blood. He also says the possibilities for growth are virtually limitless.

“There is room for growth and the career opportunities are limitless,” he says. “At the end of the day, we are producing good quality products and upholding our great company name and that makes me feel rewarded.”

Red meat processing workers can look forward to a number of benefits, including job variety. Each day is different at Fletcher International WA and as a result, Matthew loves what he does.

“As a manager in a large company there is a lot of responsibility,” he says, “And with this responsibility comes great reward. Being able to have input into guiding a company’s future or having influence over company policies and procedures are things I never thought I would be able to achieve in my working career, but they are now just part of my daily tasks.”

Another benefit to the industry that Matthew sees are the transferrable skills workers learn and take to other abattoirs throughout Australia.

“You can basically work around Australia,” says Matthew. “I can’t see the industry ever dying out like mining and forestry; everyone needs red meat, so I can’t see that changing. If you’re working in the meat industry, you should be employed for a long time.”

Whilst Fletcher International WA recruits externally, it always looks internally to see which staff can be promoted to fill roles suited to them. In fact, most staff employed at Fletcher International WA had no prior experience in meat processing. They have been trained and continue to be trained as their career progresses.

“Some of the people we have employed as process workers are now being offered opportunities in their preferred fields; gaining positions as machine operators, trainers and apprentice tradespeople,” says Matthew.

“The positions available are not just limited to processing meat, but it’s a good stepping stone to see what might be available for your working career within the meat industry for the short or long term. There are machine operators, truck drivers, maintenance personnel, quality assurance officers, occupational health and safety officers, supervisors, trainers, production managers and administration clerks to name a few. If you are prepared to start as a processor and apply yourself, there are nearly endless possibilities for you.”

The next time you eat red meat, have a think about the variety of people who helped it onto your plate. It’s thanks to people in all sorts of roles – from HR managers, boners and slicers or IT professionals to engineers, apprentices and microbiologists. It could even be the result of Matthew’s handiwork.

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