

# Recruitment International Profil

By Recruitment International



As CV's go, his is light on formal qualifications and heavy on work and life experiences so it's little surprise that Paul Mitchell - SkyBlue's new Director and General Manager, cites people as his every day inspiration.

His love of Prince the pop artist doesn't reveal a princely outlook. Quite the opposite in fact! He's true to his working class Watford roots, grafting his way through a variety of customer service and recruitment roles since leaving school in 1990.

Learning from people and not teachers has been the backbone of his development, with 'people' becoming THE theme now he's at the helm of the award winning recruitment firm that looks after thousands of temporary workers each week.

"Like any 16 year old I was keen to make money but more importantly I was keen to shape my future and to make my own way in life," explains Paul.

"Studying for a qualification and not really knowing where that A Level or NVQ would take me didn't sit right so I got myself a summer job at John Lewis and there is where my career story began."

Seeing potential, the management team enrolled Paul on the John Lewis Management Development Programme. "It's where I first got a flavour for customer service," says Paul. "In retail fantastic customer service is key; and this theme is very much with me now I'm behind SkyBlue which cares for the careers of people throughout the UK."

SkyBlue is well known for its career orientated approach to temporary work, finding ways to retain its workforce and up-skill for the benefit of itself as a business and for its clients, including support services company Carillion PLC, construction giant Morgan Sindall and leading rail firm Amey Colas.

"We're different in our approach to customer care in that once we find good temporary workers we like to keep them in work assignments. It's good for them, good for the economy and good for our customers," adds Paul.

"Our customer service extends to highlighting employment issues that may not be on the agenda such as the Agency Worker Regulations (AWR). We try to offer more than just bums on seats.

"We also have a duty to provide the very best skilled people, from Track Workers to Civil Engineers and our customers expect that and a whole lot more. They want and need higher health and safety standards from their workforce, they want and need to meet the guidelines for procuring labour ethically and responsibly and so that's exactly what they get from us.

"We give the customer what they want and then some. It's that simple.

"We're always looking at what's coming round the corner, anticipating changes in the market, the demands of our customers, which is crucial in the fast pace and evolving recruitment sector."

What came next for Paul was a stint at

ABC Contract Services.

"It was a shock to the system but a good one," states Paul.

"What you put in you get out is definitely something you glean from a recruitment role. Retail is very reactive, waiting for customers. In recruitment you've got to go and find your customers and you have to take ownership.

"But what was really interesting for me was being able to start comparing how different types of business treat the customer service challenge."

Customer service of the Greek Waiter variety followed as Paul joined the rest of his generation on a soul searching summer trip in Europe.

"Despite being unable to sing, I actually tried my hand at being a karaoke compare," says Paul.

"All those early years spent working instead of studying meant it was financially an option for me.

"Upon returning I joined a friend who was already working at Kelly Services. Initially I was asked to help set up the temporary business in Slough. This developed in a 3yr relationship managing a national account."

Paul then accepted an offer to move to Hays where he spent the next six years before SkyBlue came into focus.

"It was a great time to join the business," explains Paul.

"Our parent company, Carillion PLC had just acquired Mowlem plc and our Managed Service was developing to fulfil all temporary labour requirements for the support services and construction company.

"We grew as a business from £50m to £120m in just three years and it's those foundations that we sit on top of today albeit in a very different economic climate.

“More than ever the job-seeking public need us to help them find work. Despite the natural increase in applications to vacancies, each and every one of our candidates is as precious as ever and we try to deliver great customer care.

“We’re currently trying to improve our commitment to this, which will hopefully be visible via an industry approved accreditation and we’re working with many of the partners involved in delivering the Governments Welfare to Work programme such as Ingenus and Jobcentre Plus, to open up as many avenues as possible for people to get into employment.

“Whatever someone’s background or perceived barrier to employment SkyBlue is using these partnerships to offer them training and the real possibility of finding work.

“We should be developing the people living in the UK here and now who are crying out for opportunities to work. Bringing in labour from other parts of the world might be necessary in sectors where we don’t currently have the skills-set but where we are able to train and mentor we should be doing more to help people gain skills and enter into sustainable employment.”

SkyBlue has most recently mentored four budding railway workers at its Doncaster rail welding depot and the Apprenticeship has seen all four being successfully placed out to work onto its rail customer sites. Something they are keen to continue.

“It’s a cliché but it’s true. SkyBlue is all about offering more and going the extra mile. We’re a people business and it’s at the heart of everything we do.

“I like to think that we influence what our customers want to see out of a supplier in the recruitment industry. The fundamentals of the business haven’t changed – our customers still want someone to do a job from day one but what has changed is the increase in employment legislation elements

concerning health and safety, equality and diversity etc. They all combine to make a very complex sector. Our customers are increasingly under pressure so we should be proactively providing solutions for them rather than waiting for them to approach us.”

Paul believes SkyBlue demonstrated this proactive approach way back when equality and diversity in employment came onto the agenda.

“Before our customers new what the requirements were for ethical procurement - as increasingly demanded by Government and the public purse - we were in talks with organisations such as Birmingham Professional Diversity to fully understand the complexities of the issue. This enabled us to develop solutions for our customers. We invested in an Inclusion Manager and such is his value today that he is regularly invited to Round Table discussions at the House of Lords helping to shape policy rather than react to it.

“Many of the sectors we deliver labour to including Rail, Construction, Highways, Facilities Management and Telecommunications place safety as a top priority so we make it our business to do the same.

“We know that embedding health and safety into the hearts and minds of our SkyBlue team will ensure it is evident in every single aspect of delivery for our customers.”

SkyBlue recently held a couple of national Safety Action Groups (SAGs) inviting a cross section of its management team and key supply chain partners to explore the health and safety strategy of the business going forward.

“Crucially with the SAGs we were able to show our team how they can contribute to the health and safety aspects of recruitment. With their buy in we can enthuse the entire business, which will filter through to our candidates out on site and ultimately

reduce accidents and incidents for our customers,” adds Paul.

“Going forward I think it’s going to be harder for recruiters who say the right things but don’t follow through.

“More and more customers are beginning to appreciate the added value of a good recruitment business. Despite the pinch we are all feeling, decisions don’t all come down to cost.

“If you look at changes in expectations in quality and service, we all have less disposable income due to inflation, so we eat out less but the quality dining industry isn’t suffering. That’s because when people do eat out they are increasingly looking for good service and a great eating experience. They’re happy to pay for a great meal and the excellent service they receive and therefore come back again and again.”

Whether you can deliver just such excellent customer service or you are passionate about smarter working and processes Paul gets inspired.

“Everyday people who are good at what they do drive me to do better and are inspiring,” adds Paul.

Which is just as well as Paul will be taking a lot of people with him into the next phase of SkyBlue’s journey.

“The first stop will be to grow our service offering to an increasingly broad number of like minded customers who value what SkyBlue has to offer,” explains Paul.

“Growth is important even in these challenging times and we’re keenly aware of the need to add value to our customers by innovating our practices, eliminating wastage and aiding our customers with their own corporate social responsibility.

“Through hard work and an investment in our biggest asset – the SkyBlue team – we will get where we need to be.”