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***“If career paths are determined by a combination of ability, knowledge, experience and commitment then lifelong learning is one of the foundations upon which career paths are built”***



## ULSTER INDUSTRIAL EXPLOSIVES LTD.

**Ashley Haslett, Managing Director of U.I.E, left school with only a few qualifications but since then has embarked on an incredible journey of learning, picking up two NVQ level 5 qualifications, a BA and an MBA on the way. He recently became the third Chartered Director in Northern Ireland, having completed a Diploma in Company Direction. His enthusiasm for learning and achievement has encouraged other managers in U.I.E to develop their management competences with the NVQ level 4 and 5 in Management. Here he talks about what lifelong learning means to him.**

The road to achievement is accomplished by taking one step at a time. My first step was taken in 1989 when, as a mature student, I embarked on 5 years of part-time study towards a BA in Business Studies. It was taxing on the brain, demanding on personal and working life and physically difficult to be in several different places at the same time. Anyone who has studied part-time will understand that, but at the end of it there was a real sense of personal achievement. The company benefited too as the assignments I completed were used as a basis for change and improvements were applied in the workplace. For example one IT assignment, which discussed how using information technology could improve the effectiveness of your business, was later used as the

basis of a capital expenditure proposal that was accepted and implemented in its entirety. The system is still in operation 10 years later and has been financially justified many times over.

This step into lifelong learning influenced my work practices and enhanced my performance as a manager. I decided to pursue my personal development further using a structure that would achieve business results while at the same time demonstrate my competence as a manager. The national occupational standards for managers (MCI Management Standards) had only recently been introduced. This framework appeared to fit my needs as I was able to see how the implementation of best practice could influence the successfulness of the organisation in the management of procedures. My experience in managing activities, resources, people and information, which I had gained when I implemented systems and procedures within the organisation to achieve BS5750 accreditation (now ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System), was now used to compile a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate my competence at a senior management level. I was awarded my NVQ level 5 in Management in 1995.

Within all aspects of life, there is an element of luck. In my experience, there is however a correlation between effort and luck. The greater the effort you



**ASHLEY HASLETT**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR



put into something, the luckier you get. The trick is helping luck on its way. So far my professional development had focused on operational/tactical management levels.

To progress further, I needed knowledge at a strategic level. In the latter half of 1995 I pushed my luck once

more and sought my employer's support to undertake an MBA. It was kindly given, and a further two years of part-time study was successfully completed. Again, the knowledge gained and experience of undertaking assignments was applied in areas such as strategy, marketing, personnel etc. Mid-way through this course, I was promoted to the position of General Manager. This brought much broader responsibilities but, as everyone knows, managers succeed through the achievement of people under them. My primary function was to make sure the correct structure, strategy and resources were in place to help others achieve.

Our mission at Ulster Industrial Explosives is to provide a total service to all our customers. We provide a professional service and constantly strive to improve the level of service that we provide in all facets of the business, by ensuring quality and professionalism are at the core of the business.

We can only achieve our mission through the belief that our performance is determined by the personnel that make up Ulster Industrial Explosives. We therefore value the contribution made by all





employees and actively support their continuous development.

Having worked with the NVQ process myself, I now encourage other managers at different stages of their careers to develop themselves and their way of working through the NVQ level 4 and 5 in Management.

I continued my lifelong learning and developed my own knowledge further by commencing an NVQ level 5 in Personnel Strategy, which was ideal for ensuring all aspects of human resource management were being addressed. People are central to the business strategy, they need to be developed for the business to move forward and systems need to be in place to retain the best people. These critical elements were covered in depth within this qualification. I completed this NVQ in 1998, which in turn led me to corporate membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development.

A short break from part-time study and promotion to the position of Managing Director in 1999 helped re-focus my goals for continuous learning.

Directors are rightfully being called more to account for their actions and responsibilities and corporate governance is coming to the forefront of business. The Institute of Director's *Diploma in Company Direction* was therefore the obvious choice for my continuous development. This was approximately 20 days spread over 8 months and it covered many of the areas previously studied on the MBA and evidenced within the NVQs. For Directors, especially those who have not had the opportunity of previous study, this course is invaluable. To capitalise on this qualification the Institute of Directors have recognised the need to link the learning to practice. Having recently become the third Chartered Director in Northern Ireland, I can vouch for the thoroughness of the process.

This is only half of the story but if it does nothing else, it should provide hope for those struggling within the education system. I failed the 11+ and left school with less than a handful of qualifications. I hope my experience convinces others that it's never too late to start and that everyone can achieve his or her ambition. It only takes hard work and dedication to lifelong learning.