



SIR BRIAN SOUTER

CHAIRMAN

STAGECOACH GROUP

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Tell us about your career, how you started and your role in the profession today.

My father was a bus driver, so that was where I developed the ambition of being involved in buses. I started off as a student bus conductor and realised this was an interesting business. I also had an interest in accountancy, so in my head I was working out the profitability of the bus companies, as well. I went on to do chartered accountancy. At the end of my apprenticeship, Margaret Thatcher came to power and she deregulated long-distance buses, so I set up Stagecoach in conjunction with my sister, and we started running buses across Scotland and down to London.

What was your first role in the profession?

Being a bus conductor during my time in college and while I was at university helped enormously. There is nothing quite like developing that initial understanding of the job. It allowed me to get to grips with schedules and passengers' travel patterns, and I became fascinated by it. I also learnt to drive a bus at Stagecoach, because I am great believer in the maxim that you shouldn't ask someone to do something you're not willing to do yourself.

What has been your favourite role in your career to date and why?

My favourite role was probably being a bus conductor, closely followed by being a traffic controller. The whole idea of starting a company was probably the most pleasing and exciting; there's something about starting your own company that is very rewarding and creative.

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Have there been any particular mentors or individuals who have inspired you?

My father was undoubtedly my mentor. He was the person who inspired me and was my role model for running the business and, although he was a bus driver, he had some other business interests. He put a lot of money into Stagecoach, initially, so needless to say I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him.

What is it that you enjoy most about transport as a profession?

I like people and I am quite interested in money, so for me it was the dream job. Public transport is about managing people and managing your money and I think that that combination of skills is what keeps me engaged.

Do you think there is a crossover in interests between logistics and transport, or are they two completely separate sectors?

To do transport properly you have to be able to understand logistics. All the best transport companies have people who are equipped with logistical skills, so I think there is a conflict of interests between the two. It is all about efficiency, whether it's goods or people. Working out where the loads are and how you can access them effectively proves that there definitely are overlaps between logistics and transport.

Have you taken any risks throughout your career?

I was very excited by the prospect of setting up Stagecoach. Setting up a company that could challenge the status quo and do things better than had ever been done before was a big challenge. We had a low-cost model, but a high-quality product and that worked for us. The risk taught me that if people have a passion for a business, then that's a reason to make a start.

Why did you first join the Institute?

I was offered an Honorary Fellowship. The Institute did some really interesting things and a lot of my peers were part of it and Stagecoach encouraged youngsters to join. I was very happy to accept membership.

How has membership of CILT benefited your career so far?

Being a part of CILT gives the chance to network with other people involved in the diverse professions the Institute represents. CILT is great for young people; it broadens their horizons and they learn a lot from the expertise within it.

How can the Institute encourage more people to start working in logistics and transport?

Artificial intelligence, robotics and automation are going to change the industry considerably. I think the new technologies make the Institute more important and more relevant for our next generation, as it becomes a touchpoint to keep you and your organisation relevant and a platform to learn how to make the most of these ground-breaking opportunities.



SIR BRIAN SOUTER

DATE OF BIRTH
5th May 1954

PLACE OF BIRTH
Perth, Scotland

EDUCATION
Strathclyde University

INITIAL CAREER ASPIRATION
Bus conductor

FIRST JOB
Part-time bus conductor

CURRENT ROLE
Chairman, Stagecoach

Stagecoach continued its expansion with the creation of Megabus.com in 2003

What have you done over the course of your career to enhance your professional development?

My professional development was essentially autodidactic, and even today I continue to push boundaries and try out new things. It is also important to keep on top of your professional development to ensure you remain relevant to what's going on. Each person has an obligation to do that independently, but being a member of an organisation like CILT is a big help to people who have just entered the profession, as it gives them access to information and mentoring and experts that will help develop their career.

What do you see the role of the Institute being for members in the coming years?

If the Institute is to be relevant, it is going to have to be at the cutting edge of new technologies. We have to be able to give people the knowledge they require to educate them about how the world is changing. CILT needs to position itself at the forefront of change.

How big a role will technology have to play in the future of your sector?

New technology is going to make our products a lot safer. There is an opportunity for vehicle platooning. That's going to be quite easy to put in along the motorways, so I think we will see that quite soon. There are a few things that will need to be resolved around autonomous driving, most of which are ethical issues around how we educate a machine to behave in certain circumstances. I don't think we will be the first people to switch over to autonomy, but if a business such as Uber can master the technology, we will have to emulate it very quickly.

What are the biggest challenges that the industry will face in the coming years?

No doubt the biggest challenge is going to be digital disruption. New players are going to be coming in as competition, offering a service similar to how the taxi industry has been revolutionised. New software will impact travel choices, and we have to work out how to react to this and make the most of it.

Stagecoach is the second largest transport group in the UK

Do you believe the profession has a bright future ahead? Why should more young professionals enter the transport profession?

It does have a bright future. It's going to be more dynamic and more creative than ever before, and there is already a need for smart young people to come into the profession with an understanding of the new technologies. I see a lot of young people coming into public transport who have passion and vision, so I feel positive about the future.

