

Next-Gen Breakbulk - Skills & Competencies of the future

Christa Sys, Professor and holder of the BNP Paribas Fortis chair on Transport, Logistics and Ports at the University of Antwerp, explores what the next generation of breakbulk professionals will need to meet changing demands...

Global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and megatrends including globalisation, changing demographics, disruptive technologies, sustainability and geopolitical developments are shaping the future of breakbulk. And the breakbulk labour market must change dramatically in response.

The next generation of breakbulk professionals will have to be tech savvy and able to respond to advances in technology. Technology is changing every facet of the sector. Things like the digitalisation of asset management processes, for example, require a level of familiarity with software interfaces – at least enough to allow for fast, intuitive learning. The advent of Big Data will require a level of analytical and interpretive sophistication the likes of which has never been necessary for the average breakbulk professional.

And the thing about tech is, it's exponential. The more we advance, the faster we advance. That's why the breakbulk professional of the future will also need a specific mindset, one that is conducive to learning and enables growth.

Much more education and training will be required for the next-gen breakbulk professional, so it will be the people who believe they can continue to learn well into their careers, into middle and even old age, who will have the right mindset to undertake the continued development necessary to keep up with the shifting landscape.

The final two pre-requisites for the next breakbulk generation are commitment and consistency. For the next generation to do and be what's necessary to keep the sector afloat during such choppy conditions, they need to want to, and they need to keep wanting to throughout their careers. As Aristotle once said, "excellence is not an act, it is a habit". Without commitment, you will never start doing what is necessary; without consistency, you will never get to the finish!

What else do the next-generation of breakbulk professionals need? A working environment that supports these things and an employer that invests in their skills. There's no doubt that disruptions like the coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting effect on how people want to work, so a flexible and agile working environment will also be a must.

People in the industry who are already adopting and embodying these traits, either in themselves, or in the working environment they provide for their staff, should be celebrated. I encourage you to nominate any such person for the Antwerp XL 40 Under 40 here: www.antwerpxl.com/40-Under-40.

Professor Sys will be moderating the NextGen lunch debate on “*Agile and Agility – skills & competences of the future*” with Philippe Fierens, Managing Director of ExSeCo at Antwerp XL, 15-17 September 2020.