

## Lowering the Ladder to Learn and Grow

Welcome to the Lowering the Ladder Series - a selection of interviews designed to inspire, empower, and encourage each other in the health and safety profession. Those times when we lower the ladder to help someone up, or are encouraged to climb the ladder ourselves, can be turning points in our lives, supporting us as individuals, and the profession as a whole.



**Name:** Jo Prigmore

**Position:** National Manager: Health & Safety,  
Fulton Hogan Ltd

### Tell us a bit about your current role

I work as part of a wider team covering health, safety, wellbeing, ACC AEP, environment, sustainability, quality, and integrated management systems. It sounds like a bit of a mouthful but works really well. We have made a real effort to keep our HSQES (all the above) systems simple and intuitive – that is much harder than it sounds!

I support our HSQES teams across NZ by collating our minimum health, safety, and wellbeing standards for them to implement. I'm also an extra resource for tricky problems or new ideas. And for having conversations with external parties like clients or government agencies.

### What got you started in Health and Safety?

I got into health and safety by accident really. I was working as a Biomedical Scientist in a Histopathology laboratory in the UK; that's what my original study was in. Turns out I talk too much to be suited to lab work!

Just as I was thinking about changing roles the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) were advertising for new recruits. I passed all the tests and got offered a role there. I did that until we moved to NZ, over 20 years ago now. Luckily, the ability to get people chatting to me is an absolute bonus as a safety professional.

### Who has helped you get where you are and how?

So many people!

My first Principal Inspector, Bernard Dutton, must be up there. He taught me the discipline of always checking the rules (eg Act, Standard etc) and would challenge anything he thought I hadn't researched properly. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but he really set me up for success.

My current 'boss' (he hates that term) Tim Talbot has also been great to work with and learn from. He's got a long operational history and sadly has first hand experience of being a manager when someone in his crew was killed. He brings a genuine care for people when I can sometimes be a bit transactional after so long being an Inspector.

And my Mum! She instilled in me the strong sense of fairness and confidence to speak out that I think are critical to my role. She's also responsible for my sarcasm but you can't have everything...

## Were there any pivotal moments in your career, that were difficult at the time, but you look back on and understand the value of the experience? What did you learn and how has that helped you?

One of the hardest things I've ever had to do is stand up in a Coroner's Court in the UK and answer questions from the father of a person who was killed. He wanted to understand why I didn't prosecute the owners of the parking building where his son fell over a handrail. The handrail was low by the standards at the time of the accident, but they were compliant at the time they were installed. These standards are not retrospective so there was no breach to prosecute. It really made me appreciate **not** sounding like a jobsworth.

Another really hard experience was being part of an investigation team looking into the deaths of two men in a bread oven. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/bakery-fined-over-deaths-inside-oven-9220419.html>. The team we were interviewing had heard their mates call for help and heard them fall silent. They were unable to help. Speaking to the survivors and seeing how much they were affected made me really want to make sure other people don't need to go through the same thing.

On the more flippant side, I am quite an accident prone person and quite absent minded. Every time I walk into a table or leave my keys in the wrong place it reminds me that we aren't robots. Human brains are not perfect the whole time, we can't concentrate or remember everything all the time. The difference between my bruised leg and someone else's collision is just a matter of time and place. If we (safety peeps) put ourselves on a pedestal, I believe it undermines our credibility.

## How do you encourage others to learn and grow?

This is something I'm always working on. Like many other safety peeps my instinct is to be helpful and find the answer for people. I am trying to be the next Bernard Dutton though and try to ask people where they have looked, what research they have done. I try to temper my 'righting reflex' and work on getting people to tell me what I want to tell them.

## Share one thing with us that you have learned in your career

Making a decision and getting on with it rarely causes problems that can't be fixed. Doing nothing generally leads to worse outcomes.

## When did you last lower the ladder?

If you have an inspirational story to share, the WISE NZ Group would love to hear from you. Please get in touch via LinkedIn.