

Doug Westlund

B.Sc. Wood Products Processing (2000)

“When that door opens, be ready to walk through it.”



Job Title: Program Manager

Company: SQA Services, Inc. (www.sqaservices.com)

Location: Los Angeles, California, USA

Size of the Company: 300 employees

Environment: 70% in-house behind the desk, 30% travel

Education: Bachelor of Science in Wood Products Processing (University of British Columbia); Master of Business Administration (in progress, Marshall School of Business)

When Doug was on the verge of graduating from the Wood Products Processing program, he was inundated with a dozen job offers! Yet he found himself going after one more, and he's sure glad he did because it meant moving to L.A. to run his own plant.

After graduation, Doug was invited to a WoodLINKS meeting in the United States. Although he had every intention of making the meeting, he ended up missing it. Doug wanted to show how much he wanted to make it to the meeting so he visited each and every one of the industry employers who were at the meeting. They all suggested that he should go meet with this one particular person, and so Doug arranged a meeting that led to his first job out of the WPP program. He was hired at Nordwins, a Swaner Hardwood Company that manufactures solid oak, maple and cherry bedroom furniture. While the job required more skills than he possessed at the time, Doug saw it as a challenge. For four years he worked as an Operations Manager, turning an unprofitable plant into one that turned an impressive profit.

Doug is currently completing his MBA with a focus in Finance through the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California. He believes that developing a deeper understanding of the financial aspect of business will allow him to work his way up the chain. He is a proponent of building up your skills set and network while being open to opportunities that may come your way.

Key Responsibilities: SQA is a professional services company that specializes in supplier quality management. They work across different industries – including aerospace and defense, oil and gas, and pharmaceutical – all areas that are highly regulated and which require a high level of precision. SQA's services include critical parts inspection, global audits, and corrective action programs.

As a Program Manager, Doug focuses on reaching client's goals by coordinating SQA Associates and monitoring their results. Much of his job involves establishing and maintaining customer relations. For Doug, there is no such thing as a typical day on the job. A lot of his time is spent multi-tasking. Part of his job involves meeting with clients to deliver presentations, putting together contracts, as well as going

over these contracts with the clients. Yet another aspect of his job is working on internal improvements within the company.

Skills Required: Analytical skills and problem solving skills are of the utmost importance in a job like this one. It is crucial to have a good understanding of statistical analysis, as you are often called upon to fix problems and pinpoint their root causes. A Program Manager has to lead cross-functional teams so good communication skills help you manage people and provide good leadership.

He Loves His Job Because: He has control. Doug also likes the fact that he is rewarded based on his performance.

Co-op Work Terms: Doug completed a work term at SMED International (now Haworth), which is an office furniture manufacturer. For his next co-op term, he worked at Northwood. Doug also worked as a Junior Project Manager at the prestigious Schuler Consulting firm, where he provided manufacturing and industrial engineering support. Doug also worked for Canfor. During his time there he designed and implemented a statistical process control system to track variability in drying metrics and detect defects.

Other Employment: After working for Nordwins Doug moved to RSI Home Products, where he worked in various positions over the course of four years. He was initially hired as a Process Engineer, providing manufacturing and industrial engineering design evaluations and improvements for three manufacturing facilities. Within two years, he was promoted to Product Engineer, and later, to Engineering Manager. In this position, Doug led the engineering design team that oversaw the development of the fastest growing program within the company.

Most Relevant UBC Courses: Doug found the statistics, plant layout and design, and project development courses to be especially helpful in the working world. Analytical thinking, problem solving, presentation skills, and leadership skills are the keys to success in this job, and they are all things he learnt in the WPP program.

Advice for Prospective Students: Many high school students are young and looking for excitement. Wood may not sound that exciting to them, but look what it has done for Doug's career. In the past this industry may have been all about blue-collar workers, but right now there are a whole lot of opportunities for highly educated individuals.

Advice for Current Students: Anyone who goes through the program and doesn't do co-op is almost wasting their time. In any program that is this specialized, co-op is a must. If you are focused on getting your degree in four years, you are being short-sighted. Employers are looking for hands-on experience, and those with the experience are the people they are going to hire. Once you go out on a work term you come back into the classroom with a new outlook. Employers can recognize and value that!

As for new graduates, keep your approach flexible, know what you want, be willing to travel and relocate, and be persistent to the point of exhaustion. Once you get the job, take on as much responsibility as you can, and be proactive – seek tasks out before they are requested of you. Take the role of protégé as often as you can, and surround yourself with capable people from whom you can learn.

Look for opportunity outside of what's immediately in front of you. And when that door opens, be ready to walk through it.