



Comité sectoriel  
de main-d'œuvre  
de l'industrie maritime

# PORTRAITS OF WORKERS IN THE MARINE INDUSTRY

2016-2017  
PORTRAIT N. 2

*Patrick Couture*

Vessel Superintendent



Learn together to recognize the workers who provide us the routing of 90% of our consumer goods, thus supporting our Quebec maritime industry both at sea and ashore!

**Tribute for our maritime ambassadors!**

**« To be a vessel superintendent, you have to love working outside with heavy machinery, be practical, love concrete work and have a results-based outlook. »**

## Love of people and challenges

- ▶ Despite the blustery, snowy, February weather, my meeting with Patrick Couture was warm and welcoming.

Volubile, dynamique et clairement passionné, le surintendant Talkative, dynamic and definitely passionate about his work, Patrick Couture, Vessel Superintendent with Quebec Stevedoring Company since 2006, wants to make one thing clear from the outset: his job requires no in-depth maritime-sector knowledge or training. “The term “superintendent” scares a lot of people. It certainly scared me before I knew what the job entailed. It’s different from the role of a Superintendent in construction or forestry. It’s more like a Foreman”, he explains. Despite his job title, Patrick works on land not on board ship and is responsible for overseeing vessel loading and unloading.

A Forest Operations Foreman by training, Patrick represents exactly what the company is looking for in a Vessel Superintendent: someone with experience, who is resourceful, bilingual, versatile and comfortable managing a team. He also had field technical and operational know-how. “You have to love working outside with heavy machinery, be practical, love concrete work and have a results-based outlook. Our “success stories” for these jobs are farmers, people from the forestry sector and former military personnel (Sergeants and Warrant Officers)”, he points out.

### AN UNEXPECTED CAREER TURN

Since grade 6, Patrick knew his career would be in forestry. “My family has been in forestry for a long time, but the

2006-2007 forest crisis put things in perspective”. He had just turned 30 and was looking for professional development, something that is no longer possible in the forest sector. So, he went to a placement agency, which put him in touch with Quebec Stevedoring. Ten years later, he’s still there...despite suffering from seasickness, not knowing the sector and knowing even less about being a Vessel Superintendent. “At the beginning, I had to trust the longshoremen I worked with. I listened to them, got to know them and learned from them. In this job, the skills and knowledge you acquire with experience are still highly valued. More than a diploma or degree because there isn’t really any official academic training for this job”, he says.

Patrick began his career as a Vessel Superintendent on bulkers in Beauport, where he worked from 2006 to 2010. “Actually doing the work is the best school where the job of Superintendent is concerned because we quickly come to understand the principles underlying the job and concerning the ship. We get hands-on experience.” In 2010, he became a swing team Superintendent and his stevedoring-related duties targeted general cargo. “You need a good base since these are all special projects. For example, you might be loading a boat headed for the Canadian North to serve Arctic communities. You have to load it intelligently, a bit like a moving truck”, he explains.



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## A DIVERSIFIED, UNIQUE JOB

For a Superintendent with Quebec Stevedoring Company, a project begins by getting assigned a ship by the Operations Coordinator. Then, planning is needed to determine your list of requirements and to make your requests to the people working the equipment and the unions involved for the goods to be loaded (e.g. 6 dock workers, 2 wheel loaders, 1 mobile crane, etc.). The morning of the operation, Patrick meets with the client, analyzes risks and hazards on the dock before the shift starts and meets with the “mechanic” responsible for ensuring that all of the machines are ready for the operation. Around 8:00 a.m., the Superintendent takes attendance and explains the work to be done that day. This is also when he holds the safety meeting, which is recorded every morning. He then meets with the Foremen to explain the loading plan and assigns each a hold for which he is responsible. Throughout the day, the Superintendent completes the “work log” in great detail, giving the company a real-time stowing status progress report. Finally, since all of the men are on call, he has to contact the union before 3:00 p.m. to plan his manpower needs for the next day. His day ends with a progress report to the client.



Work as a Vessel Superintendent involves its share of compromise. A typical working year constitutes 1800 hours...over an intensive period from mid-March to the Christmas holidays. “Our reality entails variable work locations, inconvenient work schedules, being on call 24/7, long workdays. A ship isn't a bus, scheduling is variable. So, it's hard to plan for the weekend, for instance”, says Patrick. Team spirit, the synergy at Quebec Stevedoring

and the challenges that come with the job are among the positive aspects of being a Vessel Superintendent. Among other things, Patrick is proud of his team's accomplishments, including starting up four new offices in different ports and seeing that are all able to operate independently now. His job has generated many good memories too: “I remember a project for Arcelor Mittal in Port-Cartier where we had to move new machinery weighing 1800 tons. The entire operation was filmed by helicopter, it was a huge technical challenge to lift such specialized transportation equipment. There were a lot of constraints and people involved, the pressure was huge, but we succeeded. It's challenges like these that keep me doing this job”, he admits. There's also the contact with people and different cultures. “When you board a ship, you're going into someone's home. You have to adapt. I love it. It gives me a chance to talk, to create ties with people from all around the world.”



After today's meeting, one thing is patently clear: Patrick loves his job. Since 2014, he has been Operations Coordinator and coordinates the work of 12 to 15 of the company's swing team Superintendents. “You're in charge of your career and you can go as far as you want at Quebec Stevedoring”. In Canada and the US, the company offers an almost infinite range of opportunities. You don't have to be a maritime expert or know how to navigate. The important thing for a Vessel Superintendent is to love people and challenges.

Patrick Couture is a perfect example.

By Josée-Ève Poulin  
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