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PORTRAIT N° 1

# Raphaël Beaudoin-Gagnon

Fleet Operator

Learn together to recognize the workers who provide us the routing of 80% of our consumer goods, thus supporting our Quebec maritime industry both at sea and ashore !

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## An occupation well worth discovering

► A good many land-based workers participate in the operations involved in enabling a ship to bring its cargo safely to port. One of them is the Fleet Operator. Although this occupation is not well known outside the industry, it is of vital importance for safe, efficient, optimal goods transportation. I met (virtually!) with Fednav's Raphaël Beaudoin-Gagnon in order to raise awareness about this job.

Raphaël, who has a university degree (finance major) from HEC Montréal, turned to the maritime industry after a discussion with a former classmate. Having learned that a number of jobs had opened up with Fednav since employees had retired, Raphaël decided to try his luck. The maritime sector has always interested him: "I grew up in Sept-Îles and my father was Vice-President of a stevedoring company where I worked a few summers. In the bay, I used to see big and small ships but I didn't know it was a career option for me". In September 2016, Raphaël began his career as a Fleet Operator Trainee.

### A MULTIFACETED JOB

Raphaël explains that there are three echelons in the Fleet Operator hierarchy. A Fleet Operator Trainee manages 4 to 6 ships while he is learning. A Fleet Operator manages 6 to 8 vessels in addition to negotiating certain contracts with suppliers or clients. He also assesses fleet performance and the cargo volume that can be loaded in port, analyzes ports, etc. A Senior Fleet Operator is assigned bigger projects and additional duties, while managing 8 ships or more. Raphaël worked on the Red Dog mine project in northwest Alaska managing 2 to 4 ships throughout the mine's shipping season in addition to his 8-to-10-vessel fleet.



Fleet Operators are permanently on call and a typical day's activities, according to Raphaël, are of three main types. The first consists in taking messages at the very beginning of the day to make sure there are no emergencies on any of the vessels the Fleet Operator manages. If something is wrong, he has to find solutions immediately to minimize the costs and time involved: "We have to check the contract to confirm our commitments and responsibilities and what we can do to turn things around. We consult our in-house expert in the sector as well as the Claims Department. Then, we can make a recommendation to deal with the problem". The different types of complications that arise can be related to fuel, cargo, potential cargo contamination, etc.

Once the problems have been solved, the Fleet Operator carries out the daily duties for all of his fleet: "If a ship was loaded during the night, we have to send the clients the invoice. If a new contract was signed with a client and a ship has a new assignment, we have to give the Captain instructions regarding the next voyage, loading and unloading ports, the bunkering plan, etc."

Finally, the Fleet Operator must ensure that his different voyages and operations are optimized. This must be done by validating the terms of the different contracts.



One thing is certain, no two days are alike for a Fleet Operator: “Each voyage is completely different from past voyages and each vessel has its own, unique features”. As far as Raphaël is concerned, this is a major advantage, giving him a chance to learn constantly and to work with different industry players.

He especially likes the enormous responsibility and freedom he has in managing his ships. This allows him to optimize voyages as best he can. He remembers a voyage coming from the Red Dog mine in Alaska, which was supposed to be unloaded in Australia. Instead, he suggested that the client unload in Asia first in order to be able to add two cargo-carrying barges: “Given Australia’s depth restriction, we couldn’t load more than 43 500 tonnes of cargo. Despite the detour of several days, adding this unloading port enabled us to deliver an additional 11 000 tonnes and to make a significant profit”.

## ALL ROADS LEAD TO... THE JOB OF FLEET OPERATOR

According to Raphaël, there is no specific path leading to a career as a Fleet Operator. A number of his colleagues have a range of previous work experience and he believes that this diversity is advantageous and encouraged at Fednav: “I think that a team is strong because of the sum of its parts. If you can bring something interesting to the table... your application will be considered”.

More than a particular background, a person’s qualities and aptitudes make him or her a good Fleet Operator. Raphaël tells me that he feels the following are the most essential: “You have to be comfortable with numbers and calculations, be bright, critical and logical to do this job. To be able to propose solutions to problems, I’d say you have to be creative. Finally, it’s very important to be able to express yourself well in order to maintain good communications with clients and suppliers”.

## WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

No surprises here for Raphaël. He sees himself working for Fednav 10 years down the road. He expects to still be working in his current department, the Marine Department, but only time will tell. “Many of my co-workers make lateral moves within the company to broaden their experience and get closer to their centres of interest”, he tells me. No doubt interesting career opportunities will come his way in the future. In fact, Raphaël was promoted in January 2020, becoming Assistant Manager, Fleet Operations and Lakes Coordinator. Since January 2021, he has been Fleet Operations Manager, Handy, North America.

It just shows that, when you choose the maritime industry, many possibilities are open to you, including the job of Fleet Operator: “There’s clearly lots of room for the young and not-so-young wishing to work in the maritime industry. Where there’s a will, there’s a way!”.

