



Ben Simkin, General
Manager, Onboard.
CrossCountry Trains



**TEN YEARS ON:
HOW ONE INTUITIVE
INTRODUCTION HELPED
OUR CANDIDATE BUILD A
LIFE-LONG RAIL CAREER.**



When Ben Simkin first spoke to Gaynor Holt, now our Head of Talent, he was sitting in a supermarket café in the Seychelles.

It was not the most conventional setting for a career-changing conversation. At the time, Ben was working overseas as Head of Cargo at Air Seychelles, on secondment from Etihad, and had spent almost seven years building a career in aviation.

“From that initial conversation in a cafeteria, Gaynor immediately put me ease.”

Their talk sparked what would go on to become a ten-year career in the rail industry. It led to an international relocation and a move from aviation into rail. With a new life back in UK, Ben was able to build a long-term senior leadership career in rail.

THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY, WITH A TOUCH OF SERENDIPITY

Ben and his wife were already considering a return to his home country. His wife, an NHS nurse, was ready to go back to her career in the UK, so the timing already felt significant for them both.

But when an ex-colleague mentioned an opportunity with CrossCountry through Gaynor, it was not the obvious next step. Ben had built his career in aviation and knew relatively little about rail. But as he learned more about the role, he could see how much of his experience would transfer.

His background in revenue, yield management, commercial decision-making and complex operational environments gave him a great starting point. While the sector was different, all the principles were familiar.



“Sometimes these things come together at exactly the right moment. This opportunity arrived just as we were ready to think seriously about coming home.”



“Thankfully, I always knew where things stood, which made a huge difference, especially when I was overseas and making such significant life decisions. When someone puts you at ease, it gives you the space to perform well.”



SEEING POTENTIAL BEYOND THE OBVIOUS CV

What stood out to Ben was that Gaynor and Nina didn't just glance at his CV and pluck out keyword matches. They already understood the role, business and sector in depth, but also took the time to understand his motivations and relocation plans.

“From the first few minutes, it felt like I was speaking to people who knew their market and genuinely understood the opportunity, as well as I what I need from it.”

A new job, a new country, a new sector and the potential for a permanent relocation to the UK – with so many moving parts at play, Ben needed context, reassurance and honest guidance.

Gaynor and Nina helped him see where his aviation experience could add value in rail, and why the move made sense.

“Knowledge is one thing, but they were also very human. The process felt open and genuinely supportive, rather than transactional.”

A PROCESS THAT BUILT CONFIDENCE

International recruitment can easily become complicated. In Ben's case, the process was also happening around one of the most momentous personal moments of his life.

While interviewing with CrossCountry while in the UK, he was also preparing for his wedding. In fact, his first interview took place just before he got married, the second followed after his honeymoon, and the offer came through before he returned to the Seychelles.



“Great transport careers don’t always move in straight lines. Sometimes the strongest leaders are the ones who can step across sectors and bring fresh perspectives with them.”

Nina Lockwood, CEO of Intuitive



MORE THAN A JOB MOVE

Looking back, Ben sees the opportunity as far more than a new role. The move gave Ben and his wife the platform to come home at the right time, while offering a route into a new sector where his existing skills could be recognised and developed.

Within six months of joining, Ben was asked to step up as Commercial Director on secondment. Later, he secured the role permanently, moved into operations, became Regional Director and is now progressing into a General Manager position, overseeing around 1,000 people.

“I joined in October, and by April I was stepping into a Commercial Director role. I didn’t expect things to move that quickly, but the opportunities came and I jumped at them.”



SKILLS THAT TRAVEL

Ben's shift from aviation to rail shows how valuable cross-sector experience is. While he didn't come from a traditional rail background, his commercial judgement and leadership experience meant he could handle complex operations. Those skills have served him well.

His progression also shows what can happen when a candidate is open to a move that is not entirely linear. A role that began in commercial leadership opened the door to operational responsibility, regional leadership and wider general management.

“My career has been shaped by opportunities appearing at the right time, and by being willing to go for them.”

TEN YEARS ON

Over the years, Ben has stayed in touch with Gaynor and Nina through check-ins and at industry events. It's an ongoing relationship that's made the placement feel considered and personal.

“It never felt like I was placed and then forgotten about. The relationship continued long after I started the role. It felt personal. They cared about whether the move was right, not just whether the vacancy was filled.”

Ten years after that first conversation from a supermarket café in the Seychelles, Ben's move into rail has become the defining chapter in his career during multiple major life transitions.

The Intuitive Magic

For Intuitive, Ben's story shows what thoughtful recruitment can achieve when the focus is on people and long-term fit.

For Ben, it started with a call in an unlikely place. But it became a career-changing move.