A Breath of Fresh Air

Trading a staid career for the spirited world of logistics

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When Chicago native Selwin Zachariah graduated from DePaul University in 2016 with a degree in accounting and mathematics, he was dutifully living up to the expectations of his Indian-born parents.

"We had to earn our stripes, but we've been on a steady climb."

SELWIN ZACHARIAH, VP Logistics

"When my brother, sister and I were very young, our dad sat us down and said one of you is going to become the accountant in the family, another the engineer, and one will be the doctor. Take your pick and figure it out amongst yourselves," says Zachariah. "And that's basically how it worked out. I became the accountant. My brother is an engineer, and my sister is the doctor."

The only problem was Zachariah soon realized the typical trajectory of a corporate tax accountant just wasn't the life for him. He quickly grew tired of spending most of his waking hours sequestered in a cubicle peering at spreadsheets, and longed for a more dynamic career.

As it happened, his girlfriend at the time — now wife — worked for a prominent logistics recruiting firm. It wasn't a path he'd ever considered but after learning about the salary potential, he decided it was worth exploring, eventually landing an entry level position at Fastmore Logistics in Schaumburg, Illinois.

Starting at the bottom, Zachariah hit the ground running. After three weeks of tracking and tracing, Fastmore asked him to assume a carrier rep role. He aced it, and it wasn't long before the company moved him over to customer account management. Working under and observing seasoned sales reps in action gave Zachariah the idea he might be good at sales too.

His hunch was right. Fast forward to today and Zachariah is vice president of sales at VP Logistics, the in-house transportation provider for Visual Pak, an Illinois-based company that specializes in contract manufacturing and packaging services.

In just six short years, he rocketed from being a sales rep at VP to becoming the company's national sales manager to occupying his current position. At each step along the

way, he's marveled at how logistics have been like a "breath of fresh air" compared to his accounting days. "I love negotiating. I love interacting with people," Zachariah says, while at the same time admitting his accounting background has given him a very strong foundation.

A new challenge

VP Logistics' relationship with the U.S. Postal Service began in 2022 on the heels of a trade show Zachariah attended. He and his associates networked with USPS representatives at the event and shortly thereafter were granted the opportunity to bid on the freight auction board.

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Hesitant to jump in without a plan, VP Logistics' approach was slightly more strategic. Rather than bid indiscriminately, Zachariah thought it best to first be a fly on the wall, to jot down data and make a spreadsheet documenting how the whole process works. The board operates 24/7, 365 days a year at a frenetic pace. When a load is posted, companies only have 30 minutes to make a bid.

After three weeks of study, Zachariah felt VP Logistics was equipped to start bidding. "In the beginning, it was just me and four other people on the board. For the first year and a half, we barely slept." Their research-based approach paid off however, and gradually they began to win loads.

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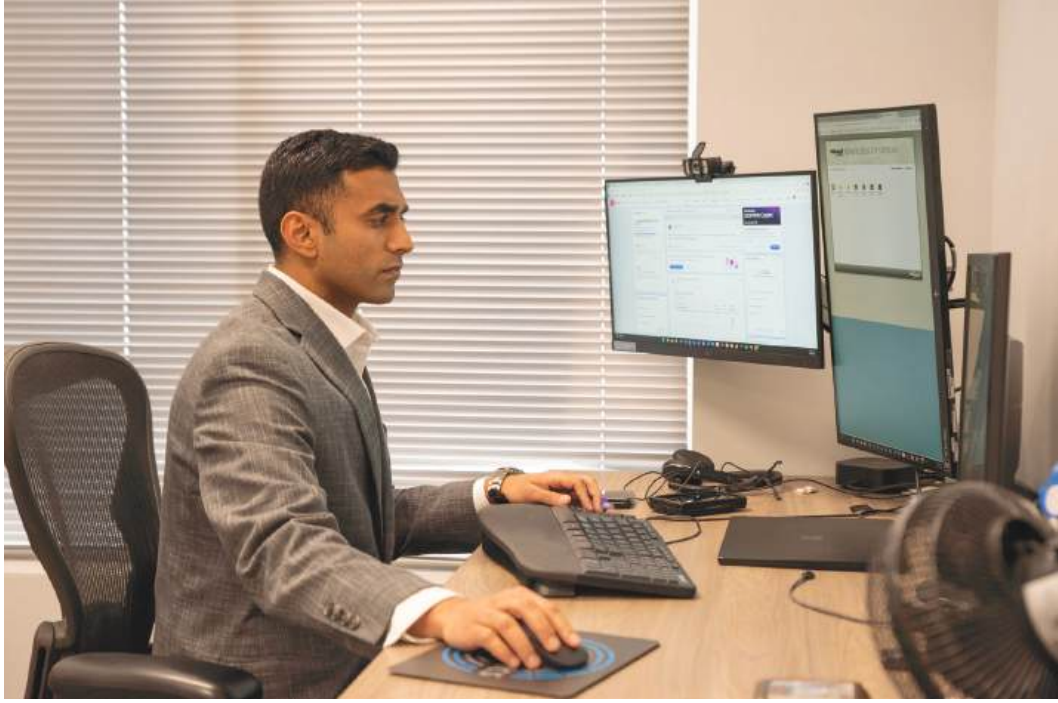

VP Logistics started on the freight auction board, they were averaging 20 loads a month. After building a carrier pool and growing within the network, their monthly count now hovers around 200 loads.

The holy grail

Delivering top tier service and consistently meeting USPS metrics eventually earned VP Logistics an invitation to Memphis to participate in a "Shark Tank" style forum being held by USPS. Zachariah had been itching for such an opportunity and true to his personality, he left no stone unturned in an effort to stand out.

It was a tall order as VP Logistics was one of the 60 companies scheduled to present over the course of three days. Zachariah's solution? He and the general manager at the time (now president) Gene Maher delivered a David Letterman-styled Top Ten version of why USPS should use VP Logistics for contracting freight.

"We had the music and dressed the part, all while emphasizing the top level of service, high energy and care they'd get from our team," Zachariah said.

Yet he still wasn't done. Zachariah closed out VP's presentation by playing guitar and singing a rendition of Vanessa Carlton's *A Thousand Miles*, complete with lyrics tailored to fit USPS. The gambit worked and VP started getting offered contracting opportunities right away. However, it still took six months of quoting on literally thousands of contracts before they landed a single one. Persistence paid off though and in January 2024, VP won their first bid.

In the year since, Zachariah and his team have grown their contract stable. Impressed by their performance, USPS also awarded VP four contracts in their pilot Go East/Go West program. Two of those have expired but two remain.

Getting his priorities straight

Zachariah jokingly admits he was once considered the black sheep in his family for straying from his father's intended path. "In the Malayali Indian culture, not a lot of people do logistics. They don't even know what that is!" he says.

Fortunately, his dad came around. "He saw how well I was doing, how invested I am and how much I love talking about my work. Eventually he said, 'You know, I think this was a good move. You have my blessings.'"

Zachariah's workdays are long, and his travel schedule is hectic, but family remains central in his life. Free time is devoted to spending time with his wife Shalini and their 18-month-old daughter Shay. His parents come from large families — his father alone has ten siblings — who in turn have increased the flock. "We're all located in Chicago and every time we get together, it's something like 100 people," he confirms.

He also enjoys playing golf although he admits to not being very good. "The president of our company gives me a lot of grief because he says I'm literally the only sales guy he knows who can't play golf," he says with a laugh. No matter. Zachariah continues to prove himself where it counts. ✯