

“Good communications skills are key, being pro-active and showing a genuine interest”

Introduction

Sjouke has been working for Atkins for the last 9 years, as a project manager on various projects in the Water and the Rail business. Sjouke has managed projects for clients such as the Environment Agency, Water companies, Network Rail, London Overground and some banks and management consultancies. As a project manager, Sjouke is responsible for the overall delivery and management of time, budgets and quality control, to ensure the client is happy with the end product and Atkins makes a healthy profit margin on the project. Atkins is a large multi-disciplinary engineering, design, planning, architectural design, project management and consulting services business. Atkins has more than 150 offices worldwide and over 18,000 employees.



Image: Sjouke Tolsma, Project Manager - ATKINS

How did you get started in your career?

I have a Masters degree in Civil Engineering & Management from the Twente University in the Netherlands. I always found it interesting to learn more about the infrastructure around us, why it is built and what would be the best solutions. The built environment, such as roads, bridges, flood protection schemes are all around us and we use them on a daily basis, even if we're not aware of them.

Can you outline a typical work day?

A typical day is in the office, where I'll be keeping track of costs and budget forecasts in xls, ensuring our progress is still according to programme and discussing possible solutions for problems with the other engineers and making decisions about the way forward. I have regular meetings with my project teams, sometimes these are progress meetings with clients and contractors, and sometimes just small meetings with part of the team to discuss details. For my projects which are under construction I also visit site on a regular basis to make sure progress is as planned.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

It is a large and multi-disciplinary business, which means that there is loads of different type of projects to work on. I get a lot of different types of experience and work with different people, which keeps it interesting. Once a project is finished I move onto something new, whether that is for the same department or for a completely different department.

What skills are important for anyone wishing to start in your profession?

A relevant degree would be ideal, but this can be varied (any engineering degree but we also have a lot of scientist, ecologists, hydrologists, water quality specialists, environmentalists, architects, building surveyors, management consultants, project managers) – we also hire many apprentices every year who can obtain their degree whilst working for Atkins.

What main personal attributes do you think is important for your type of job?

Good communications skills are key, being pro-active and showing a genuine interest.

Do you have any tips or suggestions on how young people and adults can enter your industry?

There are various career options such as a university degree, apprenticeships.

Why is it important for the construction sector to attract and train young people and new entrants?

It is possible to start as an apprentice on the tools and work up to being a project manager. Often the best project managers are those that have had heaps of practical experience. Without engineers and builders, the world would grind to a halt. Reservoirs for water, power stations for electricity, harbours, airports, railways and roads are all built by engineers all of which are essential in our lives.

Further contact/information

Email: Sjouke.tolsma@atkinglobal.com | www.atkinglobal.com