

**Roberta Owen**  
**Marine Operations**  
**Maryland Port Administration**

***Meet Roberta Owen***

My name is Roberta Owen. I am with the Marine Operations Department in the Maryland Port Administration. (*Audio problem*) As I kid I wanted to be a singer (*laughing*). I had stage fright like most people would, but yet I did overcome it through the high school years in those plays and things and I felt that, that was not for me in the end, obviously, that I wanted to make money. I wanted to get out on my own and make a career, make a life for myself.

***Explain what you do. Talk about an average day at work for you.***

We are here to make sure that the cargo gets loaded and unloaded safely and quickly because time is money. Most ships are here eight hours and they're off to their next port. So they need to get in and out as ... quickly without any damage to persons or cargo. Every morning, we come in here and we start our day by evaluating what vessels are on the terminal right now, when they going to be leaving, and what vessels need to enter the terminal. And a lot of times, of course, we're duplicating berths, so this ship has to leave before that ship can come in. So you've to coordinate the times with the agents. There's a site that we monitor that's affiliated with the Maryland Pilots and the Baltimore Maritime Exchange and they let us know when they're advised this ship is going to sail or this ship is going to be at the bridge. They Key Bridge is our main focal point because when the ship is at the bridge, it's about a half an hour from its docking time.

We coordinate with, again, all of the stevedores. These are the guys that are hiring the labor. For example, we've got 12 cranes here at the Dundalk Marine Terminal and we need to know when that stevedore needs our crane and we need to know what time and we need to know how long he's going to work and what kind of work he's going to do.

The communication between ourselves and these customers and tenants and steamship lines has many ways of our coming through. Telephone, obviously, is a main use. The Internet and the websites of the pilot in the Baltimore Maritime Exchange as well as ... steamship lines have Internet and they show, "My vessel will be here at this time."

***What personality traits or interests can be a good match for this career?***

The person to fit in our job scope would be an outgoing person, somebody who isn't afraid to walk up to someone and make a statement. Sometimes it's a negative statement. Sometimes it's a trucker that you need to get off of the road, like a police officer would do. I mean we run this marine terminal. We run five marine terminals but this one is the busiest. And many times a truck driver, big units that they have, they're looking for a place to park or just make a phone call and you've got to go to them and you've got to say, "Look, I need you to move this vehicle off the road", and they're like, "Where do

you want me to put it?" Sometimes it's a negative comment but you got to say it and present it such a way that the job gets done but that the person isn't completely offended or there's no animosity because we want to avoid those kinds of confrontations as well.

I try to be very organized and very detailed and ... which is very important obviously because you can't have one ship in berth when another one is coming in, so you really got to know what you're doing and why you are doing it and the timelines. There are so many little facets of it all.

***What parts of your education do you use most often in this career?***

Many of the courses that I've taken, whether it was high school or through the years of just bits of college credits and such, some of those things that you'll think "I will absolutely never use," they do come into play in here because we are out there measuring land. We're out there making sure that the berth, ... there is enough space on the berth so ... between vessels we need to know that there's enough room between the vessels. So we do get involve with math product ... math process and the length of the ship, you need to know that, and then the length of its ramp. So yes, math skills were something that did come in handy. I've taken maritime courses as well, that had given me knowledge about how a ship is stowed. I don't know that high schools will offer those but you could go to community colleges and they've got some courses.

***What has been the career track that's gotten you from your first job to where you are now? What special degrees or licenses did you need to get along the way?***

Just out of high school, not quite ready for college myself, my cousin also worked for a stevedore company and he assisted me in getting a position with this company. From that point on, I've just moved forward. Actually, the base of my experience has been the twenty-six years within the stevedore and steamship line and now with the port business. Previously, when I first came here I was with they call the "terminal control specialist," again another fancy title for the folks out on the terminal that are making sure there are no injuries, accidents, explosions, hazardous situations. And then, when there are those situations, they are the eyes and the ears of the terminal. So they're out there reporting this to my now-position and then we, in turn, give this information to our bosses and managers so that they know how to proceed, and that's where I started out. So basically most of my experience and education has come from on-site working.

***What is the best part of your career?***

Every day is a new challenge. I enjoy coming here. I enjoy the people I meet and speak with everyday. There's a camaraderie between us all that we all have a common goal. Even under difficult circumstances, challenges, I think that just makes me grow. It brings my personality out and I enjoy the challenge to solve this problem on this day.

***How has your work changed over the years? What role has technology played in those changes?***

My work has changed through the years in regard that obviously the computer and the Internet has made such an impact on all of us. Basically, everything was handwritten, even eight years ago, to the point of, ... you had an Excel sheet and you might type in the information, where now we've got a program where you give it the basic information ... your vessel is already programmed in, the length of the cargo in there, and everything about it, and you say, "Okay this ship is going to be at this berth at this time," and it automatically plugs it into the system that we have. And at the end of the day, when we're letting our crane department and our maintenance and even the stevedores, ... once they confirm labor with us, ... it pumps it out to them and you shoot it to them in an email or you send a fax depending on how antiquated their system is.

My work has again, some software programs that are pretty high-end. We've got satellite programs that are monitoring the vessels' movement, and as they're monitoring it, I can go on (of course, it's all Internet access) and I can see that this ship has just left Eastern Europe and that it will be here in seven days. We know the approximant time of the distances that it needs to travel. Obviously there's weather impacts, so it also let us know about the weather... is there is a storm in this area that would slow it down or may have to go the long way around. That's mostly what we use here is the satellite system.

***How does your work fit into the larger framework of the work at the Port?***

To connect with all facets and department ... to make it all run smoothly, we've all got to communicate daily with other departments, trucking companies, steamship lines, and vessel agents, so that everybody is on board with what we're all, the common goal ... to make it all work. I can speak directly about the connectiveness between operations. We schedule the ships, my department. We talk to the terminal control people and we let them know, "Hey listen, this ship is going to be tomorrow. Do you have any kind of activities planned for out there?" We've got construction going on. We've got areas that need to be swept, helicopters landing, traffic, truck traffic, truckers out on the road there, so we've got to let them know what's happening and then they've got to work around us because the vessels do take precedence .

***What advice would you have for anyone who wants to have the kind of career you have?***

There are courses at Anne Arundel Community College with maritime training that you can take. Some of these are free. So get your foot in the door and then you can guide your career by the education that you can get while you are making money, while you are here at a job, and you can also pursue your education as well, which will only enhance where you end up in the next twenty years.