



Area Manager Q&A: John Thompson, Brisbane

As an Area Manager for ALDI in Brisbane, John Thompson is responsible for a network of 3 stores and 60 staff. In this Q&A he shares his insight into working at ALDI, the Area Manager role, and finding work life balance in the fast paced and ever changing retail environment.

How did you come to work at ALDI?

I'd never thought I'd end up with a career in retail. I'd always worked in manufacturing, starting out as a production scheduler for an aluminium company and then moving to an operations management role at a flexible packaging company.

At the time, I was completing my bachelor degree in HR and management part-time, while working full-time. That was really helpful because it allowed me to apply the skills I was learning at university in a really practical way. But after finishing my degree, I was up for a new challenge.

When I came across the role, I had no idea it was for ALDI. The job description talked a lot about autonomy, personal responsibility and a team mentality, which fitted with my personality and what my career had been to date.

What is a typical day as an Area Manager like?

There is no typical day for an Area Manager – it can change with a phone call. But generally I start my day at one of our stores just prior to opening. I'll meet with the Store Manager then do a walk around the store to check compliance. An Area Manager's job is to get as much consistency across the company as possible, and especially within our area. We want to ensure the standards are the same for customers, so that they get the same experience across different stores, and that it's a really positive experience.

Then I might schedule a meeting with my store managers to talk about our longer term strategy on one of many topics like recruitment, customer service, inventory or other store initiatives.

I spend an average of about three to four hours in any one store, before moving onto the next store and doing it all over again. We always have different things going on in each store, so it's about giving the store managers the right support and direction to help them get to where we want to go.

What do you love most about your job and why?

The people side of ALDI is by far the main attraction of the job for me. It's no secret that we get paid really well, or that we get five weeks of annual leave each year, a company car and phone. All of that's really great, but for me it's nowhere near as rewarding as what you get out of working with the people at ALDI.

The Area Manager role is really people focused. I'm responsible for a team of 60, and a big part of my job every day is to lead, develop, motivate and encourage my staff. I look after all recruitment in my stores so hiring someone as a Retail Assistant and seeing them grow to become a Store Manager is really rewarding as well.

In such a fast paced role, how do you achieve work life balance?

Work life balance is what you make it. For me, it's about being disciplined and ALDI is really supportive of this and understanding. Because we are open seven days a week, I can choose which days of the week to work that best fit in with what else I have going on in my life. I have a wife and two children aged four and five, so I really appreciate that I don't have to take a day of annual leave to go to a day care function or sporting event – I can schedule my work days around this. I like to keep fit, I go to the gym most days and I've recently taken up reading. My job doesn't interfere with any of that because there is a lot of flexibility in the role.

What are some of your biggest learnings on the job?

When you start out as an Area Manager, you do everything – you take out the rubbish, you sit on the tills and talk to customers, you get to run a store and do rosters, you have to do all of the stuff your Store Managers and Retail Assistants will do later on, so it really helps with recruitment and performance management down the track.

The biggest learnings I've taken on board since joining the company is the importance of communication and how to take on constructive feedback. In this job, if you don't communicate well, things can go pear shaped, quickly. I've also learned how to take on constructive feedback. No one is scared of giving feedback and everyone will tell you what they think of an idea but the best part is that they support you through a solution.

Do you feel like you make a difference working at ALDI?

Area Managers take on quite a lot of decision making responsibility to shape the strategy of what we're doing within the region. In addition to overseeing the performance of our stores, we also take on projects within the company such as looking at how we can improve everything from store operation efficiency, environmental impact, renegotiating supplier contracts and so on.

We trial these initiatives on a smaller scale in one of our regions before taking them to a committee. So for us, we feel like we can impact the company nationally and really influence ALDI's success in Australia. When I started at ALDI, there were 300 stores and now there are over 500. The opportunity to grow with the company is really attractive.

What advice would you give anyone interested in applying for an Area Manager role at ALDI?

If you are people focussed and have a genuine desire help motivate, lead and inspire your team then this is the role for you. Your background is not important because ALDI provides all the industry/role specific training that is required. So if you are considering a career change without having to start over, it is a great option. I would also say that you need to be dedicated to the role and be flexible in your approach, however you will be working with very high performing colleagues who will always be there to support you through.

To read more about the Area Manager role and to apply, visit <https://www.aldicareers.com.au/Careers/Corporate-Graduate/Area-Manager>