

Karen Lindsey's experience working as a PA paid off when she launched her own corporate events consultancy firm

# PA and beyond



TIMELINE

**1977**

Left school

**1978**

Undertook secretarial course

**1979**

First job as a shipping clerk

**1980**

Moved to London to pursue modelling career



**1983**

PA to MD of music agency



## I STARTED MY WORKING LIFE AS A... SECRETARY

"It would be fair to say that I wasn't academic at school. To be honest, I wasn't great at most subjects but I was pretty good at table football!

"I remember attending a careers evening and being asked what I wanted to be? I fleetingly wondered whether professional table football players made a good living but, without further hesitation, I proclaimed... 'I want to be a vet'. The teacher, obviously party to my academic capabilities, suggested kindly that I may 'also' like to consider becoming a a) hairdresser, b) nurse or c) secretary. So, I chose to become a secretary."

## MY CAREER PROGRESSED LIKE THIS...

"After a year at college, I started my career as a shipping clerk. My role incorporated a lot of typing, a lot of photocopying and a lot of tea making. Without doubt, it enabled me to cut my teeth on a variety of secretarial duties that would stand me in good stead for the future.

"Whilst attending an exhibition I was approached by an agent who asked if I had considered modelling. Shocked by the cost of living, it became clear that I couldn't live on modelling alone and so I enrolled with a temping agency. I loved the freedom of temping, the flexibility and the great rate of pay.

"When I learned of a PA role up for grabs within a music agency I went for an interview and was offered the position. I worked in a small office but we had a big representation list which included bands such as Depeche Mode and Erasure. My role was to support my boss and one of my duties was to put together the itineraries. The itinerary detailed the movements of everyone involved with a tour and unbeknown to me, this invaluable tool was going to prove of immeasurable help to me in the future.

"I worked as a PA for two years before I was head hunted to put my secretarial skills, modelling experience and agency know-how to good use in launching a model agency in the West End.

"The agency shared space with the owner of a corporate hospitality company.

I was in her office one day and the phones were ringing off the hook. She gesticulated for me to take the call – a call that was to change my life. The company wanted someone to take a brief immediately. If we did, the job was 'ours'. No-one was available and so I was asked if I would like to do it!

"I relinquished my powers as the MD of the modelling agency and ventured downstairs to start my career as a rookie event organiser, and a role I happily stayed in for four years."

## I KNEW IT WAS TIME TO MOVE ON WHEN... I GOT HOME SICK

"I decided to start my own events business back home in Dorset. I ran Leaps & Bounds for 14 years, looking after companies such as Orange, KFC and Warner Home Video. We offered a bespoke service organising conferences, team building, award ceremonies and parties.

"In 2005, I went back to grass roots and Karen Lindsey Consultancy was born. Seven years on, I continue to 'venue find' and arrange functions but also provide guidance and assistance to internal staff organising their own events. From time to time, I run seminars based on the processes detailed in my book *Planning and Managing a Corporate Event* and I also guest lecture to students studying event management.

"Although I wasn't academic, gaining the secretarial skills and the opportunities that followed, enabled me to embark on the career that I still have a passion for 25 years on. And, what of my other passion – table football? Well, when attending EIBTM, I spotted the game on a stand. Spontaneously, I played in a tournament and won first prize. So, I am living proof that you really can benefit from combining work and pleasure!"

## THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE I FACED WAS... TO STRIKE A WORK/PERSONAL LIFE BALANCE!

"After running a busy event company for 14 years, the challenge that I faced was the need to develop a consultancy that allowed me to strike a work/personal life balance. Have I managed it? In a way. When I first

## 3 THINGS I LEARNED FROM THE ROLE OF PA...

1 Without the basic secretarial skills honed during my time as a PA, I simply wouldn't have been able to launch my own company. When I began Leaps & Bounds, I couldn't have afforded secretarial support. In my office, I was the MD but also the PA!

2 A great deal of my time was spent liaising with other agencies, management and the artists themselves as well as the bookers. I learned to prioritise calls, prioritise actions and prioritise my time along with developing strong communication skills.

3 Without doubt one of the most valuable lessons was the importance of being organised. Unless you are organised in the planning process, the management of an event could be disastrous.

became a consultant, I took a brave pill and informed my clients that I wouldn't be contactable whilst on holiday. Strangely enough, the world didn't stop turning and my 'incommunicado' never had a detrimental effect on an event. Being responsive to clients' needs yet making time for friends and family (and indeed, actually taking holidays) is a challenge that I face each day and is a challenge that I am sure resonates with many PAs."

## THE BEST ADVICE I WAS GIVEN WAS... FROM MY FATHER

"If you can feel comfortable drinking tea out of a mug at a roadside café or sipping from the finest china at The Ritz then you will be well positioned in life."

"My father was alluding to the fact that being confident in whatever your surroundings was important. To neither be judgemental nor intimidated and to treat everyone with the same level of respect as you wish to receive.

"I have had the fortune to work with people from all walks of life, organised events in 3\* and 5\* deluxe hotels and yes, enjoyed a mug of tea or two in a roadside café! It's all about being comfortable with yourself and being comfortable with others." ■

**1985**

MD of model and promotions agency

**1987**

Joined event company as a junior event organiser

**1991**

Launched my own company – Leaps & Bounds

**2005**

Started life as a corporate event consultant

**2011**

Published my book *Planning and Managing a Corporate Event*

**2012**

Continue to work as an event consultant, trainer, lecturer and writer