

## Meet Alumni, Karyn



Thank you to former student Karyn Wilkins for answering our questions about her time at forerunner of the Hundred of Hoo Academy, the Hundred of Hoo School, and her career since.

- **When did you attend the school?**

1980 - 1985

- **What did you like best about being there?**

The life-long friends I made.

- **Any favourite memories?**

Being in the 6<sup>th</sup> form – or years 12 and 13 as now known! We were really treated as adults for the first time.

- **Any clubs/activities that you participated in?**

Nope! I was an idiot and thought I was far too cool for that – I regret it now and wish I had learned to play an instrument.

- **Favourite subjects?**

French and French literature.

- **Any teachers you particularly remember?**

Mr Poole, Miss Penn, Mr Mings and Mr Rehana.

- **Where you went after leaving?**

Despite having Uni places to study French and History, I decided not to go to Uni – and jobs were plentiful for school leavers in the mid-80s! My parents said it was ok to go straight into the workforce IF I got a decent job and I soon joined a management training scheme with a retail company. Within 18 months, I was the youngest Manager in the South East and very bored!

- **What you studied after leaving?**

I eventually went to University at the age of 24 to study Business and HR. I was a young, single mum and wanted to learn new skills to take into the workplace when my daughter reached school age.

I have a 1<sup>st</sup> Class BA Hons in Business and HR and numerous professional qualifications in leadership and project management

- **Career journey since?**

Wide and varied. From retail management, I sold insurance and then advertising space in recruitment magazines. After my degree, I was determined to buy a house so I took a job I HATED, working in

magazine subscriptions and worked for a single year (to the day!) which allowed me to apply for a mortgage as you had to have a year's continuous employment to get a mortgage. I then took a huge gamble and bought a house in Medway and moved back down here from London without a job. Within a week or so, I became a trainee Recruitment Consultant and stayed with the business for 11 years working my way up to a senior manager.

Disillusioned with recruitment, I began to work as a Business Adviser which led to me setting up my own business consultancy and recruitment company in 2011.

- **What qualifications do you need for your current role?**

Nothing formal – I believe that everything I do is about people and people skills cannot be learned from text books, online courses or learning platforms.

- **What skills and abilities does your current role require?**

The ability to listen above and beyond anything else. You need to understand people and their issues to be able to solve problems. It's not about what you can offer; it's about how you can help. If you solve a problem, people remember you forever.

My job is about making people feel confident and worthy of the roles they are applying for. I will never tell someone they can't do a job they are applying for but I will explain that it may not be the right time for them.

I have to be empathetic, diplomatic, organised and energetic. Running my own business also means I have to be flexible, organised and analytical.

- **What does a usual work day look like for you?**

It always starts with a to-do list! My role is so varied that I have to remain organised. I am a recruiter, a bookkeeper, a marketer, an adviser, a salesperson and Queen of the Spreadsheets – if I don't note things down, I will forget!

During any single day I can screen candidates, arrange interviews, work on social media campaigns, write job adverts, review legal contracts and complete a VAT return. In other words, there is no such thing as a typical day.

- **We live in strange times; workwise, what has the Covid experience thus far been like for you?**

Covid has had a very negative influence on my business – companies stopped hiring new staff and now when hiring a new team member, a manager may not even meet the person, as they will often be working remotely. Interviews are no longer face to face but held on Zoom or Teams; the whole process is very, very different. Employers are hiring again but salaries are being suppressed as working from home is perceived as being worth less financially.

For myself, I have had to take temporary work with the NHS working on the Test and Trace Programme as my business is earning far less money. I am enjoying the work and know that I am learning new skills and it's fantastic working with new people too. My business is still running and we are still placing people – just fewer. We're lucky. Many other small recruitment firms have not survived.

- **Any advice that you'd give to the 18-year-old you?**

Trust your gut and always do your best.

- **Anything else you'd like to share with us?**

There is no better time to start your own business than when you're young – don't neglect to consider this as a career option. You have tons of energy and ideas and your personal overheads are likely to be very low. What the worst that can happen? It fails and you'll have to get a job, and everyone's telling you that you have to do that anyway! But you'll have learnt so much along the way that it's always worth it....