





# Julia Styles

'It's all about people. Most project managers produce big complex spreadsheets. That's not actually what it's about. It's all about people. Always.'

**W**e're with the forthright and clear thinking Julia Kitchen, who has run her workplace consultancy highly successfully since 1995, and recently has partnered with Jamie Rothwell at HBDS. And successful it is too, with an impressively varied roster of clients such as Samsung, the Football Association, Legal Services Commission, Jewish Care, World Wildlife Fund and St. Peter's Hospital.

'All my clients – bar one actually – all 148 of them since 1995 have come from recommendations. That seems quite a lot to me.'

Julia's right – that is a lot of clients. So, logically enough, we asked about her approach.

'A lot of workplace consultancy looks at the building too much. It tends to look at the physical side, and not enough at the people. It's also really important that the person who comes in to do the consultation is the same person who carries it through to completion. It's about trust, carrying the can, continuity, not re-inventing the wheel. I'm an unusual combination – I'm both project manager and change management consultant – and in my opinion most people can't do both as they are such different skill sets. Most consultants focus on analysis and research – unlike me they tend not to see the project through.'

It's Julia's people skills that set her apart. She's done the hard yards of strategic analysis, she's FM'd with the best of them and she can rationalise a real estate portfolio until it goes out of fashion. It turns

out her people skills, allied with organisational ability, emerged in an unlikely early setting.

'After graduating in French and Spanish I worked for Thomson Holidays in Torremolinos. To them I was a gift from heaven because I could actually speak Spanish. All those trips to the police station, the courts and the hospital on the Costa are where I learned to deal with people! After three years in Spain I took on a conference and banqueting role for Thistle Hotels in Edinburgh, which then got me involved in the logistical challenge of a hotel refurbishment project. After 18 months I moved to London and joined Customs and Excise. They asked me to carry out a huge occupancy audit of all their seven buildings, involving 1,400 people. That space evaluation then led me to be part of the team that moved everyone to Sea Containers House. That role was important, as I was responsible for furniture – working with the Crown suppliers, the PSA, the interior designers Hunters, and the fit-out contractors Haymills.

'Feeling constrained by the career structure and prospects in the Civil Service, I left at the end of the project – which caused a great flurry. They liked me, but I was bit of a maverick – I didn't want to wait for promotion. After an enjoyable six months travelling in India, I went to work for John Bevan at GMW.

'I was nominally known as the Product Researcher. I was looking for what was new. The designers would say 'I need 'x'; my job was to know what existed and where we could get it from. John asked me >>>>>

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▶▶▶▶to have the best little black book in the business. It was a lovely job. I worked on great projects for the likes of ICI and Baring Brothers; Marilyn Cattle was my mentor. At GMW I saw that my skill set was complementary to the design process. And of course, I learned how to combine practicality with aesthetics.

'I left in 1990 when a recruitment consultant hounded me to take a job that doubled my salary. I joined 3Com in Marlow when they only employed 60 staff in this country – I was their first Facilities Manager. I was responsible for managing the buildings, the fleet, reception, office services, projects and procurement. 3Com then embarked on a global acquisition strategy. In most cases the acquired companies were far bigger in the UK – such as the 500 employee BICC Data Networks, where I found myself in charge of their buildings.

'I joined 3Com at the right time – and I left at the right time after five good years. Reporting to the Director of Real Estate in the

USA, the job took in all sorts of interesting challenges across the UK and Europe. 3Com were trailblazers in lots of ways. They were leading edge in interior design and architecture, but more importantly, they thought about people in a more flexible way – often parachuting in teams of people to solve a challenge or to create an opportunity.

'I think I'm best at move management linked to change management. I'm good at taking a project from an idea to reality. Richard Joyce, 3 Com's President in Europe, told me 'Whatever anyone says to you, whether you're in FM or Health and Safety, whatever – you're a project manager.' He meant that what it boils down to is asking yourself this: Where are we going? And how are we going to get there in the least painful, least expensive way?

'I have an incisive ability to see what needs to be done. My father was the same, actually. It can sometimes be a bit of a hindrance – some things are not my place to sort out! I tend to see the big ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶



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▶▶▶ picture, but I'm good at details as well. I'm very calm in a crisis. Steely calm. Every project has a pit – that moment when people wish they'd never started. Funnily enough, the best projects often emerge from the deepest pits. People panic, my calm stops people panicking. The reason for every pit is that someone's not done something they should have done. To avoid it you've got to choose the right people to do it their way – but you have to give them an end goal and parameters.

'For every project I pull together my team from a core group of about 15 freelance specialists – they could have skills in project management, fit-out, furniture analysis – it depends on the job. And my people then become part of the main team, which could be the client's people, eg. IT, procurement, HR and so on, and the external professionals, such as the architect and the QS.

'I never approach a project with pre-conceived ideas – but I do bring lots of experience. My advantage, when I go into a company as a change management consultant, is that I'm an outsider – people are more polite and more respectful because they think I'm an expert. I can see the wood for the trees, I seek compromise and I can handle egos.

'Companies usually start thinking about change because they're thinking about saving space. But, normally, they also understand that they need happy productive staff. Organisations are changing and are increasingly coming round to the viewpoint that their people are their most important asset. Of course, they also understand the significant costs involved in retraining and hiring new staff.

'People fear change. But they flourish if they feel involved.

'There are huge changes going on at the moment. There are various key drivers. Technology changes such as iPhones and Cloud networking are in the blender with economic drivers which dictate the use of smaller smarter spaces. And there's an enormous change in the new generation in the workplace. They have different expectations of work. It's less hierarchical, and less formal. They're much more self-motivating, and they want to be able to work anywhere.

'These huge changes are why I've formed a partnership with Jamie Rothwell at HBDS. It's the right time with our complementary experience. As a workplace consultancy we can help organisations who want flexible working, but they are not sure how to do it. He's seen sales of Hotbox rocket recently; it's an example of how companies are increasingly embracing flexible or smart working.'

We finish by talking a little about the images that Julia might provide to illustrate this piece. We love Julia's pithy summary, so we'll quote it precisely.

'The reason there are no project pictures is that I don't want to present myself as responsible for the interiors. I am the one who is responsible for making it happen.

'So we have some nice pictures of my three golden Labradors (Regan, Carter and Paolo) running around on the beach in Hayling Island where I live. And there's one of me, so you know what I look like! ●

