



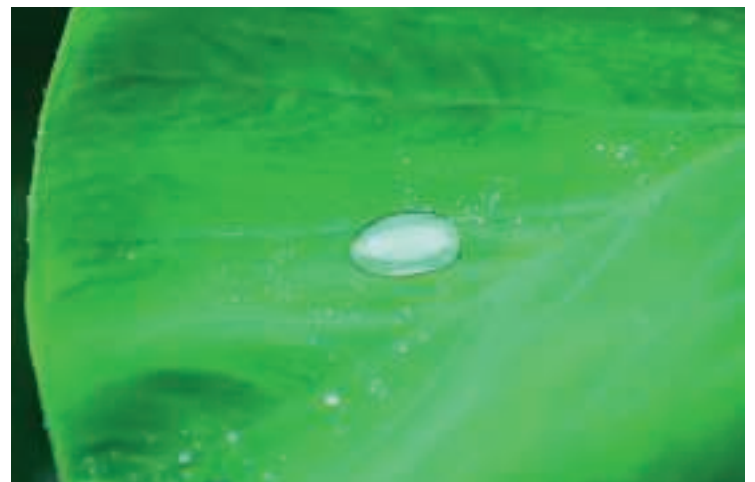




high expectations, and he inspired me. He pushed me, made me work long hours, and took me outside my comfort zone. I did strategic work, high level mapping, research, statistical analysis – and was inspired to progress in marketing. My marketing diploma became recognised and valued. After 8 years I was one of the few who moved to Coventry when Jewson relocated, but I really didn't want to be pigeon holed as a market place specialist, so I headed north to become Marketing Planning and Research Manager at Baxi Heating in Preston. It was good to really focus on a particular marketing discipline, and research was fast becoming a passion. The guys at Baxi were strong believers in using research to make the right decisions so I got to work on some very high level international projects – it's here I really saw the benefit of using research in product design.

I then had a big career advance when I became Marketing Manager at Akzo Nobel, looking after the marketing for their Crown Decorator Centre network. From scratch, I had to set up the whole marketing infrastructure, work on branding and everything related to it – merchandising, exhibitions, promotions and advertising. This was a big business – at the time there were over 100 Crown Decorator Centres nationwide. I then progressed to Senior Brand Manager responsible for the trade paint brands Permoglaze Professional and Macpherson. I was now getting into new product development, packaging, sponsorship (notably the Great North Open). I was creating products based on thorough customer research into what was needed, managing price points, all the way through to getting the products on the shelf. I loved it – then I saw a job at InterfaceFLOR in Marketing Week.

'In 2003 market conditions were difficult – almost a recession, and in many ways not dissimilar to the market conditions of today. My>>>>>>>



>>>>moving on to become Marketing Planning Director EMEAI, responsible for strategic market research. Her career in B2B marketing includes roles at leading companies such as Akzo Nobel, Jewson and Baxi – so in terms of cross-industry experience, Karen Warner is one of the leading marketing professionals in our industry. It turns out though that she set out with a very different career path in mind.

'When I was at school I wanted to be a make-up artist – creating masks for monsters and aliens on film and TV! To do that I needed to do Biology in order to go to college. I failed the mock exam, so the pressure was on to do something else. Back then, A levels were not really encouraged at my Milton Keynes secondary school so I panicked slightly and did what everyone else did – went to secretarial college. Deep down I knew it wasn't the right decision for me.

'My first job was as an audio typist at a solicitors firm – and I hated it. Then, while temping, the seeds of my interest in marketing were sown at the Meat and Livestock Commission, where I was an administrator in the marketing department. I helped in the image library dealing with requests like 'give me a smiling cow with a tree in the background'.

'My family moved to Norwich, and I got a job there at Jewson, starting on purchase ledger, but soon, at the age of 19, there was an opportunity in marketing. The company restructured and I was thrown in the deep end as marketing assistant. I had to learn fast in a massive organisation. I did a CIM diploma because I felt it would set me apart – and found a mentor in Mark Hawkins. Mark was a graduate manager from the FMCG industry – he had high ambitions,



▶▶▶▶ remit as Marketing Director was to increase awareness of Interface's market leading position. I changed some of the marketing suppliers, looked at ways to communicate with high end A&D specifiers, got us involved in events and exhibitions, got to know the media, made A&D contacts – it was all about getting connected. It took time, but it worked. Awareness is difficult to put your finger on, but what we did was a significant contributor to the growth of the brand.

'I also enjoyed seeing the potential of people, especially promoting administrative and support staff to fully fledged marketing positions.

'I had wanted to set up my own consultancy for some time, but the arrival of our son Jack accelerated my thinking! It's important to get the right work/life balance – I manage to separate work and family time pretty well.'

We talked a while about work/life balance and women in business. 'Companies need to look at the whole issue of balance in a way that is more appropriate to today's society. The whole 9-5 thing isn't the only option now – technology has changed what is possible. I still think there is some discrimination against women who want to start a family (not at Interface, I should add). I'm of the opinion that women at work should be judged on their ability alone, but a civilised society needs to understand that a proper work/life balance is good for all concerned. I've always been taken seriously in my career – perhaps it's because I'm a straight talker and I don't pull my punches. I'm not a yes person either – I've put my career on the line

more than once because I believed in what I was saying. I think it's about integrity – doing something because it's the right course of action, not just good for your career.'

For someone who once wanted to make up ghouls for the movies, Karen Warner is good company. As she says, straight talking, integrity and a generous spirit go a long way, particularly when working in the world of marketing consultancy. 'There is a logical sequence,' she explains, 'ending in creating a solution. It's about the big picture, about the direction of the business. The questions in that logical sequence are straightforward. Where are we now? Where do we want to be? How do we get there? It's all about creating the right strategy to meet short term, medium term and long term objectives. I'm not big on using lots of models, which can often be complex and confusing. I make a bespoke structured template for each challenge. Perhaps one of my key strengths is that I can do both the strategy and the delivery – I see that as my expertise. I get enquiries from companies who want help with the big picture stuff to those who want their brand recognised within a specific market sector – it's nice to have the diversity.'

Make no mistake, Karen Warner is a top marketer, a top professional. A nice person too, who says that 'starting a family is the best thing I've ever done'. Look again at the pictures, it's there isn't it? Professional, nice, everything. Now consider this: Karen Warner also likes listening to The Prodigy (at high volume) in the car. Favourite film? Meet the Fokkers. Now you know why she's one of the best in the business! ●

