

bok's of tricks



'People tell me I'm a contradiction. I'm a creative, visionary – I like to dream about the bigger picture. On the other hand, my business is all about structure, systems, methodologies and organisation. I personally think it's actually all about people.'



‘a ll the people we work with are going through change of one form or another. What we do is manage change, the macro reality of the visionary big picture, by working closely with the people involved. On the basic level what we do is to provide structure and systems but, in reality, it’s much more to do with change management.’

We’re talking with the entrepreneurial people person that is Karen Tranter. Johannesburg born and raised, Karen never thought she’d leave South Africa. However, the fickle finger of fate beckoned Karen to these shores when an opportunity arose to accompany her boyfriend of the time, who had been offered a two year contract in London. Overcoming setbacks with steely determination, today Karen Tranter presides over her highly successful FileWorks consultancy.▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶▶▶ Successful? It all depends on your interpretation of the word, but one glance at an enviable client list says it all. Financial Times, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Network Rail, NHS, Deutsche Bank, MOD – and currently a major project for the South Africa Revenue Service. You don't pick up (and keep) clients like these without offering something special. Not surprisingly, we're keen to know about Karen Tranter's X factor.

'I say to my prospective clients 'The first thing you need is a person who can work with you and a company that fits with your business'. Filing is a small part of a bigger project – and I'm often asked to get involved in the bigger picture, because I seem to have a talent for it. There's an American expression about this issue, 'Enterprise Thinking'.

'What we do is help our clients manage information, manage communication and manage change. These are the sort of expressions you expect to hear consultants use, but we're by nature very down to earth people. I wanted a solution driven business, one that did more than talk! We work all the time with people who have fears and concerns about the changes happening in their organisations and because of our knowledge of the overall aims of a particular project, the bigger picture, we are very good at communicating throughout the organisation where we are actively implementing strategy. It's a two way thing too – we're a conduit for views and issues to be fed back to the strategisers.

'We try to make filing fun and I know those are two words that people don't put together, but I believe when you are passionate enough it shines through, and even the duller subject becomes fun and interesting. It's a different approach and it works. The other strength we have is helping companies think and behave as a team. People have the most extraordinary personal attachment to their paper. People think in terms of 'my domain' and 'my stuff' – if you centralise the information, it is no longer just their stuff, it is now part of the team and is an important cultural driver for a company because it pulls everybody together as a team. Now who would have said that a simple thing like filing could have done that? Its not always an easy process – change is not easy – if you suggest centralising the filing system, even if it's the best solution, people feels it's personal.

'When we were awarded the PWC contract in 2006 it was an amazing achievement for us. The biggest reason for us being awarded the project was because we just get it done. We are hands on and got stuck in, completed the job with great team work, and reduced their paper by 60%, while assisting the implementation of a centralised filing strategy. We may do the physical thing of implementing a new filing system, but also provide a key link in the chain of communication. We get people to think about the whole business, about sharing and communicating.'



After Afrikaans University, having studied Physiotherapy and Human Movement, Karen spent nine years with Optiplan – South Africa’s leading filing specialist. Starting as an implementation consultant and progressing to project sales management, Karen clearly knew her stuff backwards, but wanted to let her creative and entrepreneurial spirit loose. K2, her interior design partnership, was flourishing, with a number of prestigious retail developments completed, when the opportunity came to travel to London. After a year at KI, Karen set up S03, a precursor to FileWorks. ‘It was a very challenging time but I learned a lot and came out of the experience of S03 wiser and more driven to succeed.

‘I had to stand on my own two feet, and decided to stick with what I knew in a consultative form – and FileWorks was born.

‘I started working from a small room at home in 2003. Today there’s a team of 14 involved with FileWorks. I say involved because a great strength is the group of people on the management team who are what I call ‘business mentors’. They’re successful entrepreneurs with their unique skill sets such as workplace strategy, HR consultancy and strategic project management for major organisations.

‘I work closely with all of them – and benefit hugely from their successful entrepreneurial approaches. They’re established, well known professionals that I couldn’t afford full time, but who support me and believe in me. Because I’m extremely passionate about what I do, I

think they get a lot from me too. It’s a great and empowering combination.

‘My folks were key to who I am. My dad is a true entrepreneur with an amazing ability to get right back up with a smile when life knocks him – and my mom is a stable and most generous hearted person. The combination gives me a fighting generous spirit with a grounded approach.’

It’s easy to see why Karen is successful; she’s fun, interesting – and interested too! ‘I love to travel – I recently went gorilla trekking with my brother in Uganda. It’s a beautiful country – we managed to acquire hard-to-get permits, and got right up close to the animals. It was the most amazing experience. I like to see the world, but I’m still attached to the bush – it’s good for my soul. I’m a bit of a mixture, because although I’ve still got my South African friends, I feel very European now. I’ve become more rounded, I’ve got a different perspective. I remember the first time I went to New York when I was doing some work for Deutsche Bank. I thought ‘Oh my God, here I am, a South African girl from London, working in Wall Street!’ I absolutely love seeing and working with people in all sorts of different environments, yet at the same time I’m comfortable in my own space.’

We’re not sure that Karen Tranter is the contradiction she thinks she is – but we know that with her passion and joie de vivre, the South African girl from London will carry on making waves ●