

# ADVISOR

SPRING 2016

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representing textile  
care professionals



**Sarah Cooper**  
Chief People Officer

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sarah Cooper, Chief People Officer at CLEAN Linen Services is well respected in the industry and knows how to drive people, along with others in the CLEAN Director Team, to achieve results.

Sarah talks to us about her background, her passions and how CLEAN is uniting as one team, one CLEAN after their recent acquisitions of Watford Laundry and Paragon Laundry. The acquisitions have taken them from four plants to nine and from 550 employees to 1,350 in a period of three months.

**Sarah Cooper:** My background is in engineering, not people. I was sponsored by Rolls Royce PLC on their undergraduate engineering scheme and received my first engineering degree from Birmingham University. I then moved to Avro International Aerospace, part of British Aerospace and completed a Doctor of Engineering Degree at the University of Manchester whilst obtaining a Diploma in Management from Manchester School of Management.

After building my qualifications, I moved into an Operations role at Mars UK and honed my line management and leadership skills. I was promoted to a Transformation Management role that focused on leading people through change management projects and that role led to my career in HR.

I joined CLEAN in 2009 after working with RHM PLC and Premier Foods (through acquisition) as Head of Change and Communication.

I always want to be in a role that is both challenging and motivating and where I have the opportunity to really make a difference. Who I work with is also a key motivating factor for me. The CLEAN team are all really passionate and motivated about our business.

With our recent acquisitions, integrating the businesses into one CLEAN with a focus on teamwork and continuous improvement is a great opportunity and will keep me very busy. I am also developing a new training strategy and look forward to rolling that out across the business.

As a Director Team, we are now working on a new set of values for the larger company. It is so important to always review these values to ensure they remain fresh and relevant to the business today. My job is to cascade and communicate the new vision, strategy and values to all our 1,350 people.

**Q TSA: What drives the business?**

**Sarah Cooper:** Our CEO, Jason Miller, is very passionate about CLEAN. He is very aware of the power of a team and we all work closely together. As a Director Team, it is important that we work well together and are all completely aligned. I believe that we all have an open, inclusive and

engaging leadership style, but at the same time we are all very focused on delivering our business objectives.

We are probably unique in the industry in that none of us have previous laundry experience however, we do have a plethora of experience in other businesses and the corporate world.

The training and development of our employees is critical to our business success. Moving forward, all training will be covered under the 'CLEAN Academy' and investing in our people will be critical to delivering our strategy for CLEAN. The focus will be on a number of areas, in particular functional training, health and safety, driver training and leadership training.

**Q TSA: What do you look for when hiring?**

**Sarah Cooper:** We want CLEAN to be best in class in the sector so when we hire, we want the best and most capable people we can find. We look for competent and capable individuals whose leadership skills are second to none and who can manage without being told what to do. We like to empower people in their roles but, we expect results.



Recently, we recruited Bob King as our Chief Operating Officer who has great experience in multi-site manufacturing director roles. Bob brings a fresh approach to laundry operations across our production and transport divisions focussing on manufacturing excellence, continuous improvement and health and safety which ties into the recent RoSPA gold award we received for the third consecutive year running.

**Q TSA: What opportunities are there/ motivations for the next generation to enter the industry?**

**Sarah Cooper:** There are lots of opportunities for young people to join the industry and CLEAN in particular. I am always keen to bring in people with potential into the business, particularly those that can become future plant General Managers. There are also opportunities in sales, account management, operations and head office.

When recruiting, there may be an immediate business need and a specific vacancy to fill, but I am always looking at future business needs and ensuring we have a pipeline of talent in the business is critical. As we have ambitious growth plans this is even more important.

With our current growth plans I have a number of projects in place with external bodies to support recruitment of younger workers. We are working to develop our apprenticeship programme across the nine plants too.

Personally, I am involved with a couple of initiatives to support younger people. Through the CIPD, I volunteer as a 'Steps Ahead' mentor. This involves mentoring and coaching unemployed graduates to help them find employment.

I also do voluntary work with schools as part of the 'Inspiring for the Future' initiative. Recently I have worked with 16 year olds in a high unemployment area school doing mock interviews to help them with college, university and work applications.

Even though I have a demanding and busy role, it is important as a director of the business to take the time out to help these young people and CLEAN are very supportive of me doing this.

# CLEAN

LINEN & WORKWEAR

## TIPS TO YOUR 25 YEAR OLD SELF

**Sarah Cooper:** I would recommend taking every development opportunity there is and be open to trying new things. I have always liked a challenge and being determined and taking yourself out of your comfort zone by trying new things is always a good way of learning.



# TSA OFFICE

TSA is based in central London, where our offices are readily accessible. Members are welcome to visit at any time and have full use of the meeting room facilities available.



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