

My career in brief...

Name: Kevin Smith
Job title: Group Attractions Director
Employer: Continuum Attractions



1. Please give a brief overview of your career history – where you started, how you progressed, the companies you have worked for etc.

My career began in Leisure on a Youth Training Scheme at Nottingham Rugby Club and involved me developing across the whole spectrum of working at a high standard sports club including grounds management through to club and hospitality management. Unfortunately the club couldn't afford to employ me after my training scheme had lapsed so I joined Center Parcs in Nottinghamshire initially as a lifeguard and worked my way up through the ranks to become the Pool Manager.

Recognising a passion for developing wider operations management skills I moved on to become Operations and latterly Contract Manager for Sports & Leisure Management Ltd. These roles broadened my management experience across facilities, operations, people management, financial accountability and business development. My appointment as a General Manager with Horizons Health & Leisure ensured I was an integral part of opening a brand new Health Club experience and set the tone for what was to follow.

In 2000 I approached Continuum for a Commercial Management position and within 9 months of appointment I became the Group Operations Manager. Over the last 14 years I have led the attractions team at Continuum and opened around 15 sites over that period for the company or clients. Recently in September 2014 I was invited to join the Board as Group Attractions Director.

2. Have you always wanted to work within hospitality and tourism? If not, how did you end up where you are now?

From a young age I had a keen interest in sports and it was clear that this is where I wanted my career to head. Foolishly the long hours and weekend working wasn't conducive to participating at the level I wanted to and the sports were dropped in favour of a career in hospitality.

I was privileged to have been involved from the very early days of Center Parcs UK and I hold a lot of respect to the training and development I received during my time with them. Center Parcs continue to be held as a great example of quality and service excellence within the hospitality field and has very much proved a catalyst to not only my career but many other people who have gone on to be business leaders in their own right across the sector.

3. What sort of qualifications and training have you had?

My time in sports management focussed my attention on the relevant post graduate courses that were provided by the Institute of Sports and Leisure Management where I attained the

Diploma level. I would certainly recommend a course of this level as it covered all aspects of management including law, Human Resource Management, H & S, Marketing, operations etc.

In terms of vocational training it has concentrated on such things as Leadership Development, Personnel Legislation, Disney Institute Quality Service, IOSH, Management Development, Group Trainer, Guest Care, Various Leisure certificates. I'm not a believer in doing courses for the sake of filling a CV and very much focus on what I believe will benefit our organisations growth and development.

Attendance at trade events, shows and seminars where key note topic discussions are as important to personal development and I would encourage this to be on everyone's agenda.

4. What are the top 5 activities you would typically carry out on a daily basis?

- Performance Management – Analysing our current trends and the performance of our people
- Project Management – Juggling several projects with clear timelines and budgets to be maintained
- Business Planning – Analysis what new projects are crossing our desks and judging their potential for our business
- Business Development – Actively looking for those new opportunities and ideas
- Mentoring and Leadership – My remit crosses over most aspects of our organisation and I believe I have a pivotal role in helping all of our people to succeed and help us become a better business.

5. What do you most enjoy about your job?

They say that variety is the spice of life. For me I agree 100% with this statement. Every day if not every hour I'm generally involved in something different and this keep my attention and motivation at a high level. I certainly can't see me being desk based and working on a single project.

6. What would you say is the biggest challenge you face on a daily basis?

- Communication – We are a growing business and our systems need to keep pace with that growth. In essence communication needs to be simplified as businesses grow as you are dealing with a far bigger pool of people to communicate with.
- Risk Management – As a business we are seeing growth and want to grow further in a realistic time frame. As an organisation however, we are at the start of a 'Change' and we have to embrace an element of calculated risk to continue our growth plans
- Competition – The sector has grown exponentially over the years with many more activities vying for consumers time and locations competing for visitation. London is booming to the detriment of many traditional tourist hot spots which challenges most of our businesses.
- The pursuit for excellence in our people. – Employing great people across the leisure and hospitality sector is becoming harder and harder due to the lower wage structure and the perception that the industry isn't seen as important as many others from a

political stand point. We spend a great deal of time on our recruitment and selection process to find those with the right personality and attitude to make a difference to each and every guest that we welcome in to our sites.

7. What would you say is your biggest achievement to date?

Personal

1. Raising my two kids to respect their environment and those within it
2. Playing Representative rugby for several age group teams and touring Canada with the Midlands Colts.

Business

1. Growing the business and providing financial stability
2. Opening many new businesses and treating them all with an equal level of attention, care and passion.
3. Becoming a Director

8. Who has been the greatest influence/role model in your career and why?

- My mum – who raised me as a single parent from the age of 7
- Stephen Hulme (Sports & Leisure Management) – In my eyes the model Managing Director who very much believed in full empowerment to his business managers.
- Juliana Delaney (CEO, Continuum Attractions) – who has taught me tenacity, an un-nerving eye for detail and to never accept no as an answer unless the question is ‘can you do it any cheaper’!!

9. Do you have a favourite tale or most memorable moment from your career? If so, please tell us about it!

I have had so many funny moments especially with my time at Center Parcs and managing a swimming and spa facility. Unfortunately many of these have been sworn to secrecy due to their embarrassing nature.

Calling on my recent experience there are two moments that really stand out;

1. Day 1 at the Emirates Airline Cable car where we supplied the Front of House operation. We had recruited approximately 100 staff within the space of two months, developed the policies and procedures and trained the staff ready for the official opening. Seeing our team presented in their uniforms made me proud of what we as an organisation had achieved in such a short space of time. We went on to welcome 33,000 visitors on our busiest day in 2012.
2. The opening of Coronation Street The Tour again tested mine, my colleagues and our delivery partners management capabilities to deliver on time. We had sold in excess of 100,000 tickets prior to opening so we knew we couldn't get it wrong. Listening to our excellent guides delivering the tour as planned and seeing the first guests running down the street, and yes, kissing the cobbles was just reward for a job well done. Our

colleagues at ITV were rightfully proud of how we had done justice to their brand and all those that had been involved in it during its 52 year history.

10. What piece of advice would you offer someone who wants to work within our industries?

Don't be afraid to start at the bottom, and learn about as many aspects of the business as you can. There nothing more powerful when you get in to management than identifying your career path and inspiring others to follow in your footsteps.

11. Why would you encourage someone to work in our industry?

It's a fun industry, every day you walk away with something that made you smile and/or something you have done to make someone else smile! I have travelled and seen some fascinating places and met some remarkable people which I wouldn't have done in many other walks of life. How many jobs can you do where you get to meet heads of state, political leaders and even Fizz from Corrie!!

Further information

For further information on career opportunities at Continuum Attractions please visit www.continuum-group.com/careers

For further information on career opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industries, please visit www.hospitalityguild.co.uk