

CLEAN START



REIMAGINING CAREERS
IN THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

WORKING MOTHER'S CAREER IN CLEANING

In 1985 I left my job selling computers and word processors following the birth of my eldest daughter and was ready to re-enter the adult world. I decided that whilst I enjoyed being a mother, I missed adult company and there were only so many nursery rhymes I could quote in a day before I started to lose my identity, I was no Mother Earth. Unsure what I wanted to do I visited the local job centre, where I saw a role advertised for Cleaner-in-charge at a local primary school.

Having never cleaned professionally before I doubted that I would be suitable for the role, but nevertheless the hours were perfect to fit in with family life and remove the need for costly childcare and so I applied. I turned up for the interview with the Head Teacher, as at that time contracting in this sector was very limited, and started my career in cleaning, which was to ultimately end up as my vocation.

I will never forget my 'First day on the job', I arrived eager to complete the work, but as the only person on site I had no one to show me what to do, nor did I understand any of the chemicals or equipment. The Headteacher offered me reassuring words, showed me the cleaning cupboard, gave me a thick orange bound specification and left me to it!



CASE STUDY

I parked the Orange Book (as I soon found out it was called) for reading at my leisure at home and gathered up all the items I thought I would need, I was soon to learn that this was not really the most effective way to work, but at the time it seemed like a good idea. My working hours were 4.5 hours per day, which was a split shift between afternoons and mornings. In addition to my cleaning duties, I had to ensure the boiler was operational and working each morning, unlock and lock up all the buildings and gates, grit steps and playgrounds in the winter months and weekly clean out the grease trap from the school dining hall, not a task for the feint hearted.

I soon got into the swing of things and worked out a routine for cleaning all areas on a daily basis, avidly reading the back of the cleaning chemical bottles to work out what surfaces they were to be applied to. Sadly, no Google or internet in those days so I could not research that way, it was just me and the County Supplies Catalogue with brief descriptions of the chemicals and their application.

No Health and Safety Risk Assessments, Method Statements or COSHH Assessments in those days, and no dilution control systems other than the 28ml pump. My first scariest moment that year came in the school



Easter holidays, at Christmas I had taken holiday (as being a County Council employee I also had paid annual leave along with paid concessionary days, a paid day off for Christmas shopping and an extra paid day off for the Queen's birthday still). The Orange Book stipulated that hard floors had to be stripped back and a reapplication of polish had to be applied during each main school break – Easter, Summer and Christmas. I had previously mastered the buffer, a rather old Victor, nearly taking out the radiator and pipework in the school hall one evening on a white-knuckle ride, before taming the beast.

Armed with buckets and mops, speed stripper and a black pad I had decided to tackle the floor in the school hall first, I struggled to move out all the furniture on my own, no Manual Handling in those days either, and so I set to that task of stripping the floor. We always thought the floor was a brown Marley tile with remains of the original parquet herringbone flooring surrounding all 4 sides. As I applied the first coat of speed stripper and waited for the contact time, as the instructions on the container said, I cautiously started up the buffer and started to machine off the old polish – the floor turned grey to reveal the original floor tile colour to be a grey Marley tile not a brown one. The Head Teacher and I were both astounded, she had never seen the floor grey before as years of trapped dirt, polish diluted with water and layers of polish were slowly but surely removed. It was the only floor that was stripped back that school holiday as it took all of my time to get all the old

layers off and reapply nice new shiny coats of polish, I was to spend the next 7 years lovingly looking after the shine on that floor with daily buffing and floor maintainer so much so that it was only fully stripped back 4 times in those years.

My second scariest moment came in the summer school break once again an incident with stripping back a floor, this time in the Head Teachers classroom, another Marley tile, but this one was a deep reddish-brown tile, having once again applied the speed strip and started to machine off the old floor polish the walls and myself started to look like we were working in an abattoir as I soon discovered the floor had a 'bleed' I did not discover Undercoat until later in my career, how I wish I had known about then, it could have saved me many an hour washing walls, while at the same time stripping and reapplying polish to that awful floor.

During my third summer at the school I had all but finished the Summer Clean prior to going on holiday with my family. The school was having a small library extension built and the Head Teacher has told me to not leave any furniture in the main corridor as the builders would be 'breaking through' while I was away. On my return with 3 days left before school was to restart for the Winter term, I arrived to complete putting the furniture back and do a final dust prior to the new term start..... yes, you guessed it the school hall, classrooms, staff room and resources areas were covered in thick brick dust, there was a pile of earth in the main corridor and a 6ft deep hole right in the middle of the main entrance, when 'knocking through' the builders had discovered an Artesian Well and were now in the throes of diverting this. How the school re-opened for the Winter term that year was a miracle, the parents were mobilised to help set classrooms straight, reclean desks, chairs, floors, books and other teaching aids, all while we had builders, engineers and the water board on site. But, the builders had the last laugh when they laid a Pirelli studied cream floor in the new library and reception area – my challenges just continued.

In 1990 the County Council took the decision to pre-empt the government instruction to enter into Compulsory Contract Tendering and split the County into 4 areas awarding their cleaning contracts to their approved contractors and so I transferred from the Direct Labour Organisation to OCS, for the next 3 years I continued to work at the school and also support my Area Manager by standing in as a Supervisor on some of her other contracts when she was short staffed. I was also sent on my first BICSc course, completing my COPC 1 at SC Johnson Wax in Frimley Green.

In the spring of 1993, all the school cleaning contracts were

retendered with Initial Cleaning Services being awarded the 'Lions Share' of the contracts in Berkshire, however, the other 2 successful companies then pulled out of the contract at the 11th hour, leaving all their contracts to be awarded by default to Initial. During the mobilisation of the contract, I contacted the local Initial branch office to speak to my new Area Manager only to be advised that they were recruiting for local Area Managers having unexpectedly been awarded the whole contract. I applied for the role and started my career in Cleaning Contract Management.

Initial had a huge task before them as not only was there a square meterage discrepancy on the contract (none of the temporary buildings or building extensions were included in the tender information), they had also only quoted for cleaning 46 weeks of the year and all the ex-DLO staff were on 52 week contracts. What followed was 18 months of hard work to negotiate new contracts for the employees, resolve square footage and specification issues all the while managing the day to day challenges of operations within the cleaning delivery.

Having seen considerable success in my role at Initial, I followed my line manager to MITIE becoming the Branch Manager at the Milton Keynes office where a similar challenge was to be presented to me with their contract with Bucks County Council. My biggest achievement at MITIE was my secondment to the Yateley branch where I was asked to mobilise the Hampton Court Palace contract, with all that this involved not just with the Palace but also the facilities within the park land and the volumes of visitors, particularly French school students!

My role at MITIE was varied and opened my eyes to not only the world of cleaning within local government but also industrial and corporate office cleaning and from there I moved on to Pall Mall Support Services, working on their oldest contract with Midland Bank (which ultimately became HSBC) and other blue-chip clients, such as The Big Breakfast, Price Waterhouse, Siemens and Immarsat.

During my time at Pall Mall I was also responsible for the cleaning at the BOC-DS at Hemel Hempstead and it was with this contract that I achieved recognition winning the Best in Sector and Best Overall Winner at the Kimberley Clark Golden Service Awards as well as the PFM Award for Best Single Sector Service in 1997.

2001 saw me entering the world of FM when I took up a position with Turner FM as Head of Business for their Cleaning Division. During my time with them I established their BICSc ATO, worked with them to successfully extend their hard services contract with the MOD in Bosnia and Kosovo and was the senior manager on their single service cleaning contracts with MTV, Carlton TV, Shell and EDS. After 8

years where I worked on central government contracts (DEFRA), coal fired power stations, pharmaceutical warehousing and distribution, tin can production sites, Scottish law courts and news paper production it was time to move on.

In 2009 I took a position as Account Manager with Europa Support Services based in Welwyn Garden City. My role was to look after a small number of sites in and around Birmingham with the bigger picture being the support that I could offer of my knowledge both in sales and operations of cleaning as Head of Cleaning within the Europa Centre of Excellence. This led to me working on contracts from Fraser Borough in Scotland down to Truro in Cornwall and across the Irish Sea to Dublin and once again establishing the BICSc ATO hubs for the Company.

In 2013 I took an 8-month sabbatical to travel around Europe with my husband and on my return took up an interim contract with Clean Event to establish their BICSc training programme and ATO for their events cleaning business at iconic event venues – Wembley Stadium, Tottenham, Fulham, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Birmingham City football stadiums, Cheltenham and Aintree race-courses and Silverstone racetrack, along with Glasgow Commonwealth Games, Stade Roland Garros and Parc de Princes home to PSG in France.

Having completed a year with Clean Event, I entered into the world of consultancy, where I have continued to work for various FM clients looking at re-engineering their contracts, reviewing what is good and bad and recommending change and also working with the team at BIRKIN Cleaning Services as their Technical Director developing their training systems, establishing yet another BICSc ATO hub – now known as ATM (Accredited Training Member) and all the while promoting the value that BICSc training and membership will bring to ensuring the continued professionalism of the industry.

In 2011 I took my place on BICSc Council, where I am now Deputy Chair and in April 2015 entered the Worshipful Company of Environmental Cleaners Livery subsequently taking my place as a Freeman of the City of London in early 2016. My career in cleaning has been full of challenges, exploits and the pre-requisite stresses that go with any operational role in today's world. I have made many friends for life during the last 36 years and hope that I will go on to meet many more, I am passionate about an industry that is varied and inspiring along with being puzzling and perplexing at times, but rarely routine. I know that I will never know everything there is to know about the industry and so I treat everyday as a School Day. What I would say with absolute knowledge though, is that there is - A CAREER IN CLEANING.