

Rising up the Ranks : From Sorting Post to Director's Post

With two parents working in banking, it was almost written in the stars that Kester Mein would end up dealing with numbers. Despite this, his career with MDA Consulting was something of a happy accident.

Kester was born in Woolwich, and has spent most of his life around Sidcup and Bexley. In 1994, he began a Business Studies course at Roehampton University. However, just one month in, he decided it wasn't right for him. So he left.

At the age of 20, Kester had dropped out of his studies and was at a loss for what to do. In his own words, he became a "bit of a drifter", until he received a phone call out of the blue.

"One of my friends worked for MDA in the post room, a chap called James. They were looking for someone to help out. James put my name across to Roy Smith, who ran the post room at the time, and Roy phoned me up. I thought 'well, this is perfect, just to keep me going until I know what I want to do'," he says.

Whilst computers, mobile telephones and the World Wide Web certainly existed in 1994, the iPhone wasn't even a twinkle in Steve Jobs' eye, and technology in the workplace was still in its infancy. This meant the post room was crucial to ensure the business worked.

"At that time, everything was photocopied and there weren't emails - it makes me feel so old! There were two of us, all day, literally photocopying, and then we would handle the faxes. Pretty mundane stuff." he says.

But his time spent in the post wasn't boring by any means, as it encouraged good relationships with the MDA team, not least James. Kester has fond memories of how they would often get up to mischief when everyone had left for the day.

"James and I used to carry on when everyone had gone home. There used to be a long corridor - we called it the horseshoe because of its shape - and we would play cricket when everyone had gone home. Full pelt cricket, smashing it all around!" remembers Kester.

"One evening we got caught by a security guard who was passing by wondering what the noise was. I remember setting the dustbin up as the wicket and a poster tube as the bat, and a ball made from sellotape. Those were the early days."

A New Challenge

Eight months later, he began to really take an interest in the company, and applied to work in Steve Banks' document control room. He then took the opportunity to ask if there was any chance of studying Quantity Surveying at college.

"Steve helped to get me on track and I started on a HNC day release course. I did that for two years whilst I was working with Steve. I thoroughly enjoyed that. Then I started my degree at the University of Greenwich in 1997. I left Steve's room and joined a small team led by a director called Chris Wall," says Kester.

With Chris being in charge of the All England Lawn Tennis Club project, Kester's first ever QS job with MDA was on a £50m job at Wimbledon, followed by working on the BT Framework, for which he is now the account holder.



2001



2016

Later, Kester would spend a short spell out in Oman to check if we could open MDA's office, followed by a secondment at RBS in 2011. Upon his return, he was promoted to Associate Director and furthered his Bank Monitoring experience, working across small to medium sized projects for the UK's major banks.

Whilst the journey to Director certainly wasn't easy for Kester – as he started his APC, his wife gave birth to the first of his three daughters – he's so grateful for the support he received from the team.

"I've had some mentors over time: Roy Smith to start with, he's an MDA legend; Steve Banks, a major legend, and he's the one who got me into thinking about a career in construction; Chris Wall helped me through my APC; Mike Jewell, the next director who took me under his wing, then obviously Steve Jones and Sean Gatehouse are the last directors that I worked under, now working with," he says.

"All those people I hold in high esteem."

Kester is now seeing this from the other side of the fence, mentoring three of our London graduates, Nana, Ursula and Enzo, throughout their APC's.

"They force me to sit down every quarter to run through their workload and make sure it fits the experience they need. My advice for anyone doing their APC is push your supervisor hard, which is what our guys are doing. I can guarantee my three are going to pass – I've told them, they've got to!" he says.

Constructing a Career

As the industry faces a massive skills shortage, due to construction not being viewed as a 'fashionable' career, Kester has some advice for the youth of today who may not be interested in a similar path to his: "I'm finishing a project now in Highgate, a lovely house, which is probably going to be on TV because it's that unique, and I can say I was a part of that.

"In construction, you can build a great career, a great knowledge base and a good social life. Because it's not in fashion, you've got a great opportunity to learn quickly and move up the ladder."

With the recent promotion under his belt, it's safe to say Kester is living proof that dedication and hard-work pay off. His career has certainly progressed immensely since the after-hours cricket playing days in the office. And, ironically, he still plays cricket - as MDA Consulting's wicket keeper and batsman!

He adds: "MDA isn't just a place to work; it's almost like a little family.

"I think that's what makes the firm unique and the challenge now is to make the youngsters try and take on that belief and be the next one of me, and hopefully become a director."



MDA Consulting -v- the Oriental Club - May 2017

Kester second from left