

Breaking new ground for guest services

1 year ago



[On Verve](#) founding director Bianca Angelico explains how the company is enjoying rapid growth through unflinching honesty and complete support for clients and colleagues alike

One of the more wide-ranging and positive views expressed by senior industry professionals is that there is no such thing as a bad experience, either within personal or work environments, as each of these will provide those involved with the opportunity to learn, develop and gain more skills that will assist them in a number of ways in the future.

This is just one of the maxims that relate to On Verve director Bianca Angelico, who attributes the beginnings of her passion for the delivery of excellent guest services to her father. "I started working as a waitress at my dad's restaurant in South Africa at the age of eight. I just wanted to spend more time with him during my school holidays but also found that I really loved meeting people and helping them to have a great time," she says.

Her interest continued throughout her education and, after gaining degrees in marketing at university and social science, organisational psychology and industrial sociology, saw her deciding to travel around Europe, bringing her to the UK. "I had no experience of working in the UK and found it difficult to find any work, initially. But I then found an opportunity in the events market and became both a personal assistant and an events organiser for WorkTech Events in May 2012," she continues.

The dual aspects of her role are regarded as providing significant supportive background knowledge and skills that have proved essential in the founding and development of the On Verve, she states. Organising business events around the world involved travelling to Australia, Singapore, New York, San Francisco, Stockholm, Helsinki and other locations.

"I was given the chance due to my personality, tenacity and determination – but I also made the effort to

do lots of research for applying for the role – and I’ve taken those experiences and applied them to On Verve and tried to pay my way forward,” she states.

Another significant stage in her career followed her first attendance at a Tomorrow Meets Today (TMT) event (see *FM Director* November for more information) as one of the young people benefiting from meeting senior professionals. “I met James Taylor there, who was CEO for Sodexo UK & Ireland Healthcare at the time. We then looked at reverse mentoring, because he was an American who had just moved to the UK and wanted to adapt to the new culture,” she continues.

This led to her joining Sodexo as the marketing manager for its Healthcare division and as executive personal assistant to Mr Taylor. Ms Angelico credits her work with him and other CEOs with teaching her a great deal about problem solving, managing people and clients, as well as gaining more experience in her marketing role, all of which have proved highly useful – if not essential – in the launch and further development of On Verve.

Yet more valuable experience came through moving to the Sodexo Corporate Services division as a Guest Services transformation manager and helping to radically change its guest services operation.

She then became an account manager and guest services lead, looking after the company’s corporate clients and gaining further supportive background information on all aspects of business operations.

In the midst of dealing with all the new developments created by the emergence of the Covid pandemic in 2020, Ms Angelico heard from Churchill Group chief commercial officer Anthony Law to discuss the opportunity to join Churchill and launch the On Verve business.

“I’d met Anthony through Emerging Workplace Leaders, where I shared with him that I wanted to run my own guest services division, which was and continues to be my passion,” she states.

After joining the Churchill Group in early 2021, Ms Angelico states that the On Verve division was launched and required her to create “something from nothing”.

The fact that the company exceeded a turnover of £2.5m in its second year shows the success of the efforts of her and her colleagues, with more growth due to be reported at the end of its third year.

“We started On Verve on a Post-It note,” she recalls with a smile, as she explains the benefits gained from creating visual representations of planned operations and their intended outcomes. One of the main aims of the new business was to place clients and colleagues on an equal footing, she explains.

“Covid resulted in a major paradigm shift that saw the emphasis change from just support to clients to also supporting colleagues. A lot of people lost their jobs during Covid and a lot of others had to fight for their rights, including working from home.

“We then created the DayMaker concept to combine the comfort of home working with the benefits of working in an office and taking people on that journey.

“Some of the people we now see attending the office have never worked in a corporate workspace before, so we started recognising the needs of people and began drafting and embedding the DayMaker concept

so that everyone has a positive experience in the workplace from day one,” she says.

Further proof of the value of the DayMaker idea is provided by the fact that the company registered this with the government as a protected trademark. High levels of attention were additionally placed on creating the On Verve brand image and use of pink and green as its corporate colours to ensure this represented the aims and ambitions of the new division.

“When we launched it was obvious that we were shaking things up and breaking down barriers, so much so that people thought we were crazy,” she states.

“But then you see people doing now what I did three years ago, so the lesson is that when you have crazy ideas that you truly believe in, just do them.

“This means you’re disrupting something and I prefer to rewrite the rules rather than just follow them. When we launched on International Receptionist Day we sent boxes to everyone to announce it, including a hand-written note from me.

“Guest services is all about personalisation, so I wanted that to be the case from day one rather than just sending generic stuff,” she says. “We were very pleased with our first year of trading, which achieved £.5m turnover, but we then had £2m of growth in our second year, which was double what we were expecting.”

The business dealt with its growth through the efforts of all staff members, says Ms Angelico, assisting with both existing and new clients, as well as supporting the recruitment of new colleagues. “It was really great to have support from the wider Churchill Group, but having a good team around you is very important when you’re dealing with that level of growth.”

She further describes the building of meaningful relationships as “the Holy Grail of being successful in FM”. While knowledge and expertise are essential, she states that without interacting with clients and all stakeholders “in a positive way it is unlikely that they will want to continue working with you or your company”.

Finding the best solution

As the company approaches its third anniversary Ms Angelico states that she is very proud of the fact that it continues to have a 100% retention rate with its clients. “If any customer has a problem they know they can call me and I’ll jump straight on it, with the aim of finding the best solution for the client and my colleagues and get that win-win situation.”

Solutions are frequently the result of collaboration between colleagues, discussing what has been tried previously and sharing ideas for options to suggest in the future. On Verve colleagues are encouraged to express their character and take responsibility for their actions within the accepted guidelines: “We give everyone guidelines, rather than a script, to allow them to express themselves and work in the best way for them,” she says.

“People buy from people and they can feel if someone is being genuine, which goes back to my point of the importance of meaningful relationships,” she explains. “But we never talk about five-star service or compare ourselves to a hotel, because although it’s a brilliant concept for the hotel industry there are no

metrics to support it in the workplace.

“That’s why we talk about the energy we bring, which is not about just being loud and extrovert, but reading the room and knowing your environment and what’s required. You can bring calmness or even meditation as a type of energy.”

As part of the extensive efforts of the company to attain high standards of diversity and inclusion is its acceptance of neurodiversity, explained by Ms Angelico in terms of the support given to her dyslexic colleague: “She previously worked on reception and never thought she could have a more senior career, but has now come off the desk to become the team leader of operations support and also working as my assistant, while also looking at more involvement in projects as a manager of those,” she continues.

In addition to supporting the Dyslexia Thinking movement, now accepted by global operations including the LinkedIn business social media platform, Ms Angelico states: “I genuinely see my dyslexia as one of my superpowers. It allows me to look at things in completely different ways to anyone else around me.

“It also means I can consider all the things we need to include and bring in HR, finance and operations as needed, rather than treating them as standalone areas, and that helps to build the puzzle that creates the perfect solution to any issue,” she says.

The company has also introduced ‘bite-sized’ training modules of around five minutes in length that are then shared and discussed throughout the year, rather than a day’s classroom training that can result in various elements being forgotten or completely ignored. Online instruction of just a few minutes is designed to be convenient, avoid the issues associated with physical attendance and allow everyone to give their full attention.

Having previously mentioned both the EWL and TMT, Ms Angelico states the value these have provided and her determination to continue her involvement in future. She is a co-founder of the EWL, formerly known as the Young Leaders Forum (YMF), and continues to speak to all those involved.

“I loved meeting other people the same age and discussing the issues they were experiencing in their careers. It became apparent that communication was a major requirement for the YMF, so I ran their social media and communications and continued to be involved when it became the EWL and recognising the role of leaders around the property, workplace and FM sectors.

“We then ran the Coffee Connect online networking events through Covid, which were hugely successful, to allow young people to connect with senior people under Chatham House rules. I’m also still the EWL co-chair, as we believe that having male and female provides diversity and allows different views to be brought to the table.”

She further states her desire to continue working with the Tomorrow Meets Today events, having first engaged with these at the start of her career and progressing to the point where she is now included as a mentor to support young people in their career development.

“But I really hope that people see my career as an inspiration and that helps them to feel that they have a voice. It was really cool to be there this year, especially as it was held at one of my clients,” Ms Angelico concludes.

In just 12 years she has risen from a junior employee to a founding director of a successful guest service provider business, further emphasising the many opportunities throughout the FM sector for those with talent and ambition.

Her many achievements will no doubt prove to be the foundation for many more in the future.