

Conducting the Orchestra: A Year of Growth and Innovation at Sodexo

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Speaking exclusively to FM Director, Lynsey O'Keefe, CEO for [Sodexo](#)'s corporate services business in the UK & Ireland, reflects on her first year in post and shares her vision for the future of facilities management.

Twelve months into her role, Lynsey has orchestrated a year of remarkable achievements. From celebrating milestone anniversaries to winning prestigious awards, her first year has been marked by both strategic growth and operational excellence.

"It's been birthday parties, awards ceremonies, sporting events, restaurant launches, retaining clients and winning new clients," Lynsey said. But beyond the celebrations, she has focused on the fundamentals: engaging her team, understanding operations, and building solid foundations for future growth.

A Year of Milestones and Recognition

Among the standout moments of Lynsey's first year was celebrating the Good Eating Company's 25th birthday. The restaurant-quality workplace dining concept, which started in the UK, has now expanded to Dublin and across the US, with plans for regional growth across the rest of the UK.

Another significant milestone was the opening of the Orangery on Tottenham Court Road, a central London public-facing restaurant featuring the largest hydroponic farm in London. "It's about taking that farm to table experience to the consumer," Lynsey explained. "It's great because it gives us an opportunity to celebrate great British food and engage with customers in a different way than you normally do."

The year also saw major contract wins, including BNP Paribas, where Sodexo successfully consolidated

multiple suppliers into a single integrated FM solution. "That was a big mobilisation with a great client," Lynsey noted.

Recognition from industry peers proved particularly meaningful. Winning Sustainable Business of the Year at the prestigious Cateys Awards in July stood out as especially significant. "To be recognised amongst your peers as the best of the best, was incredibly special," she said.

The year concluded on a high note with Sodexo Ireland winning the Irish Chamber of Commerce Company of the Year for 2025 – an accolade that recognises excellence across all sectors, not just facilities management. "That is all different types of companies, and I'm very proud of what the Irish team has done," Lynsey emphasised.

Conducting the Ultimate Orchestra

Lynsey described her role with a compelling metaphor: "My job is being the conductor of the most amazing orchestra. I have to make sure I've got the best musicians and the best instruments, ensure we've got the best technology and everything that works together, and then delight the audience – our clients – at the lowest possible ticket price, and they keep coming back to see the show."

This philosophy reflected her broader approach to facilities management – creating seamless experiences that allow clients and their colleagues to focus on what they do best. "If we can make it completely seamless and allow their colleagues to do exactly what they need to do, and we pre-empt their needs, I think that's really special," she explained.

What particularly energised Lynsey was the diversity of Sodexo's operations, from highly visible food services to the more behind-the-scenes technical services. Managing 8,000 colleagues across the UK and Ireland, she valued the honest conversations that help improve both services and working conditions.

Future Challenges and Technological Evolution

Looking ahead, Lynsey has ambitious growth plans for both food services and integrated FM across the UK and Ireland. Central to this vision is Sodexo's hospitality DNA and commitment to co-creating exceptional workspaces tailored to each client's specific needs.

"As a provider, we deeply understand that it's our responsibility to co-create exceptional workspaces for our clients," she explained. This approach combines hospitality excellence with technological advances to deliver seamless end-to-end experiences.

However, Lynsey acknowledges significant industry challenges ahead. Rising costs, talent shortages, and skills gaps create tension against a backdrop of increasing consumer expectations and budget pressures. "We've got this tension of costs going up when budgets need to come down, and it's harder to get the talent," she observed.

The evolution of hybrid working remains a key focus. Rather than forcing people back to the workplace, Lynsey believes in creating environments that encourage return. "You need to create a workplace that encourages people to come back and recognise that's the best place to perform and collaborate," she said.

Technology, particularly AI, plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. " 'A benefit of AI is being able to process the data' quickly and how you get that ultimate switch of 80% of your time doing and 20% of your time thinking the other way round," Lynsey explained. The goal is leveraging technology to create more value while working smarter.

Sustainability remains at the forefront of Sodexo's strategy. As both a food provider and FM company, Lynsey recognises the significant responsibility this brings. "When you look at the world's climate change levers, 10 out of 20 are connected to food in one way or another – food ecosystems, food waste, food production," she said.

Leadership and Balance

Reflecting on being a woman in FM, Lynsey acknowledges she hasn't personally experienced significant barriers, crediting this to working with "great organisations and great leaders who recognise talent." However, she is conscious that her experience may not be universal.

"Just because I don't feel I have suffered, it doesn't mean it isn't a challenge that women face on a daily basis," she said. She identifies the challenge of balancing work with being a parent as particularly significant, advocating for outcome-focused rather than input-based working practices.

"I'm a firm believer in being an output and outcome organisation," Lynsey explained. "If someone needs to go to their child's nativity play, that is absolutely where they need to be. It's important because you can never get those moments back."

As Sodexo continues its growth trajectory, Lynsey remains focused on the fundamental principle that has guided her first year: "Growth is a mindset, and growth isn't just about new clients – it's about retaining our existing clients and retaining our people."

With her orchestra metaphor in mind, Lynsey is conducting a business that's hitting all the right notes – balancing operational excellence with innovation, client satisfaction with colleague wellbeing, and growth ambitions with sustainable practices.