

# Career spotlight: Callum Irvine

In this interview, Callum Irvine shares his career path and advice on successfully managing risk and making an impact at work to inspire those up and coming in their careers.



## How did you get into health, safety, risk management as a career?

Totally naive to the world of risk and safety, I was the on duty manager at a leisure centre/ gym the day a local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) called.

Feeling puzzled post-visit by curious questions the EHO asked (what was a risk assessment, why were they asking about a policy?) - puzzlement grew into intrigue, and ultimately my first steps towards a new career that I didn't realise existed!

## What Qualifications do you have, which have proved most valuable and what advice would you give those starting out or considering a career in risk management?

### BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

Callum has spent more than 15 years working in risk; primarily safety. Whilst risk wasn't the original 'career plan' (having started working life as a guitar teacher, before qualifying as a personal training and sports therapist), Callum fell into the topic early in his career - taking on his first 'Head of' role aged 23.

Through a number of subsequent career moves Callum's most recent past role saw him lead Deloitte's health, safety and environmental consultancy practice - something that Callum considers a huge privilege; to lead on HSE consultancy for the world's biggest advisory firm.

#### Name:

Callum Irvine

#### Position:

Global Vice President, Safety & Security, IHG Hotels and Resorts plc / IIRSM Co-President

#### Industry/ Sector:

Hospitality / Leisure

NEBOSH certificates and the diploma are the foundation of my training. Additionally I've completed an IEMA certificate in environmental management, lead and advanced auditor training qualifications as well as more general leadership qualifications.

My advice with regards to qualifications is to focus on your outcome; what is it that you want to achieve and, being honest, to what extent can that achievement be attained by gaining a qualification? For me at least, qualifications have provided a useful 'ticket to play', but day to day are less material to your chances of success - having a qualification might help you pass screening for a role, but won't help you excel in an interview, or make a meaningful difference when engaging with stakeholders in your business day to day.

I certainly don't want to minimise the value of spending time in the textbooks, but just make sure you're clear on what your outcome is going to be once you've picked up that shiny new certificate!

## What are the benefits of joining professional organisations such as the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM)?

There's a comfort blanket from being part of a professional membership organisation. You've higher confidence that you'll stay current (through regular updates and magazine content), and there's a universe of willing support out there if you want to ask a question to your peer group; whether through branches and groups or other mechanisms.

Perhaps you won't need those mechanisms, but it's great to know that they exist and you can access them at will.

### **What advice would you give to build a strong professional network and how important is this for someone starting out on their health, safety and risk management career?**

Be (sincerely) INTERESTED, rather than putting yourself on the rack by trying to be INTERESTING. What does that mean ... ?

Being interested means asking someone about what's going on in their world, what their challenges are, and what's top of mind for them. Being interested is a great way of learning from others, and it also helps quickly build bridges with the other person as they'll appreciate that you're showing interest to them. But do it properly; ask only if you want the answer, and listen to HEAR, not just for the next pause before you can talk again.

Being INTERESTING is much harder; you're putting on a display and trying to impress someone - maybe that'll work from time to time, but in all cases, once you've finished being INTERESTING, you're giving the power to your audience to decide whether they were impressed or not ... after which they might walk away.

Being interested also provides a solid platform for enduring relationships with your network, which is where they really come to life. Your newly made connection might feel like they work in a difference universe to you

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today, but you never know who that might become relevant to tomorrow.

### **What does a typical week look like for you?**

Flexible! As with much of the rest of the world, I'm adjusting to hybrid working - but that doesn't mean the work itself is any different.

I'm relatively new to IHG, and at the time of writing have been with the organisation for around three months.

There's a lot to weigh up when helping the organisation think about tackling risk across 6,000 hotels. We're growing (new hotels) all of the time, and our business knows well that our best time to influence risk management is pre-opening; is it smart (based on external factors) to open a hotel in country X? How do we want to influence the design of hotel Y? These are just a couple of example questions that routinely float across the desks of my risk colleagues and their stakeholders.

A big part of my role is calibrating on how much influence and oversight is appropriate for our corporate business; we've a network of hugely capable general managers and hotel teams - so we need to be clear on where and how we can best add value to their efforts. They don't need us to 'do' risk management for them, but we want to influence a degree of global consistency to give us comfort that we're operating within our risk appetite, and so that we can relay solid assurance to our business customers too.

My team have very strong bonds with a broad set of stakeholder groups; design and engineering, hotel development (who identify and sign new hotels), legal, HR, strategic risk, threat intelligence to name a few. Making sure accomplishing something meaningful in combination with those stakeholder groups is key - and it's a constantly moving beast.

### **What is your approach to leadership and what advice you would give to those starting out on their career to develop their leadership skills?**

Don't be afraid to let others grow; I'm hopeful this is a dying practice, but perhaps in the past it's not been uncommon for hierarchy to stifle individual growth - think about how as a leader you can remove barriers to growth, even if that means having the confidence to let someone spread their wings outside of your team - you never know what opportunities that could unlock for both them and you eventually.

Maintain a solid understanding of the different working styles other people might have; and continually practice your ability to flex around those different approaches. Some people might be very action orientated, others want to spend time 'blue sky thinking', some like order, some like chaos. As a leader, it's important to constantly develop your appreciation of how others work, and to give safe space for everyone to bring their best - acknowledging that 'best' means different things for different people.

### **What is the biggest career challenge you have faced, how did you approach the challenge, what was the outcome and would you approach it differently with hindsight?**

Finding the confidence to know when to make a move. Not isolated to a single incident, but something (particularly earlier in my career) I think was a recurring theme.

There's certainly some wisdom in building up a CV that shows future employers that you are a dependable type, likely to 'stick it out' for the course etc. by notching up 5 years+ experience at each business you work for.

However, it's important to weigh that up against 'lost time' - I needed to be honest with myself on a few occasions when it was

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definitely time to go (and take on a new role elsewhere). In trying to make that choice, it's easy to talk yourself out of it, "I need to stay here so it looks more stable on my CV" - and sure, there are a great many employers that might hold that view when looking at your work history. But not all employers will.

If you've stopped growing in your current role and know that you can grow more, it might be time to be honest with yourself, and be willing to face rejection from a handful of prospective businesses in the knowledge that someone out there will recognise that you're a fast grower who needs more leg room!

### **How do you manage client/stakeholder expectations whilst encouraging commitment to continuous improvement in risk management?**

Keep reiterating that 'its a journey'. Nobody has reached the finish line, and progress often means patience.

Perhaps it's an easier point to land in the UK/Europe where our environment is 'self-regulatory' and duty led, rather than rule-led.

### **What is your proudest achievement so far?**

No single thing, but I am immensely proud of the work my team and I were able to help clients on whilst I worked in consultancy. It was a privilege to be asked to tackle some of the most pressing risk challenges for some of the world's largest organisations.

The reason that creates pride for me personally is that responding to those challenges demanded that both me and my team built knowledge, networks and capability across a very broad and diverse set of industries. It takes me full circle to my original decision to get into safety/risk, which was to make risk management 'my industry', and so working in a truly pan-industry consulting environment gave me some sense of having arrived at that place

of being industry agnostic, and being well regarded as a risk professional (rather than a risk professional in industry X).

#### What/ who inspires you and why?

I take a lot of inspiration from the 'revenue earners'. The people in your business who ensure money goes in the till.

Having spent time as a revenue earner in the consulting environment, it definitely puts a different perspective on i) why your role exists, ii) who is depending on you to perform, and in turn iii) how well you can prioritise & ensure your every move is impactful.

I sometimes wonder whether in the risk/safety world we also have the same sense of urgency and ability to 'make stuff happen'; it's something I'm keen to keep with me wherever I go.

#### What are your most important tips for someone starting out on their health, safety, risk management career?

Think big and be patient - they are complementary.

I've worked in safety and risk from site level roles up to global, and looking back on myself now I can understand that my huge

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enthusiasm to 'make stuff happen' for my site/region etc. overtook my ability to pause and take people (globally) with me.

It's the way many of us work - we're keen to make an impact, and we allow our thirst to make an impact to overtake the greater good, often resulting in local risk/safety efforts splintering away from regional/global efforts.

Being patient, and taking other parts of your business (in particular, risk and safety teams) with you will nearly always lead to even more impact in the end - and no doubt give you greater exposure as a professional as you get to lead on the improvement/initiative outside of your own site/geography.

#### What are your career aspirations now?

My immediate aspiration is to make a great impression with my new colleagues at IHG, and help frame how safety & security as a function can best make an impact for the business in the years ahead.

More broadly - I don't honestly have a set aspiration or goal in mind. I'm convinced I'm still growing, and enjoying continuing to grow, and I'm relaxed enough to see where that takes me over time.

## About IIRSM's Emerging Risk Leaders Network

The IIRSM Emerging Risk Leader Network (ERLN) is a working group of ambitious professionals who are proactively looking to get ahead in their careers or support others to do so. The purpose of the Network is to:

- Support its members in developing their influence and profile within their place of work and the wider risk community.

- Empower members to build career success by learning from and supporting others from different industries, risk disciplines and geographical locations to cross-pollinate ideas, knowledge, best practice and lessons learned.
- Facilitate opportunities to showcase member capabilities through delivering informative and novel

ideas and solutions through different channels.

- Promote the importance of developing risk and leadership skills early on in careers.

#### To find out more and for sponsorship opportunities, visit:

[www.iirsm.org/iirsm-emerging-risk-leaders-network](http://www.iirsm.org/iirsm-emerging-risk-leaders-network).