

Career spotlight: Natalie Wain

In this interview, Natalie Wain shares her 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?

It was an opportunity that presented itself to me; if it hadn't been for my first full-time employer asking me to take on additional responsibilities and undertake formal qualifications to facilitate this, my career path might have been very different. Whilst their offer was for me to work predominantly on Environmental Management, there was so much cross over with Health and Safety Management, that I just picked it up as I went along, and then started booking some health and safety training courses. I have been quite fortunate that my employers have supported and facilitated my eagerness to learn and progress my skills and knowledge.

Name:

Natalie Wain

Position:

Compliance
Manager

Organisation::

Donald Ward
Limited

Industry/ Sector:

Waste
Management and
Recycling

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?

I started off completing IOSH Working Safely, before moving through to the NEBOSH General Certificate, and I am currently working towards my Level 6 Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety. I would say that the most valuable currently is my General Certificate, it's rare you'll find an employer asking for anything less.

However, qualifications can only get you so far, and experience is just as important. I'd recommend that you try and gain as much experience as you can, whether its part of your main role or not, e.g. additional responsibilities or volunteer work, where possible.

BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

I entered the waste industry, fresh out of University in 2012, as an administrator for a Clinical Waste company offering washroom services. Within 9 months I'd been asked to move part-time into the EHS Team as Environmental Coordinator, and complete a Master's Degree in Environmental Management to support this role.

I completed my studies part-time alongside my full-time job, and graduated in 2016; by this time I was working full-time in the EHS Team, maintaining our ISO 14001 Management System, assisting colleagues with our OHSAS 18001 Management System, and providing general EHS related advice to both colleagues and clients.

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

There are so many benefits, but I'd say the main ones for me are:

- Networking; you never know when you might meet someone who could be a huge help, either in your work, or for your career in general.

- Availability of advice; either as a direct question to the organisation, or to another member. There is always someone that can answer your question, or point you in the right direction.
- Learning and development opportunities; these could be reduced costs for training courses based on your membership, or becoming aware of training courses you wouldn't have seen/heard about otherwise.

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?

Network, network, and network. There are so many platforms available for networking these days, whether it be online or in person. You never know when you might need some advice and guidance, so fill your network with people from various industries and with different levels of experience. None of us know everything, so there will always be a time when you need to ask for help, and having a broad network will really help with this.

And utilise those networks, ask questions,



Maintain a solid understanding of the different working styles other people might have; and continually practice your ability to flex around those different approaches.



share information. The more you put yourself out there, the more people will notice you. In safety and risk management, we should all be working together to make workplaces safer, so go to conferences, join groups, join professional memberships and make use of them as best you can.

At some point, it will be you people are coming to for advice.

What does a typical week look like for you?

Compliance is fast paced so I'm quite often darting between meetings, site visits, management system documents, and audits, but pair that with the waste industry and it can be like a whirlwind; no two days are the same, but I love that.

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.

BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

In December 2018, I moved to the position of Environmental Advisor for a global scrap metal company; traveling across England and Wales, auditing sites, and liaising with colleagues, regulators, etc.

In November 2019, I was offered the position of Compliance Officer for one of the largest independent metal recyclers in the UK. Since then my position has changed to Compliance Manager, taking responsibility for our ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001 Management Systems, amongst various other certifications. As part of the Health and Safety Team, I have had an active role in day to day health and safety issues, including risk management, and this has provided an excellent opportunity for me to develop my skills in this area.

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

I haven't been in a management position very long, but I always like to think about my experience in a non-managerial position, and how I prefer to be treated; I'd never ask someone to do something I wouldn't do myself, and I like to make sure that people understand why I'm asking them to do something.

Everyone is different, so its one of those things you learn as you go, but I'd say just work with and listen to your team(s). You can't lead without their support, so work on gaining and maintaining that. The rest will come with time.

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?

The biggest career challenge for me was my manager leaving the business quite suddenly, and having to step up into a more senior role briefly, dealing with issues I'd had very little experience of. Although I knew it was only a short-term change, there was a lot of extra responsibility.

There were two techniques I used to help me through it; going back to my training, which helped me think about what I needed to do, who I needed to consult, etc., and planning actions out, which helped me keep track of what I had done, what was left to do, and what changes I wanted to make. In addition to this, I had so much support from colleagues and our Board Members, I couldn't have done it without them.

As it turns out, I actually faired quite well, and was praised for stepping up to the plate, and showing them what I was capable of. It

“

I'd never ask someone to do something I wouldn't do myself, and I like to make sure that people understand why I'm asking them to do something.

”

was a real feel of achievement knowing I'd received recognition for something I couldn't have planned for, and really made me feel confident in my abilities.

I think, looking back, I would still approach it in the same way.

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

I just try to be honest and open with everyone, and be clear that improving compliance benefits all areas of the business in the long-term. In this day and age, most clients/stakeholders are looking for positive statistics, and the more we can demonstrate this by continual improvement, the better our working relationships will be.

What is your proudest achievement so far?

Stepping into a more senior role for a short period of time, with very little notice, and receiving such positive feedback from our Board of Directors for the effort and outcome of my time in that role. It really emphasised what I could do if I had to, giving me so much more confidence in myself on a day to day basis.

What/ who inspires you and why?

I've worked with a variety of risk and safety managers and, for the most part, they've all inspired me in their own way.

But mostly, I'm inspired by those who have seen/experienced the horrific outcomes that can happen first hand, taken those experiences as learning points, and strive to make the workplace a safer place because of it. I once met an EHS Executive who told me about an experience early in his working life that nearly cost him his life, so he made the change from Operations to EHS in a bid to improve conditions and culture by telling his story and what he'd learned from it, and I

found that so many more people were able to relate to and engage with him.

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

This list could be endless, but I'd say my top 3 would be:

- Ask lots of questions, and don't be shy about it; we all have to learn at some point, and if we don't ask, we don't get. I always tell people that no question is a stupid question, and I'm a firm believer that the likelihood is that someone else has the same question and is too afraid to ask. Don't be that person!
- Read up on as much as you can; but make sure you add practical knowledge. I'm an avid reader, so I'll pick up books, journals, bulletins, and strive to learn something new every week; you never know when it might come in handy. But like I said earlier, experience is just as important, so take part in practical activities, learn new things, even if you don't 'need' it now, you might do in future.
- Don't be disheartened; it's quite common for health and safety professionals to not be the most popular people in the world. Just remember, it's not you they don't

“

You just need to show everyone that you're willing to work with them and be there to support them. It's a really big part of improving safety culture, and is key to improvement.

”

like, you just need to show everyone that you're willing to work with them and be there to support them. It's a really big part of improving safety culture, and is key to improvement.

What are your career aspirations now?

Some day I think I'd like to move into a SHEQ Manager position, maybe in 5-10 years when I've got a bit more knowledge and experience. But, for now, I love my job and I work for a great company with great colleagues, so it would depend entirely on the options available to me at the 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