

Career spotlight: Phill Brown



In this interview, Phill Brown 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?

Like lots of people it was a total accident!! I first became aware of health and safety as a concept while working within Facilities Management in the Ministry of Defence, but it's probably fair to say with Crown Immunity and ingrained working practices it wasn't seen as a priority.

On leaving the MoD, my plan was to pursue an FM role and during my interview for Croydon PCT, I was asked by the then

Name:
Phill Brown
Position:
Head of Risk & Safety
Organisation:
Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre
Industry/ Sector:
Theatre & Entertainment

Risk Management lead 'we are looking for someone to eventually take over from me, so are you committed to H&S?' Obviously the answer was yes without fully appreciating what this would entail, but it's fair to say that since that opportunity, it's one that I've never regretted. It was during my time at Croydon, with ever increasing risk responsibilities, that I decided Health & Safety management was the career for me and one I seemed to excel in.

My responsibilities and health & safety achievements accelerated on joining the Ambassador Theatre Group. During my 10 years at ATG I was allowed to be the driver for positive changes within the largest theatre operator in the world.

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 have achieved the following:

- IOSH Managing Safely
- NEBOSH Diploma
- NVQ (Level 4) - Occupational Health and Safety
- Accredited Security Management Specialist
- First Aid at Work Instructor/Assessor

BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

Phill has worked in a variety of public sector safety, risk and security management positions within the Ministry of Defence and the NHS before moving into the theatre industry and eventually becoming Risk Management Director for the Ambassador Theatre Group. During that time he created and nurtured a proactive approach to risk management and developed positive changes in theatre working practices before moving onto the newly created industry role for SOLT|UK Theatre, Head of Risk & Safety.

As the inaugural person to hold the role, Phill provides a consolidated and effective industry voice to represent the collective interests of SOLT and UK Theatre membership in relation to risk, safety and technical management. The role provides him with the unique opportunity to have direct dialogue with hundreds of theatre operators, employees and other stakeholders such as HSE and NaCTSO. During the COVID crisis he has supported the risk

I would say the IOSH Managing Safely was the most important as it set me up to progress in this profession and gave me an appetite for more. I struggled with the academic elements of the NEBOSH National Diploma and much prefer the practical aspects of NVQs. So I would say to any new starters to think about what best suits your learning approach, lifestyle and wallet. Whatever you choose has pro and cons but remember employers are looking at different professional qualifications these days not just the traditional ones! I also often say to people to apply for the job as the qualifications can come later. It doesn't always work but I have been fortunate in the past with this approach.

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

I've been a member of IIRSM for more than 20 years. I feel personal and professional recognition was important when newly qualified and membership gave me status with an internationally recognised institute right at the start of my career and has been part of my professional life ever since. Membership gives me a sense of being part of a larger community of like-minded professionals who can be there to support each other.

BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

management process for the 'See it Safely' initiative and created the 'Managing COVID Safely' training course to support staff in making venues safe and secure.

He strives to find imaginative and original ways to engage with staff and venues throughout the industry, setting high standards of risk management for all members.

Phill is a Fellow of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, Chartered Fellow of Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (CfIOSH) and Fellow of International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).



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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?

This is invaluable, if you get stuck on something having a phone book full of fellow professionals can really dig you out of a hole! Try and join as many professional groups as your workload allows, whether via IIRSM or our organisations. It will help with peer support and also keep you connected with colleagues who have all probably experienced the same problems you have!

What does a typical week look like for you?

It looks very different now than pre COVID. Before March 2020 I would often be in London visiting venues or networking with members but now this is all done remotely. The week is usually full of meetings with members, Boards, industry partners and external stakeholders like the Police/NaCTS0 for example. My role has been described as the industry "glue" trying to link people together or establishing what services our membership needs and working to provide that during the week. This could be simply answering queries, forwarding emails for information or organising network get togethers.

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

One of my key achievements at ATG was in

creating a network of 'Safety Ambassadors'. This was in essence a network of 50+ 'minimes'. They were all IOSH Managing Safely trained by me and in principle, there to assist me and venue management with developing health and safety. Our culture improved significantly, people started to enjoy getting involved and our management system saw a reduction in accidents, claims and operating costs. I love to find 'hidden gems' within businesses who I can work with to improve safety standards.

I especially enjoy leading and engaging with people, often those who 'don't do H&S'. Not taking myself too seriously has often helped. The subject matter must always be taken seriously but that doesn't mean we have to continually promote and encourage others in a serious way!

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 transition from the public to private sector was an eye opener and required me to change my management style to reflect the change in cultures. You will often face challenges in your career, my advice would be to learn from them. Nobody will get it right every time, just don't make the same mistake again in the future!

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

I have worked with Board representatives in a number of organisations and you have to be confident in providing them with the necessary guidance they require. You must be aware of the need to produce cost benefit analysis in order to support an organisations plans. Striking a balance to achieve cost savings, but also safety and

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quality is essential and needs some expertise in negotiating and using practical risk management solutions.

What is your proudest achievement so far?

When working for ATG I created the Safety, Environmental & Technical (SET) Conference & Awards which ran for 7 years. Our last event was attended by over 200 industry delegates from across the country. I felt this event was needed to highlight the good practice & success of individuals and venues towards improving standards. On joining SOLT|UK Theatre I was keen to replicate an annual event for the entire industry. I now curate and Chair 'Off Stage'. This focuses on the crucial aspects of theatre that the general public cannot see but are integral to a successful performance. We have taken a break due to COVID but hope to be back in 2022.

What/ who inspires you and why?

My first Risk Management lead in the NHS, a lovely lady called Ruth, was my first inspiration in this profession. More recently my old Property Director at ATG has inspired me. He allowed me to run with our H&S management system and put my own stamp on how to do things.

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

Just be you! I think being personable is huge in our industry. Be approachable and

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seen as someone who can help rather than hinder the business. Try to develop working relationships with all levels of staff and management and show them the positivity that safety can bring and new ways of proactive working. Health & Safety isn't difficult, people just need a little supportive nudge or a reassuring voice for them to achieve the desired results.

What are your career aspirations now?

I've still got more I want to achieve in my current role and help the industry emerge successfully following the COVID crisis. There are challenges to be faced but I feel my role can play a significant part in getting our industry back on its feet. I will shortly be launching a new Code of Conduct to help technical staff work healthier and safer during get in & get outs, traditionally some of our more hazardous times in theatre. Personally I have recently been appointed as a Trustee of IIRSM and I am excited about this opportunity and how I can help grow the institute. IIRSM has supported me for many years so now it feels the time to give something back to them!

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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.