

# Career spotlight: Ruth Denyer



In this interview, Ruth Denyer 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?

I haven't done anything else, it seemed a broad and interesting degree and, if I am honest, was available in Leeds where I wanted to be at University.

I became much more actively interested in a broader risk management perspective in around 2015, when I started learning more deeply about some of the 'safety differently' thoughts and approaches and in 2016 I did some studying at LSE on Managing Risk in Organisations which supported a change in my role where I moved to a wider risk portfolio including insurance and crisis/incident Management. I see Health and Safety firmly as a risk discipline.

### Name:

Ruth Denyer

### Position:

Director,  
Production Safety  
& IIRSM Co-  
president

### Organisation:

Netflix

### Industry/ Sector:

Entertainment

## 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 a BSc (Hons) in Occupational Safety and Health which led to my Chartered IOSH status. I have done many courses over the years on specifics related to H&S but have found the most insightful learnings are often from outside traditional safety training. The ones that have influenced me most are:

- Cranfield School of Management - Leading Organisational Resilience Programme
- London School of Economics – Managing Risk in Organisations – Executive Summer School

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

There is so much we don't know and a professional institute can really support all of us in building our broader understanding and expertise. They provide a network and carefully curated opportunities to learn.

## 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

### BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

I started my journey in health and safety when I was 19 by choosing to study for a BSc in Occupational Health and Safety, a 3-year full time course that covered all aspects of OHS from acoustics, to law, management systems and organisational psychology.

I graduated in the summer of 1997 and knew that H&S was my career path then and whilst looking for my first 'real' job I saw an advert at the back of the SHP (where every H&S job was advertised at that time) for a H&S Advisor at the National Theatre. The thought of being able to practice what I had been studying within the creative industry with all the variety and challenge that would bring felt like it was

### management career?

A network is important and can be hard to start to build, connect and talk to people who interest you and who have similar challenges, don't be scared to share your thoughts or ideas but also listen to others and see if they influence your thinking. Be human in your connections with people.

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

There is no typical week in content making, every production is different and as part of a global rapidly scaling business we can be deep into anything from the day to day of managing a team and what we are focusing on to thinking about innovative ways of training and scoping global research into our challenges. Alongside this there might be broader company wide activity such as leadership courses, business reviews etc.

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

Being a leader is a really important role and I have learnt a lot about the type of leader I am and want to be over the years. For anyone who aspires to leadership, spend time learning - there are many books and talks you can access. Don't assume as a technical expert you are naturally a great leader, it needs focus and hard work. For me integrity and transparency are really important, and I am really working on clarity and consistency

#### BRIEF BIO/ KEY CAREER MILESTONES:

made for me. I started there in April 1998 and then moved to several other roles over the following 5 years at KPMG and The Princes Trust before joining ITV in 2004 where I started as the Health and Safety Manager for London and left 16 years later in 2020, as the Group Risk Director. I moved to Netflix where I am deep in Production Safety across the organisation. I read the Netflix Culture deck back in 2014 and knew that the culture aligned so much I personally believe is important to delivering safety and broader risk management.

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of leadership messaging. Embrace feedback and actively seek it out by understanding what you could do better so you can be better.

### 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?

I have had moments where I have felt at odds with an approach being adopted by my leaders. At one point many years ago I made the decision that I didn't want to work in a team that was being taken in a specific leadership direction and acted upon that. Now I think I would have spent more time engaging with the conversation about why I didn't feel the approach was right and working to build allies internally to support that perspective.

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

I genuinely believe that this is all about engaging with people in a way that has impact with them, putting yourself in their shoes and trying to understand their challenges and vision of success to frame risk management in that context so they have a 'why', which isn't just because they must or for pure compliance.

### What is your proudest achievement so far?

Honestly, I am most proud of the change in conversation with Productions about Safety

and Risk that we worked on at ITV from 2015 - 2020, as a small team we navigated some really challenging times, built deep connections with colleagues outside the team who championed our work and, in 2019, won Risk Team of the Year at the IIRSM awards.

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

Honestly, I joined Netflix because the culture inspired me so much, it still does. It is brave and different and puts people at the centre - it encompasses many of the principles I believe are important to have effective risk management. On a more personal level Michelle Obama is an amazing woman and her biography inspired me as a working parent.



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

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**What are your career aspirations now?**

What is right in front of me now is to make the most of the opportunity my role gives me, I would also like to support the professional community I am part of in building understanding of what we do and the impact it can have.

## 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).