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Laura McNally

Sustainable Business Partner and Managing Director

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Sustainable Business Partner
Organisation: Environment Agency
Location: Yorkshire, UK

Job title: Managing Director
Organisation: Squat Ltd
Location: Yorkshire, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I have a BSc Geography and Geology (2:1) and began in local authorities in Geographic Information Systems in a time when there wasn't a clear career path above 'GIS Manager.' Facing redundancy I joined the RAF as an intelligence officer where, over nine years, I led very large teams (up to 80 and 150 people) and earned qualifications in Project Management (which I never used!) and the Institute of Leadership and Management's Certificate in Management at Level 6. On leaving I joined the Environment Agency and took up a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) with the Open University in my spare time, which I'm still completing. I also started my own business in sustainable sportswear and am going to be taking Personal Trainer qualifications from April 2019!

W: www.rgs.org/geographyprofessionals

What do you do as part of your role?

Most of my work in the Environment Agency is about giving advice. My role is focussed on waste so I have conversations about how our teams should be handling hazardous waste, for example, and what the law expects them to do, but also how they should be keeping themselves and the environment safe from exposure to hazardous waste. I also look at how we can avoid a lot of the rubbish we create that then has to be recycled or ends up in landfill, like plastic bottles and drinks cans – at the minute we are looking at getting staff some discounts on reusable cups.

In my own business I meet with solicitors to make sure my business is protected, I speak to the bank, I talk to suppliers about how soon they can get the fabric to the factories. I'm currently looking for edible business cards so when I meet people I don't give them something that they will throw away at some point (and I secretly hope they tweet or write an IG post about it!). Some days I'm adding to my blog or updating the website, others I visit trade shows and exhibitions to meet others in similar work and look for new products and suppliers. My business is a really creative thing so every day is different.

What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

Confidence is very important as well as networking. Doing things for free – I do a lot of volunteering as a charity trustee, on the RGS regional committee, talking to universities – and engaging with as many people as possible in many industries means you always have a contact that can help you if you need something. You can find mentors this way too. Passion is probably the most important.

How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?

Many people have one career but I think if you don't know what you want to do, you can try lots of things, and if you don't like what you end up doing, there's nothing stopping you from changing it if you have geography as a degree because its so transferrable to many jobs.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I love the variety and that I know I'm making a positive impact on the environment. My own business is the thing that excites me the most because I get to make all my own decisions and focus on environmental problems. Sometimes companies focus too much on profit, and they certainly need to make enough profit, but it's not worth damaging the world to make as much profit as possible.

Do you get to travel for your role?

In the RAF I travelled all over the world – Alaska for a month, Qatar for six months, Afghanistan of course, Sicily and Cyprus for a month each, we went skiing twice in Bavaria (Germany).

Now, for the Environment Agency we travel as little as possible because we recognise the damage that global travel has on the environment, so instead we often use an online system on which we can do presentations and have group calls, a bit like Skype.

For my business I don't like to travel but it is important that I have personal experience and understand the working conditions in the factories I use, which means I will visit them.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?

Sometimes the job you think you really want isn't the job you thought it was. That's ok, and it's ok to try something completely different.

I would also advise connecting with people on LinkedIn – maybe some of the CGeogs on the RGS-IBG website. Ask them questions about their job and if they might be able to offer you work experience (and treat these as if they were interviews)!

Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?

I chose geography because I love the

environment. By that I mean all the processes going on around us, the changes that are always happening, the natural world and the way it connects everything.

Geography as a subject covers such a wide range of skills and topics that you can do anything you want when you leave school or university, and then you can change your mind! My CV looks like it's lots of different roles, but they are all geographical and have all been really interesting.