

## South East Centre and Provider News

### The topsy turvy world of Leach Consulting & Associates

MOST of us follow a fairly conventional route up the management ladder, even if we manage to skip a few rungs along the way - but not Nigel Leach, head of one of ILM's newest approved centres based at Deanshanger in Buckinghamshire. His varied experience demonstrates the value of flexibility and versatility, two of the main building blocks of ILM programmes, and offers hope for anyone whose career is not following a traditional pattern.

At 19 in 1976 when many contemporaries were still in full-time education or at the start of a new career, Nigel was the country's youngest manager of a local authority leisure centre when the idea of the leisure industry was in its infancy. "It was mainly swimming pools," said Nigel whose duties also covered parks and other open spaces, but it was a time when the industry was developing a new image.

Progress was rapid via other more progressive leisure centres before he started his own health and fitness company 10 years later, another concept then in its infancy. "We still couldn't mix men and women but things were changing," said Nigel who then started to think about more formal training and personal development for himself through various leisure industry professional organisations. His business had been so successful it still exists today nearly 20 years on albeit with a different owner.

"I felt I'd been in management for such a long time that I didn't know what to do so I tried teaching at Uxbridge College where as a senior lecturer I soon found myself in the senior management team looking after the estate. In the early 1990s I worked with the consultants Coopers and Lybrand to prepare the college for independence but ironically a new principal brought changes which made me and 150 colleagues redundant!"

"Time for more change, this time studying for an MA in management practice where I got back into the business network. I met a lot of people going through similar career changes to mine and this networking put me in contact with the worldwide OCS Group where I worked initially on contracts management and then HR development, especially the fast track work for senior managers being groomed for director level posts and work for Investors in People status. The group's decision to re-organise after September 11 meant more changes, including my departure - but I still provide tuition on some of their internal management programmes."

This brings Nigel almost up to date and time for more academic qualifications - an MSc in strategic training and development - and the start of a new business. "It was a clean sheet with no clients," said Nigel, but the secret of success lay with the power of networking. The MSc group included John Bill, now corporate training and development manager for the London Borough of Merton and the scene was set for the development of Leach Consulting & Associates.

"I'd helped deliver ILM programmes for the NHS through the Goldsmith Management Centre in Letchworth, part of North Hertfordshire College, one of my clients, and I liked the approach, particularly its flexibility and the obvious benefit the participants got out of the work." The ILM Level 3 Introductory Certificate in Team Leading was the ideal product for the group of 12 Merton staff including the staff communications officer, carers and the registrar and deputy superintendent registrar at Merton Register Office Fiona Jessett who summed up the programme on behalf of her colleagues: "I found the course stimulating and interesting. The tutor [Nigel Leach] was able to pitch it at the right level and I feel I have gained a lot of confidence by going on the course. It's whetted my appetite to learn more about some of the topics which we touched on, and I would very much like to do the full ILM Certificate. Through the course I have made contacts and friends which otherwise I would not have done."

The second ILM programme, delivered fortnightly over a few months, started in September with further programmes planned for 2005. Nigel is currently delivering ILM programmes himself but he has the back-up of a team of associates including an accountant, a health and safety expert and a human resources specialist. The client list now includes the Royal Bank of Scotland's corporate services centre in Milton Keynes where Nigel covers a range of topics from management skills to executive coaching, and 3, the telecommunications company, where he deals with change management.

"I believe our strengths are not only in wide experience but in the academic rigour of our approach, one which served us well when we were faced with ILM's demanding approval process leading to our accreditation," said Nigel.

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