

WOMEN IN PLASTICS SPOTLIGHT



THE LATEST
INSTALMENT
OF OUR SERIES
COLLABORATING
WITH THE WOMEN
IN PLASTICS
INITIATIVE, IN WHICH
BP&R SHINES A
SPOTLIGHT ON ONE
OF THE PLATFORM'S
INSPIRATIONAL
INTERVIEWEES,
WE SHARE AN
EXTRACT FROM WIP'S
CONVERSATION
WITH EMMA
HOCKLEY, MANAGING
DIRECTOR, BIG BEAR
PLASTICS.



Q: HOW DID YOUR CAREER PATH LEAD TO BIG BEAR PLASTICS?

I work for Big Bear Plastic Products Ltd, a manufacturing business specialising in the design, development and production of technical thermoplastic components using vacuum-forming and compression forming technology. I was recently promoted to Managing Director, following six years working in various roles across the business, but most recently as Sales Director. Big Bear was founded by my father, Gerald Bloom, and so with my appointment as MD we are able to establish a strong succession plan.

It has been something of a baptism of fire, since my previous roles could not have been more different. After University I landed a work experience job with the PR department at Harrods – and then worked my way up to Head of Marketing for the whole of the Beauty division.

Whilst at first glance selling lipsticks and selling plastics are worlds apart, Harrods gave me good training in many of the skills I need, and use, to run Big Bear. Ultimately, business is about keeping your customers happy, and if there is one thing Harrods does well, it is customer service. I had the privilege of working for two female bosses who were tough, but inspiring and educated me on so many levels.

Q: WHAT SORT OF YEAR HAS 2020 BEEN - FOR YOU AND BIG BEAR PLASTICS?

I became MD just as the pandemic started – talk about being thrown in at the deep end! So much of what happened was unprecedented, so the whole team had to work through it together, and it was a great bonding exercise. Although several of our customers shutdown in the first lockdown, we kept the factory operational throughout to support other customers who needed us to maintain supply, and we were also very busy manufacturing specialised products for the NHS. We were operating with a reduced team both in the factory and the offices, so it was an extremely busy time. By the end of the



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INTERVIEW | GRACE NOLAN

summer our regular customers were back, and we finished the year with a positive result overall.

Q: WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU HAVE FACED IN YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

Moving from a senior position with a large, high profile company like Harrods, where I felt completely sure of myself and what I was doing, to starting from scratch in a manufacturing business has certainly been a challenge. It has taken time to build my confidence up again and to establish my own style of working. Questioning the status quo, and not being brushed away or fobbed off with a “because that’s how it is” style of answer has taken a lot of persistence and determination.

Q: HAVE YOU NOTICED A GENDER DIVIDE IN THE PLASTICS INDUSTRY?

Yes absolutely – perhaps made even more noticeable to me having come from a very female-dominated industry. I have been to a lot of manufacturing industry networking events where I’ve walked into a sea of dark suits which can be a bit intimidating. Having said that, I have met some very impressive women in this industry whom I admire immensely. I think initiatives such as Women in Plastics is a great way to connect and support each other.

Q: WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN?

I am lucky to have a lot of people to call upon for advice, which I do often...but my father has always been the person whose opinion I value most. Over the years he has given me a lot of memorable directives, which whilst true, also always make me smile. Such edicts as “The quality of the result is equal to the quality of the instruction” will always be front of mind. Not to mention, simply “make it happen.”

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR 2021? DO YOU HAVE ANY UPCOMING PROJECTS?

I am developing a new business plan to take us forward with a strong growth strategy, and we have some great projects underway. Big Bear is doing a lot of development work with lightweight thermoplastic materials for interior trim components such as headliners and door trim panels, ideal for lightweight transport solutions. We have also invested in a new production line to manufacture moulded acrylic components which we are very excited about.