

CLEAN START



REIMAGINING CAREERS
IN THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

CLIMBING THE CAREER LADDER

Hi, my name is Yvonne Taylor. I am the Global Head of Cleaning at OCS Group, an international facilities management company with a £1bn annual turnover and more than 72,000 colleagues.

CASE STUDY

Life sometimes takes an unexpected turn, and you are forced to re-evaluate your career path. That is how I came to start my career in cleaning and facilities management.

I was 25, my husband and I had just purchased our first home and I was unexpectedly made redundant from a successful job as a bakery manager's assistant. We had a mortgage and household bills to pay, and I needed a job, any job, so I applied for and got a role as a cleaner/pot washer at a well-known motorway service station chain... as my dad always said, 'any job is better than no job'.

I loved my job, and as a natural organiser, I set about looking at ways I could improve my role. I took those ideas and suggestions to my line manager. They were nothing ground-breaking; I just thought that new equipment, different chemicals and a set of cleaning schedules would improve my performance and increase my output.

My line manager was so impressed by my initiative that when a position of team leader became available, I was asked to apply. From there, my career went from strength to strength.

The great thing about working in facilities management is that there are always opportunities for personal growth. I



was lucky; I worked for a company that, like OCS, invested in training, and I took every chance I got to learn more. I stayed with the company for 13 years. When I left, I was a regional operations manager, responsible for £20 million of business and 500 employees. Part of that £20 million was some very large cleaning contracts, which reignited my passion for cleaning.

My pet hate is hearing 'I'm only a cleaner'. There is no such thing! Our cleaning operatives are highly trained, covering health and safety, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, correct use and storage of equipment, processes and procedures, confidentiality and so much more.

"You're only the cleaner" – yet the client hands you the keys to a building that cost millions.

"You're only the cleaner" – yet you make sure your client's premises are Covid-19 safe.

"You're only the cleaner" – yet everyone notices when you're not there because their bin hasn't been emptied. Could they tell whether or not their CEO was in the office that day?

Don't get me wrong; there have been challenges during my 26 years – for example, I have been on my hands and knees scrubbing sealant from floor edgings because our round, rotary machines could not reach. But things have moved on. These days, some machines have square pads

(funny that, as most buildings are straight and square!) and we no longer hump around 10 litres of, let's face it, dirty water in a mop bucket. Instead, we use flat mops with built-in spray systems that provide constant clean water; we have light battery-operated vacuum cleaners and vacuum backpacks so we're not stopping every 10 metres to unplug and replugin the machine; and we work alongside robots, so they can carry out the heavy repetitive tasks while we concentrate on ensuring our clients' premises are free from bacteria and viruses and are safe.

Don't think you can't make a career out of being a cleaning operative. The cleaning industry, now more than ever before, has been thrown into the spotlight: we are no longer the invisible workforce. Industry bodies like the British Cleaning Council, the Cleaning & Support Services Association (CSSA) and the British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICSc) are lobbying government to recognise our cleaning operatives as essential workers, and for our industry to be given professional status.

I am immensely proud of my achievements. It has taken a lot of hard work, dedication and sacrifice on mine and my family's part – and it could not have been achieved if I had not taken that first job in cleaning.

As you can see, I'm a passionate advocate for cleaning as a career choice and for cleaning operatives all over the world. I sit on boards, councils and committees to make sure that their hard work and commitment is recognised by lobbying to improve pay and training. Cleaning operatives who want to progress should have a clear, consistent and rewarding career path.

To support OCS in providing a career path for cleaning operatives I created and wrote the OCS award winning training programme IMPACT, which won the 2019 IWFM award for Innovation in products and/or processes. The core fundamentals of IMPACT have now been used to create IMPACT Security and IMPACT Catering within OCS, ensuring all OCS colleagues in the major soft service lines have a solid start to a career in Facilities Management.

I am a Board Director of the CSSA, a BICSc council member and a committee member with the Building Services Association. My global role enables me to share best practice from the different countries in which we operate among my peers, so that, together, we can improve our cleaning-service delivery models.

With an aging workforce, Brexit, immigration policy and Covid-19 creating challenges for our industry, we must value our workforce, show them the respect they deserve and foster the next generation of experts. Give it a go; you'll never know if it's for you until you try!