

My career in brief...

Name: Mark Fisher
Job title: Managing Director
Industry: Leisure Attractions
Company: Merlin Entertainments



1. Please give a brief overview of your career history – where you started, how you progressed, the companies you have worked for etc

Bear- Alton Towers!!!! (student job)

BA (hons) Recreation Management, Sheffield City Polytechnic

Events Co-ordinator 1990-92 (Alton Towers - Tussauds)

Business Development Executive 1992-93 (Alton Towers - Tussauds Group)

Sales Exec 1993 (Madame Tussauds, Warwick castle, Rock Circus - Tussauds Group)

Business Development Manager 1994-1995 (Alton Towers – Tussauds Group)

Sales Controller 1995-1997 (Vardon Attractions)

Head of Marketing 1997-1998 (Vardon Attractions)

Marketing Director 1999 - 2002 (Merlin Entertainments –formally Vardon Attractions)

Executive Director 2002 – 2004 (Merlin Entertainments)

Managing Director 2004 – present (Merlin Entertainments)

2. Have you always wanted to work within hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism and why? If not, how did you end up where you are now?

I started my first job at Alton Towers dressed as in a bear costume, entertaining the public! I had many student jobs at the park over the next 5 years, which really gave me a taste of what this industry is about. I used to love the fact that you could make people laugh and give them happy memories that could last a lifetime. It was a natural fit to do my student placement back at the park and after a brief job teaching English in Hong Kong, I inevitably started my career proper in the Alton Towers Marketing Department. The rest, as they say, is history!

'I started my first job at Alton Towers dressed as in a bear costume, entertaining the public!'

3. What sort of qualifications and training have you had and what else would you like to do?

Although I studied Recreation Management any good degree is ok. What is most important is to have a natural empathy towards your customers. You should delight in their enjoyment and get depressed when things don't go as planned. There is nothing more upsetting than getting a letter from somebody who did not enjoy their day. There are lots of different in house training courses that Merlin offers that can help you in specialist areas.

4. What are the top 5 activities you would typically carry out on a daily basis?

Blimey a difficult one!! No typical days.

People management is probably the most important. I have lots of reports, in many different countries, so making sure I am constantly supporting them is important.

Being on top of all the numbers is also key. I need to know what's happening in the businesses, so we can plan and react where necessary.

I'm usually out and about and spend only one day every two weeks in the office. Walking the sites, talking to guests and staff is important so you really understand what the issues are. I'm not a fan of four walls and a roof, and I've never met a successful manager in our industry who likes to keep the office seat warm!!!

5. What do you most enjoy about your job?

Probably the people. I work with some fantastic people, many of whom I now class as friends. They are all passionate and really care about what they do; it's not just a career it's more of a life choice.

'I'm not a fan of four walls and a roof, and I've never met a successful manager in our industry who likes to keep the office seat warm!!!

6. What would you say is the biggest challenge you face on a daily basis?

Staying focussed. There are so many different things going on all the time you really have to be able to step back and concentrate on those areas that make a real difference.

7. What would you say is your biggest achievement to date?

Being part of the management team that has created Merlin. It's not just a company it's a philosophy. We strive to be the best at what we do and never sit back and believe we've made it. This drive helps us to get better and learn everyday. And its fun.

8. Who has been your greatest influence/role model in your career and why?

Sounds cheesy but my boss, Nick Varney. I met Nick in my first role in 1990 when he was Marketing Director at Alton Towers. There has never been a day since that I've not learned something new from him. I have never met anyone so driven and clear at giving direction. Inevitably we have similar outlooks on the business as we've spent so much time working together. Some weeks I spend more time with him than my wife!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

9. Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

I've never worried too much about the future. I believe if you work hard, make sure you enjoy yourself and do the best you can, the rest will fall into place.

10. Do you have a favourite tale or most memorable moment from your career? If so, please tell us about it!

Too many, I could bore you to death.

The best is probably giving an American tourist a full VIP trip round the London Dungeon. We were expecting the main American share holder to visit from New York and we got the wrong guy. Gave him Lunch, lots of gifts and a personal tour with the actors. I guess we really did exceed his expectations!

11. What piece of advice would you offer someone who wants to work within our industries?

The usual boring stuff, need to work hard, need to be empathetic with customers etc, but most importantly be prepared...and I mean really prepared... to enjoy yourself. If getting up in the morning is a chore your in the wrong place.

'I have the best job in the world!'

12. What would you say are the essential person characteristics for your job e.g. enthusiastic, team worker, proactive etc?

Being able to put yourself in the position of being the customer, no matter what you are doing. If you were visiting an attraction, is what we are offering, what you would expect. I often say to people think about the best day out you've ever had, and think why. Then make sure that we deliver that in spades!

If there's anything else you'd like to tell us about your job or career please state here.

I have the best job in the world!

Further information

For further information on career opportunities at Merlin Entertainments, please visit www.merlincareers.com.

For further information on career opportunities in the visitor attractions or other hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism industries, please visit www.uksp.co.uk.



uksp.co.uk