

Getting the balance right:

Sam Pope on work-life equilibrium



Samantha Pope, Director of London-based BAR Member Alexanders Removals and Storage, talked to R&S about her experience with building up and maintaining a healthy relationship with her own business.



By 2006, we had moved into a 5,000 square foot warehouse in Park Royal, having acquired a fleet of vans and rapidly filling self-storage units. I further developed the back office, setting up systems and processes and managing our growing numbers of personnel. Over the years, Alex moved into a sales and business development role, overseeing all removals logistics, and I moved away from client-facing positions and towards personnel, process, systems and quality management.

Despite having recently transferred into a non-executive role, I continue to attend board meetings and oversee certain process changes (including the rollout of a new software system). I also give my input on new product development, and we're about to launch an app-based storage solution for millennials.

R&S: What have been the main points in your career path to reach this position?

SP: I always knew that I wanted to run my own business, so I began my career working as a personal assistant to several entrepreneurs, where I learnt how to manage an office and act on ideas. This experience contributed to the winning combination behind my own business, as my husband is an ideas man and I bring things to life. I really enjoy setting up a business, its customer-facing element and making things happen.

R&S: Have you received any training along the way?

SP: In 2010, I completed a Dale Carnegie leadership and management course. This was a career-defining moment for me, as it enabled me to transition into a leader and personnel manager of my business, which I had previously found difficult. I had one-to-one leadership coaching in 2014 with Cerulean Blu, which helped me to improve my time management skills and reduce entrepreneurial burn-out! I encouraged opportunities for others to lead and develop their expertise in the company by moving into more of a non-executive role from 2015 onwards, when I began to study life and leadership coaching at the Institute of Psychosynthesis. I'm about to complete a Diploma in Psychosynthesis Life Coaching and start advising entrepreneurs and business owners on how to maintain a healthy work-life equilibrium.

R&S: Have you faced any obstacles in progressing in your career?

SP: The only obstacles I have faced have been within myself, especially feeling as though I had to be a superwoman to be successful. When I let go of the idea that everything needed to be perfect – which is an impossibility – I started to flourish, delegate more and spend more time doing the things I loved. This really helped me and other people within the business, not to mention the business itself.

R&S: Do you think these obstacles were related to you being a woman?

SP: I don't think so. Work-life balance is the quandary of being an entrepreneur, and having a business is like having a baby: you want it to grow to be healthy and strong, but sometimes this can be overwhelming. Trusting your staff to do things differently so that you can make more time for a healthier work-life balance is a challenge, since you need to have the right people and processes in place for this to happen. It's very easy to hand things over to someone when you have lots on your plate, but if you hand over too eagerly without proper success measures in place then it will cause major set-backs. It's all about getting the balance right.

R&S: What made you start in the industry?

Samantha Pope: I started in the industry in 2004. My husband, Alex, who had been running a successful man-and-van service in and around Hampstead since 2002, had been developing ideas for a business of his own. We saw a niche in the market for a high-end local man-and-van service, so we decided to launch a family-run removals business together.

R&S: How long have you been working at your company and what does your position involve?

SP: We launched Alexanders Removals in 2004 from the spare room in our flat in Kilburn, just after the arrival of our first child. Alex stayed on the road while I set up the back office. We soon started to fill up a local self-storage warehouse, keeping control by invoicing clients ourselves and negotiating a lower rate with the warehouse.



R&S: Does your company have any specific policies to encourage women to enter and remain with the company?

SP: Although there are many women working at Alexanders, we have no specific policies as such. Part of our success in our niche market of high-end removals comes as a result of creating a voice on the other end of the line that customers can relate to, and this can be a man or a woman. Over the years we have tended to employ more female than male move managers, but we've also had some brilliant male ones. I think the fact that we are a family-run business with both male and female energies at the helm has helped to bring women into the industry.

R&S: What would be your advice to a woman thinking of taking a position in the industry?

SP: My advice would be to remember that the removals and storage industry is very traditional but modernity and technology are changing the face of how customers interact with their goods. I for one have never had any issues being a woman in this industry. I think the BAR can play a role in helping women progress in the industry through awards and anything else to raise awareness of the need for more women in an industry that is traditionally run by men.

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