

Meet the Advantage trainer: Kate Parrott

TRAINERS come in all shapes and sizes, but unless they have real-life hands-on experience of their subject it can all fall a bit flat. Kate Parrott is one of those rare people who can not only communicate facts in an understandable way, but she has tangible results from real-life business experience. The fact she is so enthusiastic about the benefits of PRINCE2 and MSP only strengthens her as a consummate trainer.

Kate became a PRINCE2 trainer, if not by accident, then by chance. She had been working in projects for about five years before she attended a PRINCE2 course. "I was coming to the end of a local government contract and I thought that I probably needed a bit of paper and I couldn't help but notice every other job advert wanted PRINCE2 practitioner. So I went along to an Advantage Learning course and had an absolute epiphany. I sat there for a week thinking 'why didn't anyone tell me this five years ago?'"

She has since gone on to qualify as trainer for both PRINCE2 and MSP (Managing Successful Programmes) and now regularly trains for Advantage Learning. Kate's passion for PRINCE2 is undimmed.

"Personally I think that everybody who is going to be part of a project should have some degree of PRINCE2 training," she says.

"For a project manager, in particular, I think that knowing that there is a well tested methodology behind you helps you stand up for yourself on a project. Going on a course and really understanding what PRINCE2 is about gives you the reasons behind everything you are trying to achieve."

Born in Newcastle and now based in Edinburgh, Kate's real life experience comes from time working with companies like LogicaCMG, Compaq, FirstMark Communications, and the Bank of Ireland, as well as public sector organisations like UK Energy Authority, Medical Research Council, Northern Ireland Civil Service and several Local Authorities.

"What I like about training is that it's not just standing at the front firing through a set of slides. You gain as much from the contributions of the people in the group talking to each other and asking questions."

Kate knows PRINCE2 can make a real difference to projects and the people working on them. "The thing with PRINCE2 is that there's nothing clever about it (which is one of its great strengths). It is often telling you to do many things you would usually do, but firstly, it tells you how to do them in the correct order, so you are getting as much value from them as possible. Secondly, it tells you why you are doing them, instead of just copying them from your last project manager."



Kate Parrott

When Kate is not training for Advantage Learning, she may be contracting as a project or programme manager. The last project she managed was the business process re-engineering of a small organisation of about 45 people.

“They wanted to look at how they did everything from how somebody requested annual leave to how they knew that the staff out in the vans driving round the city were going to their jobs in the most efficient way possible,” she explains.

“They were questioning everything they did on a daily basis, but you can’t let ‘business as usual’ disappear as you try to make things look prettier. You can’t close the hospital to build a new ward.” With the project successfully completed, Kate is sure that her legacy will be that the experience of working in a PRINCE2 environment will help her client’s work on a day-to-day basis become more efficient.

PRINCE2 is Kate’s normal modus operandi, but sometimes it’s not that straight forward as one local government business process change project demonstrates.

“When I went in they said to me ‘we don’t want to use PRINCE2; we hate it. We’ve had a half-day overview: it’s very bureaucratic and seems far too complicated.’ So I said ‘fair enough’ and I ran the whole thing according to PRINCE2 – but with all the names changed. They loved it: they thought it was brilliant and wanted me to write it up for them. I had to come clean and admit it was in fact PRINCE2.”

Kate’s project and programme experience is not all she calls on in professional life. She admits that having studied history at Edinburgh University, it gives her a certain outlook on life. “When you are looking at history, it teaches you to look around a situation and try and think of everybody’s point of view.” She finds that perspective incredibly useful when looking at projects and in particular at programmes. “If you are a programme manager, you are almost trying to be an independent bystander and you’ve got 15 different points of view coming up to you from projects and you have to be the one who decides who gets priority.”

Kate identifies another input from her studies: “When you are looking at past events, I think you become more comfortable about making assessments when you don’t have all the available information. In fact, being a programme manager is a bit like being a plotter in an old black and white war movie – you are moving models of the fleet around on a map. So running a programme is a bit like co-ordinating World War Two – although sometimes not as friendly.”

Her busy multi-faceted life takes Kate not only across Britain, but across the Atlantic as well. So how does she relax? “I’m an avid reader – I read like books are going out of fashion.” High on her list of recommendations is *A Little History of the World* by EH Gombrich. “It is just beautiful. It is officially a children’s book, but, as a trainer, if I could explain complex things as beautifully as he does, I would consider I was doing my job very very well.”

3 things we didn’t know ...

Who is your business hero and why?

I don’t have one in the way that some people do. I like people who don’t think you have to be the biggest to be the best. I like people who go into business knowing what they want to achieve and achieve it. You don’t have to be the biggest in the world to be good at your job.

What was the last music you bought?

Peaceful, the World Lays me Down by Noah the Whale – the summer’s “played everywhere” album and nothing else will remind me of this summer.

Do you wish on stars?

Yes. And I saw my first ever shooting star in the Highlands last week.



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