

Marcia Waters reflects on the journey from management trainee to her present role as wine buyer for the Oxford Wine Company

Thriving on the vine

What was your first job and what did your responsibilities include?

In my career as a management trainee for producer Listel UK which mostly involved computerised invoicing. My boss was a natural teacher and I very soon realised I was fascinated by wines, even if the day to day tasks of the job were rather dry.

How much was in your first pay packet and did you spend it on?

£300 and it went on rent. I started work a few weeks after leaving university so I needed every penny for the basics in life.

Describe how your career developed to the present day

I did all the courses I could and experienced as much as I could covering different aspects of the trade. So I worked as a buyer for Victoria and Albert, a buyer for Tesco, then selling wine for a range of prestige South African vineyards. Then it was ten years working for Rothschild and Edmondson. I also have my own consultancy business.

What are the key responsibilities in your current role?

To source interesting and great value wines from around the world. I have a close relationship with many customers who ask me to recommend wines and because I have tasted with them I have a good understanding of what they enjoy. I also talk about wines for a range of events such as teaching, or corporate functions. One of my passions is to communicate about wine as I believe everyone can appreciate finer wines.

Describe a typical day

Why there is no such thing — but most days include tasting wines, talking to customers and planning with colleagues.

What have been the biggest influences on your career?

There have been many inspiring people with whom I have shared philosophy over a good glass of wine. One of the best pieces of advice I had was from my boss at Tesco who said I should take a little extra time on buying trips to visit the places the locals are proud of. One of the biggest privileges of travelling to vineyards around the world is meeting people for whom wine is an inherent part of the culture and landscape of their region.

What has been your best decision?

To become a Master of Wine. It gave me a focus on wine in depth so that I came to a real understanding of the product. It also gave me a network of wine professionals around the world and of course I have opportunities to taste great wines as people are happy to share bottles with someone they know will really appreciate them.

What is your worst?

Not to look back with any regret.



Q&A

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What is the best advice you can give to someone starting out in your business?

Good relationships drive all businesses, so be open with people you meet and generous with your time.

Like any other business, the wine trade requires commitment and professionalism in order to be successful.

It helps to remember there is wine in surplus around the world, so it requires perseverance and dedication to select the products that genuinely offer quality, interest and value for money.

What is the secret of good management?

Be efficient with your time and communicate.

Do you have a good work/life balance?

My work is sociable so I am lucky with a happy crossover.

What hobbies/interests do you enjoy in your spare time?

Walking, music, and spending time with my family.

Is there anything in business that really irritates you?

Arrogance.

How do you see your company developing over the next five years?

I see the company as one of the most successful and respected Independents in the country with an interesting and carefully chosen range.

We need to build on our retail success and establish a strong brand in the south of England at the same time delivering an efficient and smart wholesale arm and a thriving online presence.

We look to have well-informed, well-travelled and well qualified staff offering expert and informed advice with a smile on their face — and not a hint of arrogance.

What has been your most satisfying moment?

There are plenty, but passing my Master of Wine exam was a real highlight.

I always love giving people the opportunity to realise they can appreciate quality wines and being with them when they experience that for the first time is what I find particularly satisfying about teaching.

Do you believe there is enough help and support from government and agencies for growing businesses?

There is quite a lot of support although it is not always clear how to access it.

It would be tremendous to see growing businesses championed by the Government rather than being seen simply as opportunities for revenue.

In the wine trade it is also easy to feel demonised because we sell alcohol, despite the fact we contribute hugely to the exchequer.

What is your attitude to the environment and do you have any green policies in place?

I think our grandchildren will look back on the 20th century in amazement at how much of the world's resources we wasted.

The Oxford Wine Company recycles our card and bottles and considers how best to buy wine efficiently from far corners of the world.

What is the secret of a happy workforce?

Respect, clear goals and guidelines.

Is there any other job you would like to have done and why?

Actually I can't really think of any.

What would you like to do when you retire?

Continue to enjoy good wine with my friends. **ib**