



Ticking the right box

I'M having a bit of an identity crisis. It was highlighted the other evening when I had to fill in quite an extensive form from my local Education Training Board (ETB). I had signed up for an evening art class in the community centre and the form pretty much wanted to know what I'd had for breakfast.

But the question I stumbled over was to do with my 'economic status'. There were lots of options from employee to welfare recipient, including a box to tick if you were retired.

I am currently an under-employed, self-employed person and there didn't seem to be a category for that.

I have been freelancing for a number of years now, but just in the last few months, many of the projects I've been working on have come to an end and funding for others has got to come on stream.

Anyway, it gave me pause for thought when I pondered which box to tick on that form and I realised how much my own identity is bound up with my work. We traditionally think of this as something only men have to deal with as they approach retirement, but for someone like me, and I'm sure for many women, it rings a few bells.

By the time I get my old age pension next year, I will have been working for 50 years. That's a long time to be getting up every morning, doing a day's work and, for a good portion of that time in my case, doing another day's work when I got home to my children.

So I will have 'earned' my retirement when it comes around next year. And indeed many people, when I tell them I'm not doing much paid work at the moment, assume that I am in fact retired. But still, I couldn't tick that box on the form. I'm not ready yet to give up my attachment to the identity that my work gives me.

It wasn't always thus. When I started work all those years ago as a Clerical Assistant in the Civil Service I didn't go around proudly asserting the fact that I spent my days opening bags of pension slips that had been sent in by post offices around the country.

Neither did I value the identity I had when I worked in a hot and humid factory in Queensland chopping steel and winding electrical coils. There wasn't much job satisfaction to be had there I can tell you.

In those days work was simply a means to an end. I had a few bob to buy clothes and make-up and the price of admission to a disco at the weekend. Eventually though I realised that earning my own living gave me independence — the freedom to leave home, get married, rent a place of my own, to live life on my own terms.

But somewhere along the line, work has become more than that. I suspect that, thanks to a return to third level education, the kind of work I have been able to do has given me a lot more job satisfaction than opening bags or chopping steel.

I freely admit that over the years I have loved being able to say when asked that I am 'directing a television series', or 'making a radio documentary', or 'managing an EU project', or 'facilitating a network of older people'. I have loved the work and also the clear identity that has come with it.

In theory I know that being 'retired' does not mean a retirement from life. However I am not sure that in practice I am quite ready for the 'what did you used to do?' question which will inevitably arise in the not too distant future.

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My Career: Stacey Walsh, Business Development Executive, Ag Eisteacht

Building good relationships

Name: Stacey Walsh.

Age: 25.

Lives: Cork city.

Job title: Business Development Executive with Ag Eisteacht.

Salary bracket: Enough to feed my online shopping habit, but not enough to retire just yet!

Education background: I have a BSc in International Development and Food Policy from UCC. When I finished college I completed a night course to get a Diploma in Event Management.

Hobbies: Reading, baking, travelling and spending all my money on clothes!

Describe your job in five words: Exciting, rewarding, varied, interesting, challenging.

Describe yourself in five words: Enthusiastic, positive, ambitious, honest, caring.

Personality needed for this kind of work? I think you need to have a get up and go attitude and be hard-working. The world of sales and marketing is always changing and growing and you need to be able to keep up with that.

There is also an element of creativity with the job as you need to be able to think outside the box for new marketing strategies.

Being able to build good relationships with people and clients is a huge benefit. You need to be able to build rapport with clients so you can form lasting relationships with them.

How long are you doing this job? I joined Ag Eisteacht in February, 2018, so I'm still learning the ropes, but I think I'm settling into my new role already.

How did you get this job? When I was 16 I volunteered with the Hope Foundation in Calcutta, India, and from then I knew I wanted to work in the not-for-profit sector in some way or another. That is why I chose to study International Development and Food Policy in UCC.

During my third year in college, we had the opportunity to travel abroad for placement with an NGO or not-for-profit. I was fortunate enough to get my first choice and travel to Darjeeling, India, with the Edith Wilkins Street Children Foundation for four months. While I was there I got hands-on experience in the office working on a number of different projects and I also had the opportunity to work closely with the children in the Foundation.

While there, myself and two colleagues took on the task of launching the Foundation's social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube and filmed a number of promotional videos for the charity. This is probably what sparked my interest in working in marketing and the business development side of things.

When I finished college it was quite difficult to get a job in the not for profit sector so I took a short term contract with an IT company to keep me afloat. While there I studied Event Management by night. I'm always trying to learn and I felt this course might give me the boost I needed to secure a job in what I wanted.

Not long after this work ended, I secured a job on the sales team with Laya Healthcare and worked there for a year and a half. The experience of working in both customer care and sales with such a large company allowed me to develop so many transferable skills. While I loved working with Laya, I knew it wasn't my 'forever job' and in the new year I started to look for a job in the not for profit sector and get back to what I was passionate about.

When I saw the job advertised with Ag Eisteacht I knew it was something I would be so interested in and when I started to learn more about the organisation I really believed in what they were trying to achieve. So I applied for the job and here I am now.

Do you need particular qualifications or experience? I really believe studying International Development in UCC helped me devel-



Stacey Walsh, Business Development Executive at Ag Eisteacht.

op vital skills that are needed for any role in the not for profit sector.

The event management course also taught me so many transferable skills such as marketing, digital media, communications and organisation, which complemented the skill set I already had from college.

As well as this, I don't think it would have been possible to be in the job I have now without the sales and customer service experience I developed while working with Laya Healthcare.

Describe a day at work: My day usually starts with a cup of tea at my desk while I catch up on my emails. As I look after the social media channels for Ag Eisteacht, my first port of call is always to check Facebook, Twitter, etc and see if we have any notifications, tweets or messages, and respond to them when necessary. Then I would check on the previous day's posts to see how they have performed.

Following on from this, I prepare posts that need to be published on our social media platforms that day. Each day is different so from this point on my days can be quite varied. They can consist of writing evaluations of training that has been completed, inputting data from surveys and gathering data on our training.

I generally spend some time each day checking up on the latest news to see what is going on in our sector and if anything is of relevance I keep note of it.

I write a news piece for our website each week so as soon as I find something of interest I research it and get writing.

Most recently I have taken on the responsibility of some of the summer courses that we run for teachers so I am looking forward to that task as I will be dealing with our clients a lot more.

From time to time, I help with different events that we run or that we are involved in which can be fun.

How many hours do you work a week? 40 hours per week.

What do you wear to work? The dress code is smart business so I usually wear pants and a blouse or dresses with tights.

Is your industry male or female dominated? From what I have experienced so far it is female dominated.

Is your job stressful? How? Rate it on a

scale of 1-10: 6. I think that depends a lot on your own personality. I enjoy my job so, therefore, I don't find it too stressful but I can see how some people might.

Obviously when there are deadlines to meet the pressure can be on but it's all down to how you manage that pressure yourself. I tend to work well under pressure so sometimes that suits me. I find once you prioritise what needs to be done and stay organised things run a lot smoother.

Do you work with others or on your own? I work with quite a small team so we all try and help each other out as much as we can. They are a great bunch and we all work really well together so I feel quite lucky in that regard.

When do you plan to retire or give up working? Well, I'm only 25 so I'm hoping retirement is a long way off yet!

Best bits: There is great variation with my job which I love. Every day of the week can be different. My team are great, we are a small team so it is important to support each other and we all get along really well. I also really believe in the training we provide to frontline workers so it makes my job so much easier.

Worst bits: If there are any, I haven't come across them yet!

Advice to those who want your job? Don't give up, and work hard.

Any other comments? I truly believe that to get the most out of a job, it's really important to build good relationships with colleagues and clients. At the end of the day, whatever job you have, it's all about getting on with people and respecting them. What's lovely is that Ag Eisteacht's work is all about relational training so I am getting great insight into how relationships can affect our mental and physical health and wellbeing. Every day I learn something new so that keeps me interested and excited to think that I could develop my skills further within the not-for-profit sector.

ABOUT AG EISTEACHT

Ag Eisteacht provides evidence-based relational training to frontline practitioners working in the health, education, social, youth and community sectors. The charity offers a range of training including ABLE and ABLE4Trachers. For more information visit <http://www.ageisteacht.com/>