

In her own words: "I am always seeking out new growth and development experiences."

The numbers are staggering. She feeds 1,400 people three times a day, serves up 22,000 meals a week, oversees an annual budget of \$6 million, supervises more than 100 employees and logs a 50- to 60-hour work week. Rachelle Stenhouse does it all simply because she likes to make things happen.

"I love seeing hard work pay off. I'm very results-oriented," says Rachelle, the Acting Senior Residence Manager at Queen's for Sodexo Marriott, an international food service company. "I look for tangible results in terms of budget, sales, safety, customer feedback. I don't care if the result is small — sometimes it's as simple as getting positive feedback from the students about where we placed the cups. It all counts to me."

She thrives on the high pressure and fast pace of her job. Not only does she spearhead the smooth operation of food services for the university's conference centre and Ban Righ Hall — one of the biggest dining halls in North America — but she also keeps tabs on special-event catering, sales and merchandising of baked goods and those 100-plus unionized employees who pose ongoing challenges in terms of training and collective bargaining.

Rachelle got hooked on managing people and resources as an undergraduate, although it was certainly not the career path she had plotted for herself. She arrived in Kingston in 1991, eager to break away from Calgary, where she was born and raised. "I was looking for a small town with lots of history and a campus that really gave the student a rounded experience of university."

She enrolled in the Biology program, with what she calls a "fleeting" notion of becoming a doctor. "I didn't really have a long-term plan — maybe do some teaching with my degree because I was very strong in science." But then two extracurricular experiences intervened to steer her towards a career that surprised everyone, including Rachelle.

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In the second year of her degree, she signed on as the volunteer director of the Queen's Sexual Health Resource Centre. Her duties included recruiting and training volunteers, conducting "teach-ins" on sexuality in local high schools, applying for grants, and networking with community agencies.

"That volunteer work gave me the first real hint of how much I liked to make things happen in an organization. I was directing people and seeing innovative ideas materialize. The job was about a lot more than punching a time clock, and it was very satisfying.

At the same time, she was working part-time for Sodexo Marriott, supervising all liquor-licensed events on campus. The job meant working nights and weekends, but it paid her tuition and, more importantly, supplied her with a further introduction to the world of management.

“I was doing similar work to my current job but on a much smaller scale. It was a great opportunity to practice managerial skills. In fact, in both my paid and volunteer part-time work I was developing skills that I had picked up in my Biology degree, such as researching, writing, public speaking, time management and budgeting — you write a lot of grant proposals in Biology. My biology courses also taught me about food-borne illnesses, which is helpful information in the food services industry!”

Sodexo Marriott obviously liked what they saw. When Rachelle graduated in 1997, she accepted a promotion to Assistant Manager of Operations for Leonard Hall, one of three Queen’s dining halls, and within a year she was hired as Catering Sales Co-ordinator, a position that made her responsible for all special-event catering on campus — anything from a small coffee service for ten to a Chamber of Commerce banquet for 300 people. In September 1999, she was made Operations Manager for Ban Righ Hall, a job that she somehow folds into her seemingly non-stop duties as Acting Senior Residence Manager.

As she builds on one work experience after the next, Rachelle is increasingly conscious of the power of choice in her career. “Chance didn’t get me to where

I am now. It was totally by choice and making the most of this opportunity. It’s important to never close any doors, to never stop learning.” She takes her own advice. Not only is she hooked on The Food Network, reading recipes and cooking, but she also jumps at the

chance for further training. In fact, in her short time with Sodexo she has already bagged one major award for innovation in the catering field.

She admits that she is still learning how to balance

life on and off the job. “Finding that balance isn’t easy for me,” she laughs. “On my days off I still call in to see how everything’s going. I’m very caught up in my work.”

Asked for her best advice for surviving day to day in the work world, she tells this story. “One afternoon I looked at my calendar and saw that the following day I had 1400 people to feed at lunch and dinner, a breakfast to cater for 30 people, a high-end catering event off site, and a focus group dinner in one of the smaller dining rooms. I had four full-time employees off sick — which meant some part-timers would likely call in sick, too — and my General Manager coming for a tour.

“Some people would have been pulling their hair out. But that night I made sure I did a “touch and feel” before I went home — checking the china, inspecting the breakfast prep, making sure some extra cleaning was done. The point is that if you look at tomorrow and think it looks like the worst day of your life, ask yourself what you can do today to make it better. Then do it.” ❖

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