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Business Events Africa magazine did an interview with Robyn D'Alessandro, National Marketing Manager at Gearhouse Group in September 2018. Robyn is inspirational and we thought we'd share her story, if you have not read it already.

"By the time I graduated from University, I was already fairly entrenched at the Market Theatre and progressed from Dresser to Lighting Technician, Assistant Stage Manager and Stage Manager pretty fast.

"I also spent 3 years touring internationally with the first iteration of the iconic protest musical "Sophiatown" and later "Two Weeks in September" - not much sleep, but what fantastic exposure to international standards and methodology for a technical youngster in some 30 different theatres around the world" she said.

How do you see the business events industry in South Africa?

The event industry is very strong and the core has maintained despite the economic downturn, particularly on the business events side of things. It has been a rough couple of years during which we have had to find creative ways of delivering on much higher expectations with significantly lower budgets.

We have seen a definite increase in planned events right from the start of 2018, so I am hoping we have turned the corner and that the industry will continue to grow along with business confidence in the country

Where did you grow up?

I was born and grew up in Durban, went to Berea Girls High. Left Durban 2 days after I matriculated to study a Fine Arts degree at Wits. I majored in English and Art History and graduated in 1984.

Where did you start your career?

I entered University on bursaries and started working nights at the Market theatre as a dresser as a means of paying the shortfall.



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Working at the Market Theatre under Mannie Manim was a fantastic foundation for anyone in the events industry. In 1989, I moved down to Durban to take on the role of Musicals Stage Manager at the Playhouse theatre - it was a lovely couple of years living near the rest of my family again and where I met my husband, Gary, an actor who was part of the Loft Theatre at the time.

When the newly revamped Civic Theatre (now Joburg Theatre) opened with the promise of all new stage equipment and "state of the art" mechanised stages, I was probably the first applicant - I was that keen.

I started as Head of the Stage-Management department in a consultative role several months before the building opened in 1992 and stayed until 1997.

How did you get involved with Gearhouse?

I had crossed paths with Ofer Lapid on and off since the early days of Johnny Clegg at the Market Theatre, watching with interest as he brought the first containers of equipment into the country and started trading as Lighting Unlimited.

I met him again at the Civic when he was working in one of the venues, came to have a look at his company's operation in Johannesburg and the rest, as they say, is history.

I started with Lighting Unlimited in 1997 and have been with the company as it grew. 21 years on, I have explored many different roles and learnt inestimable amounts along the way.

What has been the biggest change you have seen in this sector?

The sector has matured over this time. Technicians have gone from being "cowboys" in what was viewed as a glamorous industry to being very self-regulated in terms of safety, quality standards, working conditions and respect for our client's needs.

What role does your family play in your life?? I am married to Gary who runs a corporate wear and display materials company. My family are truly my everything. I have a 17-year-old daughter named Juno and an 18-year-old son Leo, both of whom are creative, artistic performers.



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Do you have any hobbies?

I am an artist, sculptor and painter.

What do you do for leisure?

I always have some sort of project on the go. Nothing makes me happier than a hands-on project like digging up and repaving the driveway or sanding down a wooden door.

What is your secret to success?

Well my family sum me up as “determined” and I suppose that is it really. I never give up, I will keep at the challenge until I work out how to accomplish it.

What has been your biggest challenge in this sector?

Being a woman in a male dominated industry in the early days - not that it has ever been discouraging, it just meant that sometimes I needed to double my efforts to be taken seriously.

What is your pet hate?

Laziness, buck passing and self-pity. There is no time for that.

What is the most memorable place you have ever been to, and why?

Indonesia, Bali - a veritable feast for the senses and heaven for a hedonist with on-the-beach massages,



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warm waters and fragrant food at every street stall.

What advice do you have for anyone starting out in this industry and hoping to follow in your footsteps?

If you love this industry go for it. If not, beat a hasty retreat. It's not for sissies so you will need plenty of passion and stamina to see you through.

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