

Jude Kelly OBE: Project Manager Extraordinaire

When Jude Kelly joined us at our recent ‘Ideas into Action’ Masterclass at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, she was on her lunch break from rehearsals as director of The Wizard of Oz at the Royal Festival Hall on London’s South Bank. She took time out from just one of many projects and roles she is juggling as part of her extraordinary career.

by Alison Duffy



Liverpool-born mother of two, Jude is a celebrated theatre director and producer and is currently Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre. She is also responsible for the creation of METAL, an experimental artistic space in Southend-on-Sea, she is Chair of Culture, Ceremonies and Education for the 2012 London Olympics and is Vice-Chair of the Government’s National Committee on Creative and Cultural Education and represents Britain on cultural matters for UNESCO.

We were delighted that she agreed to include us in her busy schedule and whilst eating her lunch (still juggling), she gave us a brief but powerful insight into her working methods and her personal qualities that make her such an influential presence in the arts world today.

When faced with a large-scale project, Jude explained how she applies working methods for small tasks directly to the larger tasks to help keep things in perspective. ‘Small things are often the way to stop going at big things in the wrong way’, she told us. As Brind Waldron, an experienced interim project manager, related afterwards: ‘Her beliefs operate on a large scale yet as in Samuel Johnson’s parlance, the “universal” can only be reached from the “particular”.’

Working with teams

Jude is clearly highly experienced in bringing creative teams together and she feels that ‘casting is a great deal of the effort’. Paul Trueman, senior FMCG innovation and marketing professional,

Just do it!

Jude demonstrated that she takes calculated risks too, suggesting to those in the room that they should try to avoid always trying to understand – just do it! It’s acceptable not to do it perfectly because if you test early and fail early you can re-test early too.

With regard to buy-in from key people, she believes in getting them on-board during the developmental stages of a project, rather than later when they are needed to make big decisions, such as those relating to investment.

Clare Wright, FMCG marketing/innovation director, felt that Jude’s opinion that improvisation is crucial suggested that you don’t always have to be in control and should actually ‘make space for a wild garden.’

Jude is a great example to people who run multiple projects. Her passion and focus make her an excellent role model. ‘Jude demonstrated an ability to juggle more in reality than we would feel able if we wrote it down,’ Paul Trueman, told us afterwards.

Keep life in perspective

Her ability to keep life in perspective and maintain a sense of balance is coupled with an awareness that ‘big projects become toxic’ resulting in a need to find down time or time away at the end of them. Paul Trueman relates to this too: ‘Often, we run straight from one project to another without closing, celebrating and taking a breath.’

*“right people, right bus,
right map makes for a
better journey”*

The masterclass was attended by project managers from many different sectors and according to the feedback we received following the event, they all took away with them some extremely powerful, practical pointers to apply not only in their day jobs but also to their lives in general.

identified with this. Relating to his own working environment, he said ‘if you get the brief scoped tightly, involve the right people, with the right method of working and clear vision, the end result will be better – right people, right bus, right map makes for a better journey.’

Jude struck a chord with all of the project managers in the room. An engaging, inspiring communicator and fast thinker, 'she motivated me to go for dreams', enthused, talented business coach and facilitator, Ruth Grodek.

Commenting on her composed, measured and calm personality, Philip Bird, actor and coach said 'She comes across as being very busy, without appearing manic or driven.' Jude's grounded, down-to-earth nature came across well and she obviously possesses a great deal of emotional intelligence. Philip felt she was 'a great example of what can be done, and done with integrity, if one is clear and energetic enough. 'Jude clearly knows what she wants but is prepared to listen and co-operate with people in order to get there,' said Philip.

Her strong leadership ability, unremitting drive and sense of purpose are carefully

project manager and she had a profound impact on the group.

We held our masterclass at a truly special and appropriate place. Sam Wanamaker made the project to re-build Shakespeare's Globe on Bankside in Southwark his life's work. He too possessed many of the ideal project manager qualities: he was driven, committed, willing to take a risk. He involved influential people in the early, developmental stages, when the idea seemed absurd. He was passionate and unrelenting. It was such a shame that he didn't live to see what a vibrant and inspiring place the end result has become – or to share the inspiring words of Jude Kelly.

“Her strong leadership ability, unremitting drive and sense of purpose are carefully balanced by her naturally warm, very real, human qualities...”

balanced by her naturally warm, very real, human qualities and Julia Bindman, facilitator and project manager, summarised this as follows. 'She defied the assumption that high-achievers are super-human, whilst exhibiting extraordinary self-confidence and a willingness every so often to cut back to zero – to step out of the kitchen.' An impressive manager of time, adept at juggling multiple priorities, yet brave enough to take a chance, she prompted Julia to comment, 'I wonder how many people have the confidence to have nothing on the go – and how many working worlds would be forgiving enough to let such people back in.'

The ideal project manager

We only shared forty-five minutes of Jude's time, but she demonstrated that she possesses many of the qualities of the ideal