

My retail life: Katharine Poulter, Commercial director, Dobbies Garden Centres

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Katharine Poulter, Commercial director at Dobbies Garden Centres, tells Retail Week about her life working in retail.

What was your first job in retailing?

Playing shops at the age of three. By 16, I was a Saturday girl at Ratners. I was the top sales performer every week.

Which retail company do you admire most and why?

Ikea. It is brave, bold and a trailblazer for its time.

What is the trait you least like in yourself and why?

I'm intolerant of negativity. Although I've honed ways to give people confidence, I still get secretly frustrated.

Which retailer have you learnt the most from?

Marks & Spencer. I joined the graduate training programme in the merchandising team. I believe its learning programme is one of the best in the world.

What advice would you give someone starting out in retail?

Know your own mind, and you need emotional intelligence. Know your customer, know your brand, know your strategy and be fearless in your decisions.

What keeps you awake at night?

We've got ambitious growth plans for Dobbies, and that creates so many amazing opportunities. I love the buzz of our growing business – it just happens that my brain buzzes with ideas at 3am.

What's the most satisfying part of your job?

Working with so many passionate and positive people. I love it when people 'get it' and jump on board.

What's your proudest achievement?

I'm glad to say that I go to work and it makes me happy.

What job would you have done if you hadn't become a retailer?

I've always been a retailer. I used to sell ingredients from our cupboard to my mother so she could bake a cake. But, at age 14, maybe a fighter pilot or psychiatrist.

What's your favourite shop and why?

Anthropologie. It's the zeitgeist of retail right now.

What was your last purchase?

I am guilty of a clothing spree at Harvey Nichols in Edinburgh.