

Melissa Wallbank

Company **Wilson Vale** / Job Title **Managing Director**



When I finished university, I was presented with a couple of job opportunities in different sectors, one of which was with Wilson Vale. After meeting with Andrew and Carolyne, the founders of the company, I knew it was the right fit for me. It had a family feel, and

even though the company was still very small and in its infancy at the time, I knew it was a quality operation that was going to go far.

Over the last 21 years I've worked my way up through finance roles – the company supported both my Chartered Accounting qualification and my journey to the position of Finance Director which I held for eight years. Last summer, I was promoted to Managing Director, and I'm as enthused by the work now as I was when I first joined.

Hospitality is such an exciting sector, and I love how everyone is encouraged to spend time in the business with the operators and teams. We have grown so much over my time here, from 11 contracts when I started to running 86 contracts across the UK.

What impact have role models had on your own life and career?

Carolyne Vale, who is one of the founders of the company, has been somebody that I've looked up to for the whole time I've been here. She's somebody who has constant drive and attention to detail. She's somebody who takes the time to understand those little details about people so she'll still know all the names of people that work at sites and things about them. She has a phenomenal work ethic and sharp business vision.

What advice would you give to women who are looking to build a career in HTL?

Be open-minded – no two days are ever the same.

That's true of rougher and smoother times. And be ambitious. I think a lot of people perhaps simply find themselves in the sector, but actually, it should be a career destination because there is so much happening and so much variety. It's a vibrant sector to be working in.

What do you think are the main roadblocks to inclusion in HTL? How can we overcome them?

In the hospitality sector, childcare tends to be one of the barriers we repeatedly see. I do think this is where contract catering has big advantages within the sector because we do have regular hours unlike hotels and restaurants, but also offering more flexibility is really important. I also believe



Quickfire

What is the most interesting thing you've read, watched or heard recently?

I read that the concept of hospitality dates back to the ancient Greeks' concept of generosity and courtesy to strangers, which has been the bedrock of an industry that now nets an annual \$3.5 trillion globally.

If you weren't working in HTL, what would you be doing?

Something entrepreneurial where I was managing my own business, but it would have to be food-related in some way.

What one thing are you most excited about for the future of your sector?

I'm excited to see how contract catering develops as a real welfare benefit, not only offering customers nutritional wellbeing but increasingly supporting broader wellbeing.

that seeing others progress is key, whether from a gender or ethnicity perspective.

What does being a Woman to Watch in HTL mean to you?

It's a huge honour because it's a large sector, so to be recognised is something I'm very proud of. I do feel a

responsibility, that I'm happy to take, in terms of being an inspiration, hopefully. There are some meetings where I'm the only female in the room. So I think this is an important moment in my career where I can sit back and reflect on the things I've achieved, but also look at everything I'd still like to achieve.