

A day in the Life of Fraser Allan – CEO of LINLEY

In order to appreciate the challenges of a day in my life at LINLEY, it is probably helpful to understand a little about the business and why I joined.

I joined LINLEY over two years ago now, because of two very important factors. It is a very small business and certainly the smallest I have led, but firstly, it has a profile totally disproportionate to its size and secondly it is positioned right at the top of its field. It doesn't get any better than this. These two characteristics are incredibly valuable and would be the envy of many much larger brands. Without knowing anything else about the business I was confident that there was huge potential to unlock.

The more I scratched the surface however the more excited I became, as I discovered that underneath this small but perfectly formed brand were actually five different businesses. The business is known world wide for its bespoke furniture which it sells to domestic and international customers, but it also has a full interior design service and a growing commercial interior design business. Last year we completed ten suites in Claridges and have refurbished the restaurants at the Sloane Club and the Goring Hotel. In addition the business has three retail businesses within it which are respectively focussed on furniture, a great range of upholstery and finally gifts, the latter in fact being the largest part of the retail side of the business—ranging from photo frames to jewellery boxes.

Leading the development of such a small business on the one hand should be relatively straight forward with only two stores and 44 associates, but it has actually been extremely challenging. I always say that my role is predominately managing people, associates, shareholders, suppliers and customers. This is the real test and the key issue is to be able to deal with the absolute minutia of detail but at the same time always to think in terms of the overall goal and strategy of the business and take every decision in this context. I have learned that managing a small business makes you very accountable for every decision that you take. You are in a live environment and when you direct someone to do something, by and large it happens very quickly. In a previous role in Laura Ashley I had direct responsibility for 100 people in 6 locations and we had 500 stores in 20 countries, but if you took a decision and then reflected a couple of weeks later, you were usually able to reverse it as it had not yet happened. In a small environment, the pace is much faster and you are very accountable for everything you decide. I have found this to be the greatest challenge in this environment.

At LINLEY this is even more challenging than elsewhere, as everything we do attracts a disproportionate amount of attention and in many cases we have to act very much like a large high profile business. In addition the diversity of what we do and the different dynamics of each business really provides intellectual stimulation.

The key strength of the business is in the wealth of talent here and a young and dynamic environment. Our values are excellence, enthusiasm and people and of all of these, people are always at the forefront of my mind. A day in my life at LINLEY consists of meeting people, directing people, counselling people, talking to people and entertaining people. It's very rewarding!