

Student Enquirer

Edition: 2

In our second edition of the Student Enquirer, we take a trip out of San Francisco to hear about life working for events at a Napa Winery, and then down to San Jose, to learn from a professor who has seen it all! Got a topic or a profession you would like to learn more about? Email Samantha Shaw at sshaw@bbwinternational.com. Please check the [website](#) for future editions.

Layla Kajer



Company: Alpha Omega Winery

Title: Director of Business Development

Job Description: Responsible for outreach to greater Bay Area companies to create partnerships, packages, and events as well as increase brand awareness in the community.

How did you get started in the industry? Being a longtime wine lover and collector, I got into the wine industry to follow my passion. After working many years in Corporate America, I wanted to take a risk and try my hand in the wine business.

What areas other areas of the industry have you worked in? Prior to working in the wine industry, I was working in financial services doing customer experience and business growth strategy. In that role, I assisted with many company and incentive events.

What attracted you to your current role? The Business Development role seemed like a perfect fit and a great way for me to use my existing skill set in an entirely new environment. It's the perfect combination of marketing, strategy, outreach, and event planning. I have been there 5 months.

What do you love about your job? I get to talk about wine every day! The goal of my job is to make people happy by putting together great wine country experiences and events to ensure our guests have a relaxed, educational, and enjoyable time – what could be better than that!

What keeps you up late at night about your work? I am always looking at the big picture and wondering how I can help this company grow in a manageable and sustainable way. This is something that constantly churns in my head and definitely has kept me up a few nights.

What do you wish someone had told you before you started in the industry? Be flexible and strive for excellence but still give yourself permission to make mistakes.

What are employers looking for in candidates for this type of position? Someone with the ability to think on your feet, work at a very fast pace, and be able to juggle multiple things. Attitude is everything in this industry – we are being pulled in many directions and often times have to be the voice of reason in front of clients and guests so the willingness to be calm, organized and remain focused on providing the best experience for our guests is a must.

What advice do you have for students trying to get a job? Forget about the job title when interviewing and focus on the skills you want to learn in a job – be looking two or three steps down your career path to ensure you're building a skill-set that sets you up for success and leads you in the direction you want to go.

Dr. Kate Sullivan



Company: Department of Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism Management, San Jose State University.

Title: Professor.

Job Description: Research, teaching and service in the area of meeting, event and tradeshow management.

How did you get started in the industry? I grew up in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and always was involved as a performer, be it tap dancer, athlete, or community volunteer. My large family had many celebrations which I helped plan. I also worked as a server and event planner at a major resort. This led me to an interest in corporate recreation and eventually a Masters and PhD in Leisure Studies from the University of Illinois.

What areas other areas of the industry have you worked in? I have worked in public recreation, hotel and resorts, tennis, festival management, and mega event planning.

What attracted you to your current role? My undergraduate degree was from the University of Pittsburgh in Education and I have also taught gifted children from ages 6 to 12. I chose this career, certainly not for the salary, but for the summers off and the independence of thought, time, and structure. I also wanted to start a family.

How long have you held this position? I have been at San Jose State 23 years and 3 years at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

What do you love about your job? Meeting and event management as well as hospitality mgt. is such a 'sky's-the-limit' field! I particularly love the students because here in Silicon Valley, we draw some of the most dynamic, experienced students who work and go to school and that makes for an exciting classroom experience. I also love hearing from our alumni and watch how successful they become with this degree.

What keeps you up late at night about your work? Besides grading papers (I teach 4 classes with 50 or more students each semester) and developing power points and notes for each lecture, I worry about budget cuts. I am one of the founding "mothers" of this hospitality degree and feel very protective of it, its majors and its alumni. Education is changing its formula and how we learn is evolving rapidly. I want to keep up and keep my students cutting edge.

What do you wish someone had told you before you started in the industry? If you enter higher education, don't plan on owning a Ferrari, although I know one of my alums will come back and buy me one! No, seriously, I love travel writing and although I have traveled the globe, I would have supplemented my income with writing articles about places I've visited. I also wish I had gotten started earlier in the virtual world of meeting and event planning.

What are employers looking for in candidates for this type of position? I can answer this in two ways. If you want to teach in this industry, get a Masters Degree or Ph.D. and couple that with work experience. You have to like evaluating information and listening to others ideas as well as putting forth your own (difficult to do these days of electronic communication). As far as meeting management, I believe employers are looking for someone who presents them-self with confidence and someone willing to learn as well as lead. Understanding how to conduct a meeting virtually or as a hybrid component of the business is essential. I also believe that data analysis and revenue management will be key skills for future managers in this industry.



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What advice do you have for students trying to get a job? Ask yourself if you will see it as a job or as meaningful work! Sometimes you have to start out with a job, get a paycheck, then move into your more passionate areas of work. I also think too many students see minimum requirements as a deterrent to applying for a position, especially if they don't have experience. Don't underestimate yourself, build your resume, and throw your hat in the ring! Hospitality degrees are counting for more and more these days. Also, volunteer, do informational interviews with people you admire in the field of choice, and if you're in a job you don't like, make a change! Keep throwing out lines till you catch the most nutritious fish! If you are headed in the direction of meeting and event planning, I would also buy a pair of Raybans, because the future continues to be bright and shining for this career!

Questions or comments about *The Student Enquirer*?
Email Samantha Shaw at sshaw@bbwinternational.com

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