

SPOTLIGHT ON TAMARA COOK

DIRECTOR & FOUNDER,
KNOWN ASSOCIATES GROUP, PERTH



Kenyan-born Australian and mother of two First Nations children, Tamara started out wanting to throw events that meant something. To give back to the community. To strengthen inclusivity in the sector, support Indigenous generations to come, and have fun doing it. Today, she's the director and founder of Known Associates Events and CEO of Known Associates Australia, leading with kindness and authenticity, and prioritising people over profit to create good vibes all round.

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Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

Our primary focus is managing premium corporate events and creating unique opportunities for people to make meaningful connections with colleagues, peers, communities, brands and causes. I run two companies, and with my team of six event managers we bring together all the magic ingredients to deliver the most immersive and memorable in-person experiences, from charity balls and awards nights to marketing activations and brand launches. We also offer graphic design, branding and communications strategies.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

As a kid, I wanted to be a singer. Although that was just a pipedream because I can't actually sing! I was a good student in high school and loved writing but had no idea what I wanted to do when I graduated. I had a part-time job at Coles when I was 15, and that really sparked my passion for customer service. I loved talking to people, so I knew I wanted a role where I'd get to meet new people every day. Following high school, I found my way into hospitality and landed a front-of-house job as commissionaire at the then brand new Rydges Hotel. After about a year, I made my way up to Assistant Concierge and then Head Concierge, managing a team of 14 staff. I'd really found my home in hospitality.

So, how did you get into event management?

During my six years as Head Concierge, I set up the social club for the hotel staff, started writing the monthly staff newsletter and established the Concierge Ball that brought together the concierge departments of Perth's major Perth hotels and all our suppliers. So that was my first dabble in event management. Then, after a short contract on a Caribbean cruise liner, I got stuck into studying a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Writing and Communications at ECU with my sights firmly set on getting into event management. The first job I landed after finishing uni was as the Dockers' Events Co-ordinator. That was an amazing training ground, managing over 120 events a year.

How would you describe yourself?

Growing up sporting my absent father's dark skin in Australia, and living with my mother's Caucasian, blonde-haired, blue-eyed family, I had everyone at school asking me where I was from, and that put an early chip on my shoulder. But as an adult, when I finally got to meet my Kenyan father and family, I realised that my identity wasn't shaped by how I look, or the pigeonholes others wanted to put me in. It gave me the strength to brush that chip off my shoulder, grow in

confidence, and truly understand that I had the power to define who I was and what my destiny would be.

I'm a genuine people-lover, networker and connector who likes nothing more than hearing people's stories and putting great attention to detail into creating event experiences that are truly meaningful. And coming from a long line of teachers, I also have a real passion for sharing and passing on the knowledge I've gained.

What do you love most about the industry?

I really value the opportunities to provide human connection, change lives and create long-lasting benefits for the community. By far my favourite event was the inaugural Black Diamond Ball for Lifeline WA. It was spectacular and, most importantly, it was full of heart and instilled hope for the people serviced by Lifeline WA.

What's the best part of your job?

In live event management, you only get one chance to make it absolutely perfect, so it's highly stressful. I thrive in those situations, and the elation that follows when it all goes to plan – our client is ecstatic, everyone in the room has had a ball, made new connections and left with amazing memories – that's the best feeling. Matched only by the sense of pride I get from seeing my team really grow in confidence and progress their own careers.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Be prepared to work as hard as you play, and understand that it's not all glitz. There's a lot of gritty hard work that goes on behind the scenes to perfect every little detail and create all the glamour you see on the outside. You need a sharp attention to detail, the determination to get as much experience as you can, and the strength to remain unflustered. I always say to my team, be a duck. Even when you're paddling like crazy, remain perfectly calm on the surface!

And what's next for you?

We're growing at a fast pace – live events are thriving! We're currently working on our first event outside WA, taking the team interstate. We've also just appointed our first Indigenous intern as part of our mentoring, training and placement program. We really want to showcase and support the opportunities that Indigenous people and Indigenous-owned and run businesses have in the events space.

Connect with Tamara on LinkedIn

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