

In a previous life, we ...

People from all sorts of working backgrounds find themselves in estate agency. Jenny Barlass talks to three who work for one London agent

Question: What do a cruise ship entertainment director, an aromatherapist and an actress all have in common?
Answer: They all chucked in their jobs to work for London estate agent Dexters.

Which just goes to show that you don't always need to have a background in sales or lettings to be a success in property. In fact, of Dexters' 250 staff, some 80% have come from other backgrounds.

"The transition is often seamless, as many of the skills people acquire while working in other fields is exactly what we're looking for here at Dexters," says Sarah Sargeant, the agent's personnel and recruitment manager.

Singer and dancer

Ross Howard is living proof. He was a P&O entertainments director running a busy department keeping 2,000 cruise passengers entertained, for 15 years. "I started as a singer and dancer and worked my way up to cruise director.

"I had a staff of 100 people including star entertainers, singers, dancers, musicians and lecturers. I had to draw up all the entertainment events including shows, cinema screenings, lectures from specialists and music concerts. There was a huge amount of organisation and the devil was in the detail.

"I loved the performing but I also loved dealing with the passengers – providing a top-class service and putting a smile on people's faces. Passengers would come up to me at the end of the day and say: 'You've made my cruise!' That made it all worthwhile for me."

Today Howard is the branch manager of Dexters' busy Chiswick High Road office, running

a team of 17 people selling and letting over 240 properties a year.

"I've been with Dexters for four years now and this job requires the same attention to detail and passion for wanting to deliver your absolute best to customers all the time. It's about giving people what they want, which in my job means selling their property with skill and efficiency, and of course getting them the best price.

"When I started at Dexters I had no training, but they recognised that I had a natural tendency to want to help people and deliver the sort of service I would like if I was selling my home. Plus they could see I was extremely organised."

Celebrity clients

Ruth Mason was a successful aromatherapist with a celebrity client list before she joined Dexters six years ago. "I loved it but the pay wasn't regular enough and I wanted to work somewhere where I would have career progression," says Ruth.

"When I went to see Dexters my only office skills were typing – although I couldn't even use a PC. But they could see I was a good self-starter and a hard worker. I started as a junior administrator and have been steadily promoted. I'm now facilities manager, responsible for new offices and maintenance of our existing ones. I'm also training to be the company's health and safety officer.

"It's been a very busy six years but I've worked hard and enjoyed it. It's been a great two-way street as I've learnt a lot from the company and been trained by them, but they've benefited from my hard work and drive too."

Acting since six

Natalie Davies, a Dexters' director who works at the Hampton office, acted since the age of six

before embarking on a career in property.

She did everything from extras work in films like the Kray Twins, to those old actors' chestnuts *The Bill* and *Casualty*, as well as over 30 commercials. "I really loved it and only quit because I had a change in personal circumstances and needed to get a nine to five job," says Natalie.

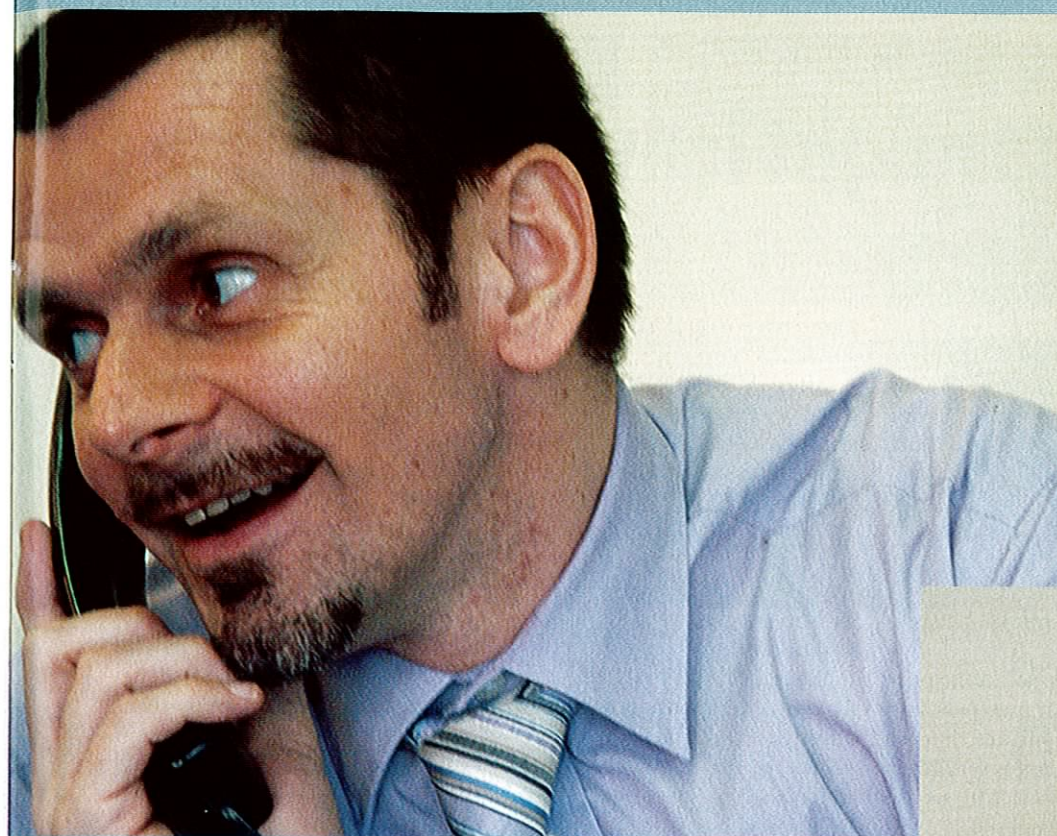
"I didn't feel a lack of training in the industry was a problem when I started in estate agency: in fact it was my acting training which helped me get on. It gave me the confidence to get up in front of people and present my ideas and thoughts coherently, and to relate to a wide variety of people.

"So whether it's a valuation on a million pound mansion or giving selling advice to someone who hasn't moved in years, I'd like to think I deliver the same level of service and care."

Andy Shepherd, Dexters' MD, says that in fact an estate agency background isn't the first thing the company looks for when recruiting. "We tend not to recruit people from other agents very often, because in our experience they find it difficult to adapt to the unique way we do things in this company, with our high standards of customer care.

"We like to coach people to work to Dexters' best practices. That way, we can be sure our customers are getting the very highest levels of customer service."

***If you know any ex-actors or cruise directors who would just love to become estate agents, get them to call Dexters' recruitment hotline on 020 8614 1245. And if YOU had an unconventional working background before you went into estate agency, do tell the Editor. Email rosalind.renshaw@talbothays.co.uk**



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"So whether it's a valuation on a million pound mansion or giving selling advice to someone who hasn't moved in years, I deliver the same level of service and care" - Natalie Davies, right



"It's been a busy six years but I've worked hard and enjoyed it. It's been a great two-way street as I've learnt a lot from the company and been trained by them, but they've benefited from my hard work and drive too" - Ruth Mason, left