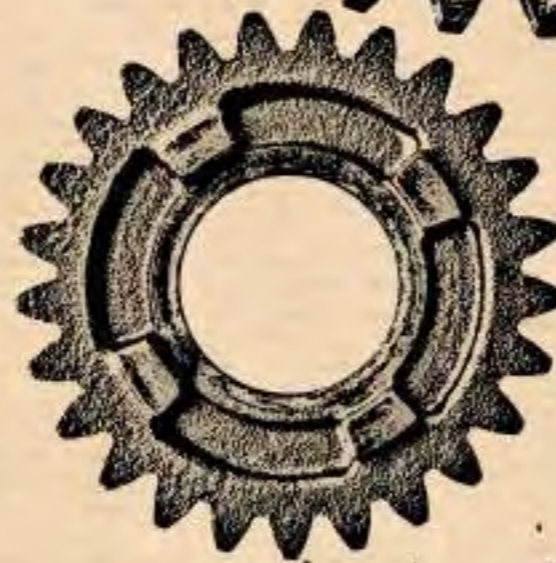
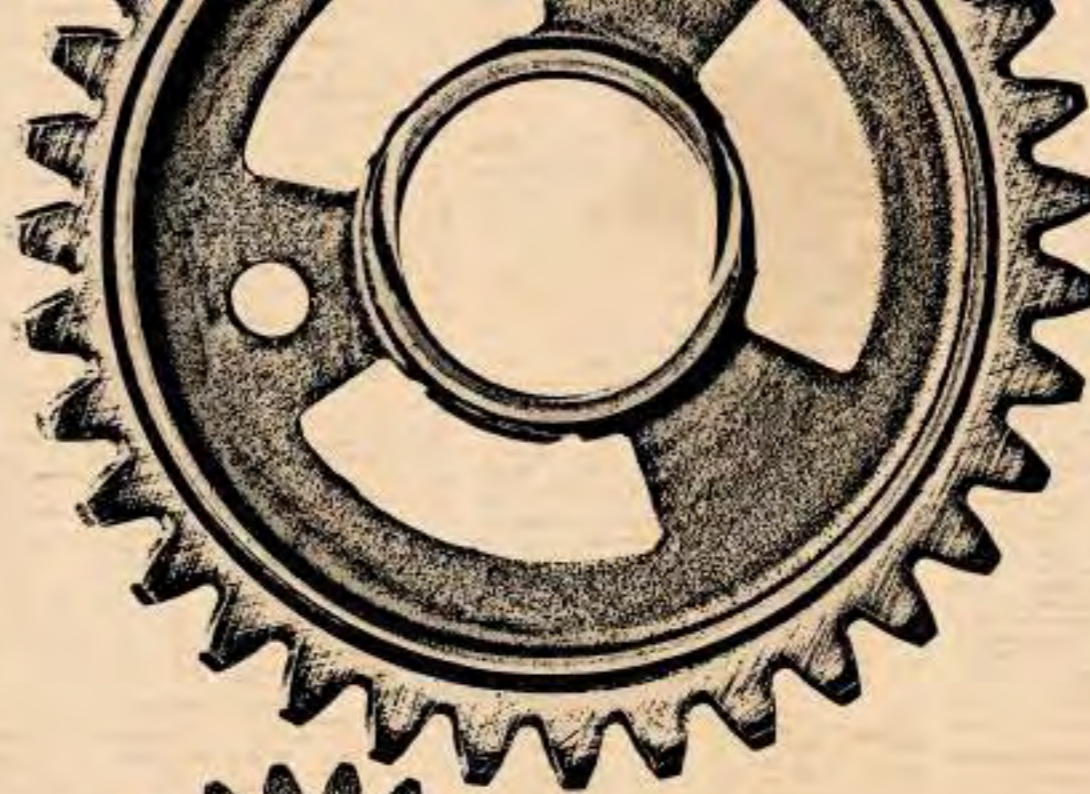


# #AGAINST

# CONVENTION

ACTS OF REBELLION ARE OFTEN SEEN IN HINDSIGHT AS HAVING BROUGHT ABOUT MUCH-NEEDED CHANGE. BUT IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO PUSH AGAINST THE COMMON PATH OF TRAVEL. AUTHOR AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR SAM CONNIFF WILL CLOSE THE 2020 IWFM CONFERENCE BY TALKING ABOUT THE ISSUE - BUT HERE, BRADFORD KEEN SPEAKS TO SOME FM REBELS ABOUT HOW ANTAGONISING THE NORMS HAS LED TO SUCCESS



**T**he Israeli military calls it the '10th man'. Civilians refer to playing 'devil's advocate.' But the underlying principle is the same: be the one in the room to interrogate group thinking, thereby challenging prevailing practices and accepted conventions.

So who are rebels in the context of workplace and facilities management? They are the people, argues Andrew Hulbert, managing director of Pareto FM, who "go against the grain, and often against the will of their peers, to bring about change in something they believe is right".

This is so even when other parties fail to perceive the rebels' beliefs or acts in a positive light.

For Hulbert, one such 'act of rebellion' has been to focus purposefully on creating gender balance in his organisation - despite thinking it would be unpopular among some in the industry.

It has paid off. Pareto FM recently won a contract with The Wing - a network of work and community

spaces designed for women - that depended on providing an all-women team to a new client entering the UK market.

"I was immediately drawn to the challenge," Hulbert says. "We knew the contract would work because we already have so many exceptional women in our management, engineering and FM operative teams that could rise to this challenge immediately. The culture of how we delivered just fit perfectly with the vision of the client and it's been one of the more successful contracts to date."

But even a confident rebel needs assurances. In this case, Hulbert sought guidance on gender identity. "We work so hard within Pareto to ensure we are inclusive to the LGBT+ community and didn't want a contract whereby non-binary or trans members of our team were excluded. The client had such a progressive attitude to this area, it was so refreshing to experience."

### Do what is right

Rebellion in FM requires doing what others aren't even considering, says Martin Stead, managing director of Sewell Facilities Management. He adds that it's "usually driven by good intention but also to constructively impact on your business".

Stead had both good intentions and business outcomes on his mind when he joined with Mencap to form Abilities in Facilities, a programme that trains and prepares adults with learning disabilities for the job market. Sewell FM also employs several graduates from the programme. ▶

"THERE IS A HIGHER LIKELIHOOD OF REBELLION FOR THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO THE SECTOR"





ANDREW HULBERT,  
at Pareto FM



LAURA BIRNBAUM,  
at LFB



GARY CODLING,  
at Vinci Facilities



MARTIN STEAD,  
at Sewell FM

Abilities in Facilities was so impactful that it earned Sewell FM the 2018 IWFM award in the Impact on Society category.

"It's less about being sure that it would work and more about making a logical decision based on all the information in front of you," says Stead. "I'm a big advocate of trying something and, if it doesn't work, trying something else. If you are going to fail, then fail quickly."

Rebels should also act for the greater good, says Gary Codling, performance director at Vinci Facilities. This is why he's committed to democratising work and giving people a voice and choice about how the work they do is designed.

But Codling has also focused on challenging the client-provider relationship. He says there's a tendency for organisations to "fall into the trap of just doing the same as everybody else... rather than actually thinking about what the right things to do are and what really matters."

Codling adopted lean enterprise processes – specifically Hoshin Kanri. The approach is grounded in the belief that people perform best when they have a purpose and understand why what they're doing is important to their organisation. Based on Hoshin Kanri, Vinci

Facilities formed VMOST – Vision Mission Objectives Strategies Tactics – to better align the operational relationship between client and contractor and define mutually advantageous outcomes through collaboration.

#### Reluctant rebels

Laura Birnbaum, now head of property at London Fire Brigade, won the IWFM (then BIFM) Manager of the Year award in 2018. She was recognised for developing the newly organised FM department and raising the function's profile to take on strategic significance at Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Services, where she was deputy director.

Accepting the title of rebel reluctantly, Birnbaum believes in questioning the status quo and challenging entrenched mindsets. On a micro level, she says people can ask: "Why am I doing it this way? And is this the optimal way to do it or is there another way? Can I borrow from someone else to learn to do it better?"

"Questioning underpins rebellion. And in certain organisations where there might be a strong hierarchy or established way of doing things, it's really important that senior leaders encourage that micro-level analysis," Birnbaum explains. As long as the acts of rebellion don't cause conflict or inhibit progress, it should be encouraged, she adds.

There is always an opportunity to dig a little deeper into motives behind action. Birnbaum says: "When you do property in a corporate environment, like I do, you're a back-office function. The business will give you a requirement – the courtroom needs to be this size or the fire engine needs to go there – and expect you to just enable what they do," she says.

But questioning why can help FM to be at the forefront of decision-making rather than being mere recipients of a request. The property function can challenge operational requirements so that stakeholders get the property or workplace they need.

#### Rebel personalities

Rebels can be unpopular so they need self-confidence, drive and bravery. Rebellious acts don't always win friends.

"It can be a lonely time and there must be an inner strength to push forward with what the individual believes is right," says Hulbert. "They do not always have the backing of others and are often seen as disruptive. The individual knows they may face a backlash, which they may need to deal with alone. That deep-seated self-belief in the cause is critical at times when others will be against you."

Humility is also vital.

Codling says: "If you don't have a true sense of your own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, you won't surround yourself with people that are better than you. You won't find the good counsel that you need to encourage you were when you really need to be encouraged and to caution you when you need to be cautious."

But the rebellious FM also needs to appraise when rebellion is justified. "You need confidence and emotional intelligence because challenging the status quo can

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#### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**THEME:** Rebellious Acts of Positive Change

**SPEAKER:** Sam Conniff

**LOCATION:** Premium Suite, Etc Venues, St Paul's Cathedral

**TIME:** 16.30-17.15

**TICKETS:** [www.iwfmconference.org](http://www.iwfmconference.org)

**TOPIC:** Rebellious acts of positive change

● Turbulence, disruption, complexity, ambiguity, fragmentation. Do we need neat strategies to deal with this disruption or simply a little more audacity? History is filled with countless rebels – and we have seen plenty on the main stage in 2019. What can be learned from small but rebellious acts of positive change?

● A bit about Conniff: He ran nightclubs and managed bands in his teens, set up a content agency and ethical marketing firm in his 20s. He's worked in publishing and television, has written a best-selling book, *Be More Pirate, Or How To Take On The World And Win*. He currently consults to major brands.

create a scenario of conflict and you need to enable others to see your rebellion positively," Birnbaum says.

Stead thinks similarly: rebels need to calculate the risk before taking action. "This takes quite an analytical person who can consider every outcome and make a brave decision that despite a level of residual risk know it's still the right thing to do."

Charm helps a rebel's cause too, Birnbaum says. But its effects are limited. "You will need an organisation and leadership function that are supportive of that way of working and sees challenge as positive rather than disruptive or negative... Balance your challenge

and rebelliousness with a genuine desire to collaborate, cooperate and support. Too much of either is detrimental."

#### The profession's support of rebels

Rebellion is a tough task in FM with its tight margins and aversion to risk. It's even harder if working for a large FM service provider, contends Hulbert. Rebels are hindered by restrictive processes that inhibit creativity. "You must follow the procedure or you'll potentially face disciplinary consequences," he says. There is greater freedom to rebel when working within an SME as there's often "a much more entrepreneurial outlook on how to deliver services, which lends itself to flexibility and driving through creative change".

But there are practical inhibitions to rebellion too. Birnbaum says there is a "bedrock of requirements that can be quite hard to maintain while also trying to be forward-thinking and progressive".

She adds: "Although the industry is looking to really embrace new ways of working and new technologies, sustainability and gender equality – you can build so much into workplace and facility management – we still need to maintain statutory requirements and PPM that you ignore to your detriment. Rebellion can only work when the fundamentals of the job are met."

#### Skin in the game

Codling doesn't think there's a direct correlation between age and rebelliousness, although he has grown more rebellious. ▶

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Having the requisite experience helps to inform the rebels that they're pushing for change for the right reasons, he says.

Hulbert takes a different view. "I'd say there is a higher likelihood of rebellion for those who are new to the sector.

"I believe the Generation Z's are coming into the workforce with real purpose. They care about the intentions of the organisations they work for and are willing to voice their concerns when the two sets of values are not aligned."

Perhaps rebellion relies more on particular personalities.

As Stead says: "You have to be willing to ask things that might feel like a silly question, to challenge the norm and to take a risk."

But future generations are important to bring about change. Stead argues: "We

need to focus energies on unleashing potential of existing and new entrants to the profession by creating an environment where questioning the 'norm' is not just acceptable but positively encouraged. Be curious, ask why and, most importantly be brave!

"As new generations enter the workplace and facilities management sector we must guard against imbuing them with age-old practices."

More broadly, diversity is a prerequisite for rebellion because it necessarily brings a range of opinions that challenge the status quo.

But beyond ensuring that varied ages, races, social backgrounds and genders are present, Birnbaum says diversity should also cross professional boundaries to learn from other sectors and industries, such as how Amazon can track their delivery personnel in a way that FMs aren't yet able to do with their engineers or contractors.

She advises the sector to "look for trendsetters in different markets and translate that for our sector".

Key to any rebellion is arming oneself with hard data as evidence always trumps anecdote.

"In FM, you are regularly waylaid with anecdotal examples of poor service delivery or highly priced projects or claims that end users have better tech at home. So to challenge existing practices, you need to make sure there is a real problem to solve and there is evidence to support it and measure your intervention," Birnbaum advises.

Calculated risk, confidence tempered by humility and a dogged pursuit for positive change are worthy guides for the FM rebel. By interrogating prevailing conventions and thinking, rebels can foster a professional culture in which questioning is encouraged and change happens readily. **f**

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