

Relationship expert with a difference

Whether you're looking for a one-off interview/article or a regular contributor for all things to do with relationships and dating then look no further than **Anne Stringer**, MD and chief-matchmaker of RSVP Introductions, probably the UK's number one dating, introductions and singles events agency for the Midlands, East of England and London. Anne is a media-savvy professional whose experience and well-informed advice on relationships and dating has been utilised by various media. Appearances include local TV, radio programmes and a variety of regional and national press. To see examples of her media profile please visit the 'Reviews' page of the RSVP website: www.rsvp.uk.com.

There are 13 million single people in the UK and finding the right person can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Much of the time people just don't know where to start. Anne can provide guidance and advice on the trials and tribulations that people face when either looking for love or issues within an existing relationship.

Below is an interview we at Atom conducted with Anne to explore her background, motivations and passion for helping people find love. For more information or to arrange an interview with RSVP MD Anne Stringer then please do not hesitate to contact me.

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An interview with RSVP Managing Director Anne Stringer

How did you find yourself as Managing Director of RSVP?

When I left a very well paid Finance and HR Director role at HFL Ltd in 2005 I had no clear vision of what I would be doing, but I knew that whatever it was it had to meet three demands:

1. That it was away from the corporate world that I had spent the first 17 years of my career in
2. That in some way I would be helping people in a personal way to enrich their lives.
3. I had to be working for myself, building a company with the culture that I knew would allow business to flourish.

I had no idea that I would end up owning probably the number one introduction agency across the Midlands, East of England and London, RSVP Introductions Limited. In May 2006, I acquired the business from founder Patrick McDonald, who had spent 14 years making it the well-recognised brand it is today.

I had just completed a cultural change programme at HFL – the well-respected Horseracing Forensic Laboratory in Newmarket, where I had been challenging the staff to look at their own values and how well they married to the values of the business. Having challenged others to do so, I challenged myself to consider what I really wanted from my career. Although I was proud to be on the board of a well established company with an excellent reputation, I still felt I had not fulfilled everything I wanted to do.

I looked back to my school days when I was interviewed by my head teacher at Southend High School for Girls and she challenged me to tell her how my decision to train for a career in accountancy matched my desire to help other people and change the world (don't we all want to do that at 18)? I had picked accountant for a career because I didn't know what else to do at the time and I was good at Maths! However, I now feel I can go back to her and say that the skills I have developed in HR and Finance are invaluable in the role I have now and the company that I run helps people every day to find a life partner, or gain wider circle of friends. I really am helping people and I am sure I would not have got here had I not taken that first job as accountant trainee at Reuters all those years ago.

So, what are you doing at RSVP that makes you different?

At RSVP, we have a definite strategy to distance ourselves from the lottery of internet-based dating services. We want to be famous for being the introductions agency that really cares about you. We care that you were on your own last Christmas or Valentines Day. We care that 2008 is the year you kick start your efforts to find that special someone. We care that your dating is safe. We care that we meet our promises to you.

To help us deliver on the caring promise, we have made a number of changes since I acquired the business in 2006. We work closely with Northampton-based Stephanie Robinson - our resident qualified life coach. Many people come to us at a transition point in their lives and we have a responsibility to help them through that transition and provide them with the best chance to change their lives for the better. Stephanie came to RSVP as a client and met her husband through RSVP and wanted to give something back herself to those who find they are in the same position she found herself after her husband left.

We have also retained style consultant and image coach, Sue Donnelly, who works with our members to help them accentuate their positive and grow in confidence.

Our agency is not just about delivering personal introductions (although we have provided over 6,000 in the last year alone), we want to help people grow in confidence and self esteem. Our office is open 9am - 9pm Monday to Friday and 10am – 1pm Saturday and our staff will always take time to listen to anyone who needs a chat. Our members really appreciate the fact that they can pick up the phone

and talk to someone who understands what they are going through. We build up very real relationships with our members and celebrate when they do meet someone.

How have you gone about changing the culture?

Looking back on what we've achieved culturally at RSVP in two years, I feel we've been pushing at a door that was already ajar. By the very nature of what we do, we're the kind of organisation which tends to attract recruits who have that caring side about them already. A lot of the changes we've put through have been welcomed because they help our people to do a better job. Doesn't everyone want to be proud of the organisation they work for?

As a manager, I like to think of my style as consultative and making people feel involved in shaping organisational change is a great way of taking the fear out of it. We've lost a few people along the way who didn't share that view but, curiously, that seems to have given the many staff who remain a degree of trust that this is an organisation that does the right thing for its clients. And they are, at the end of the day, the reason we're all here.

Do you get any private life?

I've probably never been happier in what I do. It's a completely all-consuming business and I'm incredibly lucky to be supported by a General Manager and many other staff who don't seem to operate 'normal hours'. If you think about it, most of our clients want us outside normal working hours. On top of that, because we organise up to 60 hosted events every month, if I'm not meeting new potential clients of an evening, I'm hosting an event somewhere stylish.

There's just no point in me attempting to segregate work from my private life. It would just cause me more stress. Instead, I find a few hours for myself on days when we're quiet and some days I sneak off and have lunch with my husband for an hour or two. So, my work and private lives have fuzzy edges and that works well for me. I think maybe work/life balance was a concept dreamed up by people who don't run a business!

[ENDS]