

# 'An email sent to me by mistake led to a whole new career'

When Lorraine Thomas, 53, gave up a high-flying City job to become a full-time carer for her father, she struggled with the change of pace. Then one day, she found an intriguing message in her inbox

The morning the email pinged into my inbox, I was running on empty. Giving up my City job to care for Dad had been the right thing to do, but sometimes I felt overwhelmed.

It was 2016 and Dad, 81, had moved into the garage of my London home, which I had converted eight months earlier when his Parkinson's disease and dementia worsened. Since then, he'd needed almost constant care. I was more than happy to do it – Mum died when I was 16, so for a long time he'd been both mum and dad to me and my sister. My career as head of business development, marketing and recruitment for a City law firm meant I was used to pressure, but caring for Dad brought stress of a kind I'd never endured. Aside from the daily task of getting him up, washed and dressed, there was always the risk he might injure himself accidentally.

So when I received an email from a lady I knew called Delores, asking if I could help her find properties for the company she runs, I jumped at the chance. I had just managed to arrange some NHS care for my dad, which meant I would have some free time. Delores' company, Step Ahead Services, rehomes vulnerable young adults in the care system. I did think it was strange – I had zero experience in that field – but the email was like a light coming on. It was only when Delores rang me a day later to talk it through that we realised she'd emailed the wrong Lorraine by mistake. But we clicked and I made it clear I was



Lorraine left her City career to care for her beloved dad



She's now a coach, mentor, project manager and more

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willing to learn. The prospect of using my brain and being reminded I was still needed out in the world revved me up. What's more, having to manage on a carer's allowance of £62.50 a week had been an eye-opener.

My new role involved arranging meetings with estate agents and boldly walking in to persuade them to let flats to often troubled 16- to 21-year-olds. This meant guaranteeing that we'd cover the costs of any damage and somehow this, plus my explanation of why these young people deserved a break because of their difficult start in life, was enough to see us end up with quite a few properties on the books. I got to use negotiating skills I'd never known I had. But at times, I wondered if I was out of my depth, especially as some days, I'd go home to find that Dad had refused to eat in protest at my absence.

Juggling the two was hard. To keep Dad cheerful, we'd play dominoes, which he'd always loved. His eyesight was failing but just holding them made him feel good. He loved to spend time with my teenage daughters and we'd put the cricket on the radio, which always soothed him. But occasionally, the carer had to leave when I was struggling to get back from some far-flung part of London and I'd race home in a panic.

After Dad passed away in 2018, I increased my focus on Step Ahead. We started buying properties ourselves rather than relying on landlords. We refurbish them, then we group the young people sent to us by the council in flat shares according to their needs. With the help of a key worker, they manage their own budgeting, cooking and studies and, with a stable home, many go on to find jobs.

I now have a sense of purpose that I didn't have before. While it was a buzz working in the City, it was all about money and status. The satisfaction of helping young adults in need is lifelong and goes much deeper.

If I hadn't decided to give up everything and devote myself to caring for my dad, I might never have ended up on this path. He was always keen to lend a hand to people who were struggling and I'd like to think he'd be proud of me for finding a career where I can follow his example. *To find out more about Lorraine, go to [viewfrommywindow.co.uk](http://viewfrommywindow.co.uk)*