

PEOPLE IN BUSINESS

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Theatrical solution to any problem

**Petra
Costigan-
Oorthuijs**

Company: ToBe

Position: managing
director

Location:
Stradbally, Co Laois

By Cheryl Rickard

Working as a volunteer in Mother Teresa's home for the dying in Calcutta more than 20 years ago was to be a life and career-changing experience for Petra Costigan-Oorthuijs.

Born in the Hague, Costigan-Oorthuijs had tried to decide between a career in theatre or healthcare, even studying nursing management.

One day in Calcutta, a hysterical woman was brought in to the home and the pair tried to communicate without a common language.

"Eventually, our mutual expressions in our own languages seemed to have reached a point of some sort of trust," said Costigan-Oorthuijs. It was then that she realised that she wanted to base her career around the ability to communicate through expression.

She qualified as a drama teacher in the Netherlands and taught personal development through drama in colleges, as well as working with groups on plays centred on social and political issues.

Arriving in Ireland in 1994 with her Irish husband, John Costigan, she worked as a sales



Petra Costigan-Oorthuijs, ToBe: delivering theatre-based learning methods for personal and professional development

and marketing director for a project management training company.

"Working for this company for seven years gave me insights into what people in business need and how the environment of corporate life influences personal development," said Costigan-Oorthuijs.

"When Ireland's wealth was growing rapidly, people became more confident to try out new ways of learning. With my experience in education, health and now business, the time had come to start on my own."

She started in business as a sole trader in 2001, delivering theatre-based learning methods for personal and professional development.

After taking a marketing course for company owners, she and her husband launched ToBe as a company last November.

They have now launched a website at www.tobe.ie and are connecting to new markets.

The company recreates classroom versions of workplace situations, which Costigan-Oorthuijs described as "a condensed version of reality with accelerated learning".

Typically, it takes corporate clients through three phases: diagnosis, design and delivery.

It can conduct 'forum theatre', where scenes are performed to portray the dilemmas of the clients and consider how the dilemmas can be overcome.

By having the clients partici-

pate in scenes with actors, ToBe helps them explore their problems in an interactive way.

"The most intriguing, interesting, inspiring part of my job is what happens with people, between people and for people when they step into the scene," said Costigan-Oorthuijs.

"I am trying to capture here what is beyond work: it's the magic of what theatre can do.

"Theatre means 'to behold', which is much more than seeing. It's understanding physically, vocally, mentally, spiritually and spatially what is truly happening."

ToBe employs three full-time staff, two part-time workers and has a database of contractors. It is holding a master class on emotional intelligence on Friday.