



# Sheila Flavell

Interviewed by

**Kerri Mansfield**

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*What's today? Twenty-second of August?*

Twenty-third!

*Twenty-third of August, and we're in the offices of FDM Group. I'm Kerri Mansfield, Head of Capability at Digi2al Limited, today I'm talking to Sheila Flavell, COO and Executive Board Director of FDM Group. Sheila also sits on the Tech UK Women in Technology Council and advises various government committees. Having won numerous awards, Sheila is ranked in the top fifteen most influential women in the UK.*

*Sheila, where do I start? [laughs] Your public bio just glosses through your early life and moves swiftly on to your achievements, so can we take a bit of a step back from that and...*

Sure.

*...talk about those early years. Tell me about your childhood. What were you passionate about when you were growing up?*

Passionate about, I was a real tomboy, Kerri. I used to love building swings over trees and building rafts in the local loch. I was a village girl. I was a village girl, I was brought up in a very small mining village in Scotland and there wasn't much to do. We used to jump on the steam trains as they were going up and down the line, or we'd ride on the bogies going up and down the line, crashing them into the gates. We would, you know, we had to make our own fun in those days. So, I was one of three children, I have a brother and a sister, and my parents were very simple people, but we didn't want for anything, we were very fortunate. And, you know, I went to the local primary school, I went to the local high school, and then off I went to work.

*Did you enjoy school?*

I did enjoy school. We had great fun at school and the Scottish education system, as you know, is very highly regarded and I stayed at school through my, in Scotland it

was O levels, then higher. We didn't call them A levels, they were higher. So I sat my O levels, I sat my higher, and then I went straight out into the workplace, I was really keen to go out and start earning some money. And d'you know, my parents hadn't been to university so it wasn't really on the agenda. And so I joined the Glasgow police force as WPC247, City of Glasgow Police, back in 1973, I think it was.

[0:02:24]

*What took you into the police? That's an interesting twist.*

Well, I was very active and when I left school I wanted to go to PE college but I was too young and so they asked me to reapply in a year's time. So I wanted to do something which didn't entail sitting in an office. So I wanted to, I wanted to be active, and I thought the police force, that'll keep me active and busy. So I was one of twelve women and there were 90 on our course at police college, the National Police College in Scotland, and so off I went to police college for three months. This was before equal pay was introduced, I might add.

*Yes, I think it was, wasn't it?*

I was there before equal pay and I was there during the transition to equal pay, which was a really interesting time. And in fact Kerri, I must say that when equal pay was introduced, we women were turfed out of our cosy policewomen's department where we dealt with things like kind of sexual crimes, family crimes, things that entailed social services, and we were thrust out into the streets because the men wanted to make a point that we women weren't as good as the men and we shouldn't have equal pay, we weren't deserving of it. So I was given the patrol that had the fish market and I was given bicycle clips, because during the bin strike, the dustbin strike, the rats were everywhere. Bit like the mouse we saw five minutes ago. And so the bicycle clips were to stop the rats running up my legs. I was also given the city mortuary, where Jimmy the mortuary attendant, who's since murdered his wife – another story for another day – and [laughs] I used to go down on the night shift and spend the evening with Jimmy because, you know, Glasgow was a bit rough in those days and a young girl like me had to make sure I kept myself safe.

*Wow. They did really like to ensure you did equal pay for equal work, didn't they? That must have been some quite difficult times. Where did you find the inner strength to go through with that?*

Well, you know, as I say, I was a young girl, I was pretty innocent, naïve and, you know, I didn't know what was meant to happen in the workplace and, you know, I had to learn very quickly to keep my wits about me because in those days the police force was understaffed and often we were sent to patrol the streets of Glasgow during football matches or after football matches and, you know, through the dead of night on our own. And, you know, there were some scary times. I remember even attending, you know, premier football matches as a young girl where in those days football matches are not as we know them today, I can assure you [laughs].

*So, what happened? What did your parents think when you said I'm, you know, at the Celtic-Rangers game and I'm on my own and...*

Oh, my parents were very proud of the fact that I was a policewoman, you know, that was quite a credible profession back then, as it is now. And they didn't really pay much attention, to be quite honest. [laughs]

[0:05:41]

*So what happened next? Because you obviously stopped doing that at some point.*

Yeah. I was there for four years and I graduated into a theft squad, which was quite exciting. But I also remember one night it was pouring with rain and a chip shop window was smashed in and I had to stand outside waiting for the keyholder to arrive, and whilst I was waiting I climbed into the chip shop and ate the jar of pickled onions that was on the counter. And I thought there's got to be more to life than sitting - standing, rather - in the pouring rain outside a chip shop eating pickled onions. So I applied to an airline based in the Middle East. And I said to my young brother, who had a fascination for airplanes, I said, choose me an airline and it has to be in a warm country. So he chose Gulf Air and Gulf Air was based in Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf, I applied and I was offered a job. So at the age of twenty-one, off I went,

having looked at the AA atlas and – I think it was in the AA atlas – and off I went on this aeroplane to the Middle East. I hadn't got a clue where I was going. And I became a junior air stewardess. And the average length of stay was two years, but I stayed twelve years.

*That's a long while.*

The fact that I stayed twelve years, I actually did most jobs that the airline had to offer. But if I thought discrimination was rife in the police force, it was nothing to what I experienced in the Middle East.

*What happened?*

Well, because of course women have only recently been allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, but that's only recently. And back in those days, you know, women weren't given the same opportunities as men. Arab women certainly, you know, weren't given the same opportunities as their male counterparts. And they had to, the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf countries, they had to rely on foreigners, foreigners like myself to populate their work forces. So...

*Oh, I see. So they used overseas air stewardesses because they didn't want their own women working as air stewardesses.*

Yes. We have lots of Arab men, but we didn't have any Gulf national women in those days working in the airline. We had lots of Indian girls, Pakistani, Turkish, British, French, German, American, but no local girls.

*No locals.*

It, it wasn't deemed to be a job role for the daughters of the Arab gentlemen. Anyway, there I stayed for twelve years.

*Twelve years.*

And I became a, well I finished flying after five years, I became a trainer, I was the grooming instructor and then...

*Was this all based in Bahrain?*

This is all based in Bahrain. And then ultimately I was head of the cabin crew. So there was 2,000 cabin crew and I personally looked after 600. So that was my first...

*That's a lot of people.*

It was, yes. And a lot of people who lived away from home in a country that was deemed a hardship post, so the challenges we faced were different to perhaps the challenges that people might face today. I don't think the Gulf is known now as a hardship post.

*But you got the weather you were looking for? [laughs]*

We got the weather, yeah, plenty of that, with a hundred per cent humidity in the summer. But you know what, it was an exciting time, it helped me grow up, it taught me discipline and resilience and it was my first venture into management.

[0:09:27]

*How did that come about? How did you make that move from being an air stewardess into managing all those people?*

Well, as I mentioned, the average length of stay in Gulf Air was two years and the fact that I stayed twelve years, I progressed from one role into another and I just, you know, kept sort of moving up the food chain to the most senior position a foreign woman could have in those days, was head of cabin crew. So I was fortunate to be one of only two women to actually achieve that position.

*That's amazing. You mentioned that you left school having done your highers.*

I did.

*But I think you've got an MA and an MBA now? So at some point you went back to education.*

Yes, I didn't do it in the normal way, Kerri. I...

*Surprise me. [laughs]*

[0:10:19]

When I came back from the Middle East, I came back with two children, one under each arm.

*Okay.*

And in fact that was an interesting story because, you know, people often ask me, what's my interest in diversity and equality and, you know, jobs for women. Well, I think you can see from my experience in the police force and working and living in the Middle East, how that all came around.

*Of course, yeah.*

But when I hung up my wings, so to speak, and returned, returned to the UK when the Gulf War started in 1990, I returned to England. Now, I'd never lived in England because I'm a Scot, as you can tell by my accent, and I thought I could just walk straight into a job, perhaps as an HR manager, because you know, I certainly didn't want to travel up to Gatwick or Heathrow to work for an airline. So I thought I'll get a job as an HR manager, and I went round a number of agencies, job agencies, and the best that could be offered to me was a waitress. It was...

*It's not quite what you were looking for.*

It wasn't what I was looking for. It was as though I had 'useless mother' tattooed on my forehead. And I very quickly realised that, you know, having two small children was actually not beneficial to my career prospects. So, I thought I should consider

going back to education, but just at that time I met a man, Rod Flavell, who was starting up his own tech start-up, and he asked me to come and work for him. And his words, I remember, were, he said, I can see something in you, I don't know what it is, but if you come and work for me I'll help you find that something.

*That's fabulous. Yeah, I like that.*

So that was twenty, twenty-eight years ago, I think. And what he didn't tell me, Kerri, was that I have no money and I cannot pay you. [laughs]

*Oh, yeah. And I'm guessing you didn't ask that question.*

[0:12:20]

I didn't ask the question at the time. [laughs] Because it was a start-up. So that was my first venture into tech. So I put aside my plans to go back to university whilst I worked with Rod in this tech start-up. But the fact that I had two small mouths to feed and he had no money, eventually I had to go and get myself a proper job.

*A job, yeah.*

And after a few years of earning some money, Rod called me up, he said, the company is getting a little bit bigger, it needs its mother back, can you please come back.

*Oh, that's nice, yeah.*

So I said, okay, you didn't pay me last time so we're going to talk about what you're going to pay me this time.

*[laughs] Lesson learnt.*

I said if you give me a BMW convertible I'll think about it. So the next day I came home from work and there was a contract through my letterbox, and on the contract



was my pay and conditions, my terms of employment and the promise of a company car that was a BMW convertible.

*Very nice.*

So that was my return to FDM. And after a very short period I decided that it was time to go and finish my education. So I enrolled in university and I undertook, I participated in an MA in marketing, and then I went straight into taking an MBA straight after that. Oh, in for a penny, in for a pound.

*So you were working all the time?*

I was not only working, I was the mother of two small children, so my, if I had to map out what my day looked like, it was five o'clock in the morning, get up, write an essay for university. Seven o'clock get the kids up, breakfast, drive them to school, drop them at school, go to work - I was the UK sales manager for FDM at the time – run the sales team, go and visit clients in London or all over the place, pick the kids up, take them home, give them supper, then be back at university for six o'clock at night, from six till nine a couple of times a week to do my part-time MA or MBA, they were both the same. Now, interesting, and it is funny that all these years later I've built up a strong relationship and affiliation with the university and they invited me back only a couple of weeks ago to do the keynote speech at the graduation. So I stood there in front of the business graduates presenting the keynote speech and as I looked at them I thought about myself all those years previously.

[0:14:57]

*That's an enormous achievement, to do a fulltime job and a family and the education all at once. What advice would you give to other women in what's been, so far in your career, an overwhelmingly male-dominated career? What advice would you give to women today? How much do you think it's changed? Do they need your advice if things are different?*

Oh gosh, I think it's changed enormously and in fact I'm so envious of young women starting out today because I think there's never been a better time to enter a career in

technology as there is today, because the opportunities for women are endless and you can really fast-track much, much quicker than you ever could in my day. Now be it I'm still working, but [laughs] you know, if I was starting off now, I have two daughters who both work in tech, I have one stepdaughter who also works in tech, and you know, I'm so envious of the career opportunities that they have ahead of them. I think that being a woman is an advantage in today's tech world.

*How does that pan out for you?*

Well, if we think about gender pay gap, though we're fortunate at FDM that we have a zero gender pay gap, we're very proud of that. And that's come about because of the way we have built the business and for me, joining the business way back then, I created a fifty-fifty gender split. We've maintained that in our management team from then to now. Now, in order for companies to reduce the gender pay gap, they're going to have to get more women in at senior level. If they don't get them in at the junior level, they're never going to get them to the mid or to the senior level. And there are so few women at the senior level across all industry that, you know, companies now, there's such a focus on the gender pay gap that companies are under serious pressure. So, that alone is something that will help women and, you know, I think also women represent fifty per cent of the population and they're also the greatest users of technology, but they don't represent fifty per cent of the tech workforce, only seventeen per cent. So again, you know, the door is wide open.

*Yeah. It's still quite low, isn't it? And we seem to have done a lot of work on that for the last, I don't know, twenty years, but we don't seem to be closing that gap, we still don't seem to be getting a huge amount of women in tech.*

I always say that, I will say, don't wait to be asked, try to let them stop you.

[0:17:44]

*Yeah. I like that. How much difference has having good mentors made on your journey?*

I've never had a structured mentor, but I can probably say that Rod Flavell, who is by the way now my husband, although we've worked together for twenty-eight years, we actually only married eleven years ago.

*Congratulations.*

Thank you. And...

[brief interruption]

*So you've never had a formal mentor?*

I've never had a formal mentor. However, Rod has, Rod has always been someone that I've highly respected in business and he's supported me, he's coached me, he's held my hand metaphorically, and physically, through the various challenges that I've faced over the years, and I think both him and possibly our chairman and others I've met on the way, mainly men really, have held my hand through my career. And I think that's given me strength and confidence. Well, in fact, I don't think, I know it's given me strength and confidence.

*You know it has. And do you mentor other people now?*

Oh absolutely. Yes. I mentor people outside of the organisation and I mentor people within the organisation and I try to do the best I can for them.

[0:19:06]

*What sort of obstacles have you come across in the last twenty-eight years with FDM?*

I can honestly say I haven't come across obstacles in FDM because I've always been part of the leadership team and I've been a director on the board for many years, and I continue to be a director on the FDM board. So I haven't personally faced any obstacles that I can think of, except the fact that my husband and I are the only husband and wife team in the FTSE 250 and...

*Really?*

... although that's not an obstacle, I know that people sometimes question the husband and wife team.

*I'm surprised you're the only two.*

Yes, we are. We are the only husband and wife executive directors on the team, on the FTSE 250. So whilst it's a little bit unique, we've been part of a team that's created, part of a big team that's created the success that we're enjoying today, but why that should bother people... I can understand it, I suppose. I can't say I don't quite know. I do know. But we try our best to be professional at all times and separate the relationships. So that's been a challenge, I suppose, and...

*I'm sure you wouldn't find that in other countries, where family businesses are much more the thing, or maybe...*

I don't know, but if someone wants to point a finger, they'll make reference to the husband and wife. But, you know, it's been very positive, it's been very positive for FDM and it's certainly been very positive for us, our children have gone through the business. You know, we have other members of the senior leadership team whose children are in the business. But, so you asked me about my challenges. That's been one, I think. For many years I was the only woman on the FDM board and I think often women see things a little bit differently to men and we prioritise things differently, we want to receive information differently. There are a number of physiological differences and, you know, behavioural differences, so you know, perhaps that was maybe a challenge. But now I'm not the only woman on the board.  
[laughs]

[0:21:37]

*And we've talked a bit about the fact that there aren't a huge percentage of women in technology, how much do you think technology itself is empowering women to be in the workforce, whether it's in technology or in other roles in the workforce? How much do you think that's down to technology changes?*

Big time. Absolutely, because now of course our phones are computers, we all live in the cloud, and it's not so important to have to come into a work space. You know, technology has allowed us flexibility and agility and we have recently set up a returners programme here at FDM, a getting back to business programme, and we're focussing, although the programme is open to both male and females and thirty per cent of all attendees have been male, the seventy per cent who are female, they have constraints. They have children they have to get to school, they've got children they have to get back to, they have elderly parents, parents that they're looking after, and they have their own challenges and technology has helped them do some work from home, on the train. And I think also, from a commercial perspective, often companies don't need such big premises nowadays, because they can have hot-desking in a flexible workforce. So technology has allowed us to – what is it, HSBC, they are the world's local bank?

*Yes.*

[laughs] And when you phone up, you're speaking to a call centre somewhere in India, and that's the same for most companies. In fact, I would say, Kerri, that most companies, if not every company in this country, is now a technology company, because their business processes are underpinned by technology.

*Completely, yeah.*

So it's there to be embraced by all.

*I can't but agree with you and I think we start with fridges, which...*

Fridges?

*... meant we didn't have to, yeah, we didn't have to go shopping every day.*

Yeah.

[0:23:40]

*It's where that starts. You've got another initiative in FDM. You talked a little bit about the back to work initiative, you've also got one with the military. How did that come about?*

We realised some time ago that there's a finite number of graduates out there and we would have to start looking in other pools. So that's where we thought the military. We have lots of, in America we call them vets or wounded warriors, and we set up the programme in America first of all and I went down to the Pentagon to help get this thing started, off the ground, and that's going great guns. We were then introduced to Colonel Stewart Sharman, who was a British armed force colonel, and he loved the programme and he loved the programme so much that he brought forward his retirement, joined FDM and we have, Kerri, what is it? I think it's nearly 500...

*Wow, that's brilliant.*

Is it nearly 500? Ex-service people now working for FDM, which is really commendable.

*Yeah, that's absolutely fantastic.*

And so we have our graduates, we have our ex-forces, we have our returners, and we're always looking for people- what we're looking for are people who are enthusiastic and have a passion for technology. So what we say at FDM is we don't care where you come from, we're only interested in the journey you want to travel.

*Yeah. Exactly, and where you're going to. You've won on your journey quite a lot of awards and accolades for your work, including, I believe, Woman of the Year 2018?*

Yes.

*Congratulations.*

Thank you.

[0:25:22]

*Which one's been the most meaningful award for you?*

Oh, goodness me. Probably the first one, because in 2012 someone in the business entered me for a Business Leader of the Year, the Everywoman of Technology Leader of the Year Award. And I went along to the award ceremony and I didn't tell my husband, I didn't tell anybody in the family. And the girls at work had booked a table and I sat, our table was the furthest back at the back of the room, and I remember taking my jacket off and being quite relaxed, and I couldn't believe it when they called my name, and I didn't have a speech ready. And I had to go up there and mouth something out very quickly, which sounded credible. And I suppose that was the most exciting one because, you know, your first experience is always your best experience. And of course, since then I've been very fortunate to receive, you know, many awards. And I think the other one of note would be I was invited to the Scottish Women in Tech in 2017, November last year, and they conferred me with a lifetime achievement award.

*That's wonderful.*

And that was particularly poignant because of course it was back in Glasgow where I started my career as WPC247, and I did mention that I seem to have made more of an impact to the technology world than I ever did to policing in Scotland. [laughs]

*Well, if they invited you back, you obviously made an impression on them. [laughs] And I'm sure you will get many more awards in the future as well. But you also have a number of philanthropy projects that you give your time to. How do you (a) squeeze in time for that and (b) what is it about them that makes it worth squeezing a bit of extra time for?*

[0:27:12]

Yeah, in fact Kerri, I don't squeeze in time, I prioritise time for these, you know, as long as I'm given plenty of notice then, you know, I can ring-fence it in my diary and prioritise the time. It's something that I want to do. I'm less interested in paid NED,

or non-executive work at this moment in time. I'm really only interested in what I do at FDM and the pro bono, the philan... I can't say the word, philanthropic work that I'm now involved in. And, you know, I'm not taking any more commitments on at the moment because I want to give time to what I have committed to. The most recent one would be the Institute of Coding, I've accepted the chair of the industry advisory board and this is an initiative that Theresa May, she announced at the Davos summit in January, later on in January, and she gave, the government, the current government has given 20 million pounds to this programme of work and we have matched funding of a further 20 million. So there's 40 million being put to this programme. And what really, not surprised me, but enthralled me was, I asked, I invited eighteen leaders of industry to join the industry advisory board, and they all said yes.

Wow.

So we have our first board meeting in a week's time, kicking off this programme. And that hopefully will make a huge difference within the UK in the educational market.

*That's brilliant. I like that. One of the quotes that I, I did a bit of digging around and I found a little quote from you that said, 'You cannot be what you cannot see'. Let's talk about what that means to you.*

[0:29:02]

Well, it's all about role models. Role models, mentors. And we have a very structured programme here at FDM where we shine a spotlight on role models and we have a structured mentoring programme, and we have hundreds of people signed up to this mentoring programme. It's run as a very formal part of our business. And what we say is, we have young people who've just left education, left university, this is their first job, and they don't know what they want to do, they don't know what they're good at, they don't understand the challenges that are going to be ahead of them, and we try to align them with people who may be two years, three years further down the path than they are, so that they can see what's possible. Because when they look at me, you know, I'm in my twilight years. [laughs]



*You're in a very different position to them.*

Exactly. You know, I'm in my sixties now, I'm way down the road. And they look at where I am as chief operating office of FDM Group and where they are, and there's just too much water...

*Too big a gulf, yeah.*

... between where they are and where I am. So we have to... But, I do mentor, I mentor people who are in middle management, senior management, as well as people externally. In fact I had a meeting this morning with a lady from, a very senior lady, from another huge UK company who wanted some guidance, and I'm very, very happy to host those meetings. So, at FDM we try to present the opportunities through the women who are our success stories, and we have loads of them.

[0:30:34]

*That's good, I love it. You're also one of the most influential people in IT and business, you're not just in the top fifteen in IT, you're in the top fifteen influential women in Britain, right across the board. That carries a fair level of responsibility with it. How do you use that to encourage the next generation?*

Yeah, in fact, maybe better mention not only in the UK, in the USA for the last three years, I was nominated as one of the top, the top most influential women in the US, North American mid market. So we do a lot of work in North America as well. How do I...? What was your question again?

*Well, it's how do you use that position to help the next generation coming through?*

It, it allows me a platform and I have to, you know, when you have this privilege, then you have to use it for force of, force for good. And I think I have a responsibility to speak to women as much as I can, as much as it can be a bit daunting and a bit nerve-racking at times, but I'm kind of getting over my nerves a bit more than perhaps a few years ago. I try to speak to as many women, host as many events as possible, host a

number of panels. And what I've found, Kerri, in recent years is as I'm becoming a little bit more known in the industry, people are more inclined to attend. So that's... So, if I can help the attendance [laughing] of these events, then that's great.

*That's a good start, isn't it, yeah?*

But I don't want to be, I don't want to be talking all about the women, the women, the victims.

*No, it's right across.*

You know, we women are not victims and this glass ceiling, people talk about it, for me it doesn't exist, but it certainly does, you know, for a lot of other women and it's all about breaking through it and creating your own opportunity. So what I like to talk about and what I like to participate in are events that talk about real challenges and real solutions, real opportunities for anyone.

*For anyone, yeah. I like that.*

I look forward to the day when we don't talk about diversity and we don't have women in tech initiatives, we just talk about tech initiatives and diversity becomes the norm.

[0:33:06]

*Becomes normal, yeah. So thinking back, you just said you're in your sixties now, how different was it for your mother, her life, compared to yours, from a technology point of view? Not from a standard of living point of view or an opportunity point of view, from a technology point of view, how much has that changed from her generation to yours?*

Oh god. Well, I mean I remember when we got a telephone, and my father used to stand beside me saying, you've been on there long enough, get off the phone. Nobody has a telephone in their house these days, everybody has a mobile phone, isn't that right? I think social media is great, but there's a flipside as well, as we read

about all the time about, you know, Facebook and, you know, the criminal effort that's, you know – what am I trying to say here?

*Like grooming and cyber bullying and...*

Yeah. Cyber bullying, grooming, you know, all the criminality that's coming out. You've got the dark web where people can buy guns and all sorts of things. So, technology is a great enabler, but it comes with a health warning and I don't think the regulation, the global regulation has caught up with the technology.

*No, that's true. Makes sense.*

And, d'you know what, when we floated the company the first time round, we were asked to create a risk register, so we gaily wrote down all the risks that we thought were maybe in front of us for the next five years. Five years later we bought the company back and we were asked to create another risk register. So I thought, I know, I'll cut and paste the old one into the new one. But I dragged it out, I looked at the risks and none of the risks that we thought were going to happen, happened. The risks that- cloud didn't exist then, it wasn't in our language, neither was cyber. So the risks that we thought were going to happen hadn't happened, and there were a whole new set of risks. Four years later we've listed again on the main stock market, yet again we were asked to create a new risk register. So I once again dragged out the old one, the latest old one. And again, those risks hadn't happened and the risks were new risks. So I'm really curious about what are the real risks, and I think one of the real risks is communication or lack of it. Because if you go to a festival or concert, you to the O2, any event, everyone's standing with a phone and they're either videoing, taking photographs, or they're using the phone for something, but not speaking. We don't actually speak very much on our phone because we live in a text world of WhatsApp, FaceTime, so forth and so on. So people are communicating using their technol... their devices, they're not actually speaking to each other.

[0:36:06]

*No, that is a big risk, you're right. What brings you the most joy in your life?*

What brings me the most joy? Apart from chocolate? [laughs]

*That'll do. [laughs]*

Well, obviously, obviously my family. And I mean I have to say that work-life balance is something we all talk about and we all strive for, but very few achieve. And I would like to think that one day I might have a work-life balance, but as today, it has evaded me. [laughs]

*Well, if you came home with two small children under your arms, a few years ago, I'm guessing they're grown up now, you've mentioned a couple are in technology.*

Yes. Well, two daughters got married in the last two months and that was very...

*That kept you busy.*

That kept me busy and it was a very joyful occasion. And I obviously look forward to the day I have grandchildren, and I don't, not so keen on thinking about the babysitting duties at this moment in time. But I'm looking forward to seeing my family, you know, further progress and expand through time. What gives me great joy is seeing how the young people that come into FDM progress in their careers, and only this morning I spoke at an induction and it was brilliant to see about, maybe 35 people at the induction, that's 35 people that's joined our company in the last month, 35 operational people. So that demonstrates to me how the company is expanding, and quickly, and it was wonderful to see those fresh faces, those clean slates with no preconceived ideas and share with them the opportunities that they have available to them, and I look forward to watching them and help them progress in their own careers. I mean that's got to be something good.

*That's a good thing that'll bring joy, definitely. I don't get the feeling you've finished though. I think you've got goals for the future. Have you defined them or do you just know they're out there somewhere?*

[0:38:06]

I haven't finished. Age is but a number. I, Rod, my husband and I, we're still very driven, we're still, we're looking forward- what we do is we set goals, we set goals, we set personal goals, we set business goals and then we work towards those goals. What we're very bad at is actually when we achieve the goals is stopping for a few minutes to enjoy the moment. And that's a failing and that's something that I would like to improve on. So we're still setting goals, we still have expansion plans for the business, we want to see that 5,000 of a workforce, and we want to see further expansion in the group. But outside of FDM, I have other aspirations. I want to continue with my philanthropic work, I want to expand on that and I want to develop it, I want to do more of it in the future. So I do as much as I can today, but I want to build on that as I progress.

*Cool, I like that.*

I'd like to get my golf handicap down too. [laughs]

*[laughing] I don't know how you have time to play golf.*

Difficult. Still rubbish.

[0:39:14]

*What is the best decision you've made in your career? And the worst?*

The best decision I made in my career was to leave my old job and come back to FDM and get that BMW convertible. [laughs]

*I was just going to say, the BMW wasn't it? [laughs]*

You know, it was a risk, because I've made a few decisions that I think were a bit risky, and one was leaving my home town of Glasgow and leaving the home of my parents to go overseas.

*Very brave, very brave.*

Or stupid. I'm not quite sure. [laughs] It was definitely ill-informed. But, you know, I made the decision to go and off I went and I loved every single minute of my twelve years in the Middle East. But then I had to come back to the UK and leave a job that I loved, and that was a big decision as well. But the war was looming and that wasn't such a difficult decision, but it was one that I didn't want to make. And then when I came back to the UK and I looked around me and there was no one phoning me up and offering me jobs and I didn't know what to do. When I was working with the company that I left to go and work for this start-up, that was a big decision and- but it was the best decision I've ever made, because I've now had twenty-odd years of working in a tech company and watch it grow, for it to become a FTSE 250 international company that it is today and, you know, it's now, the company's not about me or people of my level, the company's about the next generation. And so we are there not so much to lead the charge, but to get into a supporting position to support the charge. And you can become a blocker if you stay in the same job for too long, you have to make way for future generations.

*That's true, that's very true. What about you is least documented, that you'd like people to know?*

[0:41:22]

What's, oh, least documented? Oh, my life is an open book, Kerri. [laughs] That I'd like people to know? Oh, d'you know what, nobody has ever asked me that question and I can't think of an answer right off the top of my head. I say, I'm a rubbish golfer, I don't want anyone to know that.

[both laughing]

My ski-ing's gone backwards as I've got older. So my sporting prowess is not something I'm going to be raving about. [laughs] I have lots of dreams that I want to turn into goals and ambitions and that's not for today, but it's something that I would probably want to sing from the rooftops if I achieve these, and hopefully I will. Not if, but when.

*I'm quite sure you will. It's been an absolute pleasure to meet you and have such an interesting and wide-ranging conversation. Thank you very much for being open and for being candid with us and willing to share your knowledge and experience.*

Thank you, Kerri, I've enjoyed our meeting.

*Thank you.*

[recording ends at 0:42:23]