



# Kirstin Duffield

Interviewed by

**Kerri Mansfield**

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*It's the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2018. I'm Kerri Mansfield, an independent IT consultant. Today I'll be talking to Kirstin Duffield, CEO of Morning Data, a leading supplier of world-class software and service solutions for the global insurance industry. Kirstin has always done things a little bit differently, as she travels the globe working with diverse cultures, and picks up multiple awards, from Family Business of the Year, to being one of the top 25 most influential women. Good morning.*

Good morning.

*Well where do I start Kirstin? I've had a look at your public bio, and you appear to have sprung into the world fully-formed in your early twenties. Can we go backwards and talk about those early years?*

Oh, crikey. Early years. Now in my mid-forties – sorry, late forties, it seems a long time ago. I think the most notable thing in my mind now, but it wasn't at that time, was, I took a GCSE, well what was obviously O Levels at that time, in IT. And, so I went to, I was fortunate enough to go to a private school, but that I don't think would have made a great deal of difference. And I was given the opportunity to do an IT O Level, and I remember we had to... It was all done on BBC BASIC, and BBC machines. So these sort of... And I was watching *Tomorrow's World*, and all that kind of thing that really sort of started to inspire me at that point. But then I was one of only three of my class that went on to take an AS Level in computer science.

*OK.*

And I still didn't think anything odd. Because, I, well, my father was a computer programmer, so, to go home, every time... I did Board, so I would go, go away one sort of, term time. And I had been given or bought an Amstrad PC, one with the little cassettes in the corner that start whistling at you. And then when I came home at the end of the term it was all in bits, and my father had dismantled it. And there was a new one. Which would seem very luxurious, but it was more for his benefit than for mine.

*Yes.*

So I went through quite a few generations of machines, mastering a little bit of a few things. And, and I think that probably started me off with the idea of, of IT.

*Of IT.*

And I did enjoy my A Level project, which was to do a bar restocking system, so, which of course now is commonplace, but at the time was, you know, I don't think I invented it, but at the time it was sort of, you know, something out of my head, and I thought, well that was really exciting, and terribly daring.

[02:40]

*[laughs] Very daring. So tell me about your childhood. What were you passionate about when you were growing up?*

Sport. Hugely. I played county and England lacrosse. I played county tennis. My parents were very, great tennis fans. Swam at county level, and athletics for Brighton and Hove. So, I would sort of, be training on the same pitch as Steve Ovet and, and that crew. But I think, I... I liked academics, the whole sort of, that side of things, but I was never very good. So I came out with four Bs and five Cs at O Level, and I came out with, I think one B and two Cs at A Level. So I was certainly not a high achiever.

*And you then qualified with a rather eclectic mix of B and C in computer science and cartography.*

Yes.

*Yes. And a marketing diploma. How did that all come about?*

Well, the degree was a question of... My mother and my father were both very inspirational to me. My mother won Kent Businesswoman of the Year, she was a businesswoman in the Sixties, she set up a language tutoring service for adults in the professional world, and worked out of the World Trade Center. So, you know, she

was a real, you know, sort of highflyer. And my father, as I said, was a computer programmer. So they, I was an only child and they did push me a little bit, but nothing sort of weird. And I found myself applying for a pre-university employment scheme at IBM, and needing a degree, to work out what modules to take at Oxford Polytechnic as it was.

*Mhm.*

Anyway, I had managed to work out which course I wanted, and I decided that IBM Basingstoke of all places was definitely where I wanted to go. I had had the interview. And I now would probably reckon I wasn't going to get either, looking back. But, slightly extending the exact truth of matters, I played one off against the other, and said that I had a place at university, or at polytechnic, if I got the IBM employment, and I told IBM that I would, in reverse. So, fortunately they both landed on my doorstep on the same day, and it paid off.

*It worked.*

So I deferred my entry to Oxford Poly and had the year at IBM, and I was the only woman on a floor of 60 blokes, except for the pool secretary. So it was still, even though we're talking 1993 now, we're not talking the 1950s, it still was that balance.

*Very much, yes.*

And so, I started with, double microelectronics was the degree course I first selected. And then I got there and thought, now, I'm quite happy being a geek, but that's really taking it to silly levels. And I discovered that they had this computer science option, but it was only the half a degree, you had to pair it with something else.

*OK.*

And therefore I looked around the courses, and I started, I went with the computer science, and stayed with half of the microelectronics. And then after about week three or week four I discovered cartography. And I thought, that's it.

*Yes.*

So although during the degree I was learning about the blouse, and I was learning about, you know, sort of, the original survey of the United Kingdom, and we were getting out there with theodolites and all this kind of thing, by, towards the end of the course we were looking a little bit more into creating maps digitally. But it was a very new science at that point of view, very new.

*Absolutely, mm.*

Yeah. So, that was...

[06:25]

*Interesting. And then you threw in the marketing diploma.*

Yes. Well, sort of, as soon as I had finished that, I sort of thought, well I, I quite liked everything I did on my degree, but I wanted to be more out there with people, rather than sat behind a screen. And I guess just at that point we could look back now and say, the sort of business analysis roles, the UI developers roles, they weren't really there unless you were in Silicon Valley. So, I didn't have the, the scope of roles that are there now for people.

*Mm.*

And so I sort of thought, how can I go into an IT role but, and understand how it works? So, I landed my first proper job I suppose, after sort of, a role that was filling in some time, as a, in a marketing department of an IT company. And therefore, that was my perfect... I understand all about what we were marketing, and I obviously I had a head start perhaps on some of the others that were in that, but then I started to play into my strengths on things like databases. So I would run all the marketing databases, and I would look at how we could make that more efficient. And it really sparked my interest. And I was living in Woking at the time, just next to Brooklands

racecourse, and Brooklands College, and they advertised that they were doing a marketing diploma. So I thought, well, might as well fill in my spare time with that.

[07:44]

*Yes. Sounds like a good thing. Your work is pretty well documented, and a quick browse around the Internet, anyone can find out what you've been up to. So tell me instead about the journey, what the journey's been like from when you started to now.*

Well, I suppose the question is, would I do the same journey if I'm now sitting and looking back. Probably yes, but I think the overwhelming thing I feel now is, slow. Which is interesting, because there's a lot packed in.

*Yeah.*

But once you start getting towards your later forties you wonder what you could have also packed in, and you're looking potentially around at your peers, or indeed your next generation coming up very fast on your heels, I mean, probably, really overtaking, what they have achieved. And you think, do you know, did I, did I achieve, you know, am I achieving everything that I wanted to? But I couldn't have sat there in my mid to late-twenties and looked forward and had any idea how this was going to go.

*No.*

I was quite happily doing IT training in, I had moved to Dorset by this time, and I had set up my own consultancy, and I was training the Dorset district council moving from Windows 3.1 up to using more of a mouse, which was a challenge, all 400 of them, and I decided perhaps we needed some help. So I recruited some freelance trainers et cetera. And I had had my first child, and I had taken a few weeks out, because obviously you're a self-employed person so, you don't your maternity leave or anything like that. And then I was pregnant with my second in 1999, and in 2000, well, my husband decided to have a, a meeting of minds, literally, into the back of a Volvo 480 on his motorbike. Which somewhat scuppered any plans I had. And so, six weeks after having my daughter I was with a two-year-old, a six-week-old, and a

husband in hospital, and, no income, at all. He was self-employed, I was self-employed. We don't get anything.

*No.*

I borrowed £2,000 from my parents, and then decided that the roles were going to have to reverse.

*Yes.*

[09:53]

So I then did more for my father's company, started getting more and more involved, and by 2005 I had really sunk my teeth into thinking, this is where it's, you know, we're going to have to make something of it or... Any, any small company, especially if it was more of a lifestyle company, for my father's income, you have to decide at some point whether you are going to make something of it or let it die.

*Yes.*

So, that's where I started out in 2005.

*So you took over running the business from your father.*

Yup.

*What other dimensions did you bring to it that your father hadn't?*

Oh. Well... [laughs] Given that he's a computer programmer, people was a good start.

*Yes.*

Yes. So... I think, my father does... He likes people in social environments, but not in terms of business. And I remember very distinctly that I had one client ring us up

and said, 'Would you please stop your father sending such poorly and condescending faxes.' And it sort of was a little light-bulb moment, that perhaps actually, there were balances of skills that perhaps one could bring to this. So we were a team of four at that point, two of my father's associates, and we were all really, just tootling along. And I decided that potentially this product had somewhere that it really could go. I wasn't quite sure where, but it definitely had somewhere to go. But it certainly wasn't going to go anywhere with my father being the sort of voice-piece or the, the mouthpiece of the company.

*Yes.*

So I started to do a couple of days a month or so in London dedicated to try building up, and understanding what the London market was about. So I started doing my CII courses, so that I would understand what this insurance industry was really about at the coalface. And, just sort of threw myself into all the aspects of the Lloyd's of London market, which then, the light bulb really started to come on at that moment that we had a really good product, and a lot better than a lot of other options out there. So, make it or die.

[12:01]

*How did it change the family dimensions?*

Oh hugely. Well my husband now was having to be the house husband I suppose. So, he had fifteen operations in the end, so, over the course of many years, which meant that a regular job and an income was, would have been tricky anyway, but equally, with two small children, and me being more and more away in London, there was zero chance that a traditional sort of make-up of family was going to happen. And in 2005 my parents sort of, sat me down with a, you know, sort of, nice cup of coffee out in the garden, said, 'We've come to the decision that we think, you know, it would be better if we gave you the company.' And I thought, absolutely superb. Thumbs up. Superb. I'm rich, all of a sudden. Absolutely brilliant. The penalty was that I had to pay them a salary till they died.

*Yeah.*



So... Which at the time seemed an easy, no-brainer, absolutely fine. Sort of, ten, fifteen years on, you realise that, that means, as someone retires from involvement, you are still finding an income to be able to pay them. So, you know, that's been a little bit of a challenge. And there have been a few knocks I wasn't expecting. I thought that running a company was just about being nice to clients and they would pay, and supplying them with what they would like, they would pay. Funnily enough, that wasn't always what was involved in running a business. You had everything from personnel issues, you had reputation to preserve, you had this funny thing called cash is king. And, and EBITDAs, and profit and loss and balance sheets, and all these kinds of things, all in the mix.

*All of which you had to learn en route.*

Yes.

[13:37]

*Yeah. So... There must have been some very difficult times, running that business, being responsible for, seven people?*

At that time, yes, coming up. So...

*Where did you find your inner ability to do that? Did you know you had it, or did you find it along the way?*

Somebody... At around about the same time a friend of my mother's was going through a huge trauma with her children being kept by the father overseas. There was an overseas custody battle. And, she turned to me and said, 'I have no idea how you cope with everything that you are doing.' And I looked at her and said, 'Who are you kidding?' I have a choice in decisions that I make, but ultimately, I felt the journey I was on was no choice. And I sat there and I said, 'Well I suppose it's a little bit like, if somebody says that you have no choice in the matter, the problems, your whole challenge, goes away. You have no choice.'

*Yes.*

So, if there's no choice, actually your stress levels start to reduce. So, I am currently undergoing breast cancer treatment, and as a result I have no choice to be on chemotherapy. So, I have no choice. My hair will fall out. And when you get your mindset to there, a lot of things become a lot more easy. If you were given a choice about things, then the problems start, then you've got to, you start second-guessing whether your choice and your decisions were right. So providing nobody gives me a choice, I'm, I'm winning all the way to the bank. That's no problem.

[15:20]

*What values and behaviours and knowledge did you need to get through those times?*

You need to blag well. But once you've worked out what you're blagging in, you then need to go and research the facts. So sometimes you're put on the spot. Sometimes you're in front of somebody who, well, like a dragon's den, so, 'What's your profit margin?' You know, sort of, 'Give me some metrics about your performance over the last three years.' I was... What I probably realised is, I do have a great ability to retain those snippets of information, and then make them all link up. But then, you will be found out very quickly if you don't substantiate that with some really, really good and researched facts. So the first thing, I would go back and say, well what *is* the true answer, the bigger answer to that questions?

*Yes.*

So it, it was never a question of doing an MBA or getting it all from the books. I got asked a lot of questions about how the software would support our clients in compliance. So I thought, go and do a compliance course. I'm not going to be a compliance officer, but at least I can now understand where their motivation is coming from. So I think the biggest lesson, which I then, I get the rest of the team to follow as well, is that you need to understand where your client is coming from, and often it's a point of fear and lack of understanding. So if you can fill in their gaps, and give them the comfort that you're on a journey with them, then they're more

likely to be loyal, they'll give you their business, and they will... And you'll work together as a, as a true partnership, rather than a supplier.

[16:57]

*Oh that's really cool. And you've just taken on two more senior appointments, bringing the team to...*

Including part-timers, flexi-timers, contractors and every which way, upside-down and back to front, there are 24 of us.

*Wow. So a non-exec chairman and a director.*

Yes.

*How's that going to change business?*

Well, I hope it'll change it. The director appointment makes a three-man executive board, of two men and a woman. Both the gents concerned are fairly confident that doesn't sway the balance on the gender element, because, they probably support the fact I have quite a, a vocal and, a very... I have a very clear image about what the company should create in the mind of anyone that knows us. So if I am talking to somebody in the market, and somebody says, 'Oh where do you work?' 'Morning Data.' I know what I want them, the first thought to come in their head. And I want them to think of a niche, very adaptable, very flexible, very supportive and clean company. That's what I had in mind.

*Yes.*

With a non-executive chairman, you're really looking at something a bit different. You are looking for somebody who's going to show the three-man executive board all the stuff they don't know.

*Mhm.*

So that is someone who has done it before, someone who has been through some of those pains. But every appointment is as much about the personality of that individual, not about getting someone who has transformed the last company from a one to 25 million turnover company in three years.

*Yes.*

Their CV does not need to have lots of noughts on it, it doesn't need to have lots of incredibly impressive achievements, but it does need to have steadiness, it needs to have understanding, it needs to, understand the value of the team that's got you to the journey so far, but also, a strength to spot where potential changes that might be a little uncomfortable need to be made as well.

[19:00]

*Yes. So, you've mentioned being a woman in a three-man team.*

*Mm.*

*You are a woman in an overwhelmingly male career path. What advice would you give to other women coming into that area?*

It's a bit trite, but I would say, truly, do nothing but be yourself. Because, there's no difference because you're a woman. There really is absolutely no difference because you are a woman. Most of the time any man who, if that's how you look at it, if you see that perhaps a career door is not opened, or perhaps an opportunity, sadly I would think it is, 50 per cent the woman herself, and 50 per cent the man who is standing in front of her as a blocker. And he's probably scared, fearing his own future, and totally out of his comfort zone, because he might not have appointed a woman in that role. And we are very tribal as people; it's not just about women, it's about cultures, it's about diversity. When you are sitting in front of an interviewee who might be a wheelchair user, you have got the same challenges as the interviewer to decide, crikey, we're on the eleventh floor, and this building hasn't got disabled access. All these thoughts are going through your head. So the same will happen. So, any woman presenting themselves into a career just simply needs to state very clearly

what her goals are, what she wants, and does not, do not allow in your head to think that because you're a woman you're not going to get this job. That confidence then comes through out of every pore of your body.

*Yes.*

I was, perhaps the overarching trait that I was blessed with was a complete ignorance during my teens, twenties, and even into my thirties, that there *was* a problem. I wasn't even aware that there was a diversity problem on gender balance. It was only when it started to hit the news I really realised what the problem was. So, because I was completely oblivious to it, it never was something that stood in my way when talking to someone. I find the old boys' network. Find your way into it. Find a different avenue. I don't play golf, the last bastion of the Lloyd's of London and City of London male involvement. But go along and organise the golf day, be there when they come off the golf course. Apart from anything else, they all come off in drips and drabs; you have now got the most amazing networking opportunity of getting the drinks in whilst they're all coming off the golf course. It's fantastic. So, you can always spin it to your advantage. It is simply just about believing what you want is perfectly achievable.

[21:35]

*Cool. How much difference has having good mentors made, and in what ways?*

Oh, hugely. And this comes to something I was chatting with a colleague, Rob, about, is the... You've got the unconscious bias, which we've perhaps addressed a little there, and then you've got this, this inferiority idea, this, this idea that you're not good enough. So you have this sort of, complex of whether you really, whether someone's going to actually suss you out at any moment. And that is quite weird. And going back to an earlier comment, where I would potentially blag at certain times, and you are, so, and then you go, but I might be found out.

*Yeah.*

Well that can happen to your entire career. I'm still sitting here leading a, you know, an international software house, and I'm thinking, how did I get here? [both laugh] Because, I haven't got the MBA, I haven't suddenly been fast-tracked by KPMG, I haven't been through these other ranks of big companies. And there is so much more you learn in a smaller company than you will ever learn in one of the big companies. And it seems that at the moment, the youth of our, our next generation coming up behind us are set on getting placements at all these big companies because they think that'll catapult them into, into a great career. Personally, yes, I had a year off in IBM, but I learnt less in that year than in any other year of my experience and career. I learnt far more in smaller companies. And so your work experience, all these kinds of things pulled together I think are, are really, really important, and getting the next generation up behind us is, is a huge, huge ambition.

*Interesting.*

Yes.

*And you mentor them, in your turn?*

Yes. So I've had, I would probably say, maybe five mentors in my career. I've had one which was, now a Past Master of the livery company, and he had, he was the sort of, fifteen years ahead of me. He had built his software house. He had been through it. He was a very, he could understand the strains and, and various things, of family. I have had one who would be the, the proverbial kicker-up-the-backside, who literally took no prisoners, and I've cried, and I've revealed my soul, and everything, you know, under all of that kind of, trauma. And then I've had someone who was very much more about the London Market and where I was going. And then I've had friends who perhaps don't realise they've been mentoring me.

*Yes.*

And that's where I turn the tables back onto others. So, I have mentored a lovely young chap from Lilian Baylis school, who, I felt I did very little to help him whilst he was getting to the end of his A Levels, and I felt that I hadn't really cracked that

nut, I hadn't really made any impact at all. But two years later, when he had lost his way a little bit on what he was doing, he buzzed me on LinkedIn and said, 'Hi. Do you remember me?' And I said, 'Well of course I remember you.' But it was the reaching out in the first place.

*Yes.*

So, the confidence that the place he wanted to turn was someone he thought could help at that moment. And that, that was worth more than any possible failure of not seeing an amazing rising star in a six-month mentoring programme that you do. I think that was... And we will remain in contact through his career I'm sure, every time that he needs. So the same with any of the youngsters that come through our... And we always have somebody that we would be having either on work experience or an internship or whatever.

[25:18]

*Cool. Now, turning to the awards and accolades for your work.*

*Mm.*

*You've had lots and lots of them. Which ones have been the most meaningful to you?*

I won't say this just because you're interviewing me Kerri, but, I think, you'll understand why. So, the Women in the City award, gosh, two thousand and, going back a bit, yes, twelve, eleven, something like that.

*Twelve.*

Twelve I think, yes.

*Yes.*

And I, I think really because, it was something in the City, not in Dorset, which is where the development centre is. So that was the first thing. It went through the

traditional interview programme, so it was something I had never done before. I had been working for the family business since 2009, so I hadn't actually sat an interview of any kind whatsoever. So that was slightly weird in its own right. And, the fact that, I didn't win.

*Mm.*

Not that I in the wildest dreams expected to as it happens, but I was highly commended. And, we've discussed previously about...

*I think the only highly commended ever.*

Well, yes. [laughs] And, and your job, as one of the interview, one of the adjudication panel, was apparently sort of, difficult to value between the winner and myself et cetera. And the winner was someone who was able to influence a far larger number, individual... It was a numbers game.

*Yes.*

And being in a large international bank, her influence was, was quite extensive. But what it did was, it catapulted me into realising, actually I might be quite good at this. And I think that's why it's possibly the most, the most important. It's the most influential point in my career, and why the others are all wonderful, absolutely wonderful, and I think anything that is technically based, something that is maybe, you know, sort of, a business partner of the year of the company. Those kinds of things really look at the whole value of the company's influence, which I hope my influence is then going into. But that I think is definitely the most, the most memorable.

[27:27]

*Cool. Now you also do quite a lot of philanthropic projects. What do they have to do to tick the box that gets some time from you for them?*



They have to be different. So, we have sponsored... By supplying... Raise money. And we've, we've sent it to one of our clients in Africa, who has bought goats in Eritrea. So Eritrea was a, has been a war-torn country, it's very, very calm now, but it has its difficulties. But, there are a lot of women left with no male part of their family, so they've either lost their husbands or their fathers and their brothers. And so they're out... They have no welfare system as such. So we felt that what they actually needed was a, well we didn't, it wasn't our decision. We talked to our client, and the client was talking about it. And they, they don't charity. So we said, well, why don't we buy them five coats each. And is five enough, is five the right number? Can they then grow to a herd? And all this kind of kind of thing. And that was really really successful. And when I went out for a business trip a few years after we had, I think we had got about 60 goats by that stage, you know, we were able to influence the lives of those ladies, but without lots of administration charges and all these kinds of things between.

[28:49]

And then the other end of the scale is our, the office where we have just moved from recently, it was based in a village. And, it had a, average age of quite a, sort of retirement-y kind of level, and it had a village hall, and all these kinds of things. So we decided, well what could we do to give back into the village? And, we, we shop at the shop, but, that's not really going to enormously impact the village. So we paid for the village hall's Internet line.

[29:17]

So I think it's always looking for something that's a little bit different, and how you can help directly rather than just necessarily doing the traditional raising of charitable funds, which is great and, and absolutely superb, but you then might wash into the same as everyone else.

[29:34]

*Mhm. Makes sense. You're also quite active in blogs, social media, all the modern stuff as it were, that wasn't there when you started. Which social...*

Till I forget my password and I need help to get back in again. [laughs]

*Which social environment do you find the most useful for getting your views recognised?*

LinkedIn. Hugely. Although not necessarily for writing the, the pieces themselves. So, I run a, a sort of, personal résumé and blog post using Strikingly, and then, the, the company's website for anything that is really to do about the market. I think it's also differentiating your personal views, even though they might be in a professional capacity, compared to the company's views. But in terms of driving responses, where, from the audience that I am trying to approach, then LinkedIn.

*Mhm.*

But, in contrast, and feeling that one of, one of the elements I've got the most strength of from being diagnosed with breast cancer, was then, and that isn't necessarily the right channel to select, although most of the people who might be interested as my friends, so I've been very cautious to put a post on just to let them know how it's going. But I've been running that through your traditional Facebook et cetera. And going into the foray of YouTube and, and sort of, Instagram and all this kind, of which I now realise I know very little. So I'm... [both laugh] So late night conversations with my son at Swansea University going, 'How do I get more likes on my YouTube videos?' At which point I realise I'm behind the curve on that as well. He said, 'I don't know. It's a bit of an old thing for me.' So you do get this, and you realise how fast this technology is, is moving on. And yet I'm, in my professional world we're talking about lock trade, we're talking about AI, robotics, test grips et cetera. But these worlds are almost, not really overlapping for, for a single point to look at. So you can be terribly technologically advanced, and be a bit of a dinosaur in the same... Just ask half of my team when I've, you know, get myself locked out of something, or, I'm trying to get through on the BPN and it doesn't quite work, and, yes, I put the whole... Yes. I'd say "blonde head on", but present company excluded, but... [laughs]

[31:50]

*You posted a blog earlier this year, 'Is tech killing the Lloyd's broker?'*

Yes.

*Take us through your thoughts on that.*

So, the London Market itself is 325, 330 years old, it's one of the oldest industries in the world. It's based on face-to-face. And for those that don't know the Lloyd's of London model, you have a, a marketplace, like a Roman forum, which is that famous building, and the brokers will come to punt their business to the carriers, to the underwriters. And they will do that sat on a small wooden stool, I think we might have got to a metal one, it might even have a cushion on now. And the underwriters will be sitting at what was the old wooden benches, and they too might have swivel chairs and a computer. But fundamentally that mechanism hasn't changed and still hasn't. The London Market's introducing huge initiatives under a branding of the TOM, the Target Operating Model, and this is really where huge changes are happening. And the first and most high profile of that is, is something called PPL. For those not in the London Market, there's lots of acronyms, as in any industry, but that's the Placing Platform Limited. And it is set to totally change the way that that broker and underwriter relationship work. Yet of course, in order to get adoption, there is the element of, it won't change anything, you will still be able to do the face-to-face. Now combine that with Brexit, and we've seen some of the big carriers up sticks and move out to Brussels. Lloyd's itself has now set up in Brussels. So, this technology is set to mean that that face-to-face, walking over to Lime Street, that is going, it has to go, in the same way as, a documentary last night, and this morning, all over the news, about banks getting rid of cash, and Google and all these guys coming in on the banking and the finance side. It's going to change. And the brokers have had ten, fifteen years of their margins being squeezed and squeezed and squeezed. So they haven't got the capital to just suddenly go and take the latest tech to keep up.

Yes.

So they're going to have to be very very ingenious about how they do this. And I think they're still, given that we've only got 250 Lloyd's brokers, we have got about the same number of Lloyd's carriers, it's a very tiny market, the move from outsiders isn't there. Well it's not the same as any other industry, where you have got the

power of the masses. You haven't. Even with the threat of brokers and intermediaries from overseas, it's a different model. So, branding of Lloyd's, is it strong enough to take this? The Lloyd's market itself and the way it operates, the TOM, which is the company and Lloyd's of London, and Brexit, are all going in to making an environment where the broker has got to decide where their priorities are, and really quickly, otherwise they are going to struggle.

[34:40]

*OK. You're also one of the most influential people in IT and in business. That must carry quite a level of responsibility with it. How do you use that position of influence to encourage the next generation?*

Well isn't it a little bit of, Jack of all trades and expert at none. I'm not really quite sure. There are many people who are better at IT itself than me. There are many people who are better at business and making a, you know, sort of, a company fly through the million mark and the two million mark, three million mark, five million mark, in two, three years, and they get it all together. But if you are trying to create a company where you have loyalty and longevity of service of the team, consistency, education, realising that the youngsters have to, I always do, I always pitch to the sixth form courses, sixth form lectures that I do, where I say, 'Well if you think this is the end of your education, you're going to get an almighty shock, because this is just the start. Never mind university, if you're not going to university it doesn't really matter, but, you are now starting your learning journey.'

*Yes.*

So you combine all that together, and yes, you might not be running a company that's going to grow as fast as others, but you're seeing all of the pinch points. You're seeing the problems that your staff bring to you because of family issues, perhaps because of their change in their priorities. They want to maybe move areas, but they don't want to lose their job, but now they can't commute to the job. So, how can we be flexible? Can we support them working from home? I have a young lady, I was desperate that she would come and work for us, and she was already working four days a week. And we got into discussion about how this would look, and she said, 'I

have a plan to, to move in the next couple of years to,' Norfolk kind of area. And therefore she wouldn't be able to commute. I said, 'Don't worry.' This before we had even got the job over the line. 'That'll be fine. We can work something out.' And now she works two days in the City, two days at home, and it all works brilliantly.

*Yes.*

It's about being flexible. So that next generation, they're likely to learn far more skills by seeing a smaller company that has to do it all, and that each individual has to, answer the phones. I do, on a Friday I, I work in the Dorset office, and, I never like the phone ringing, and so, I don't shut myself away in, in a room. I'll be doing a support course. And even the, even the clients ring up, 'Kirstin? Goodness [laughs], why are you on the phone?' And, 'How can I help you?' da-da-la And you, everyone is always doing that. And you hear these stories of, the janitor or the cleaner rising up into being the CEO. They're in much larger companies where you're going through the various levels. Actually, in Morning Data you're always doing all of those levels, whilst having an area of expertise. So that next generation get to come in, they spend a week. We've got a young lady this week who's spending a week with us, and, we only got about four days' warning. Now that's agile. [both laugh] And, getting the approach, and, of being able to think on your feet and saying, right, what does someone want to see? They don't want to be given a task necessarily, or indeed, make coffee or photocopy, or anything like that. They want to see what the company does.

*Yes.*

So there's a lot of spectating, but equally, feeling by the end they've learnt something about what running a small company is about, as well as their area of interest, was why they, you know, spent the week with you, or the six weeks with you, or whatever it is.

[38:05]

*Cool. You've been involved with it, not all the time, but over the last 50 years technology has hugely changed the face of, home and business life.*

Mm.

*What ways do you think that it's empowered people through that change?*

I shall demonstrate practically, but without the visuals. The audience might not like it, but... Alexa. Turn on lounge lights. [electronic sound] There you go. So, you're empowered in your home. And I come back to my flat at the end of a day, [laughs] and I feel I have a friend in, in the home. But, that is demonstrating something, when you're really really just sitting there, one-to-one, you've got something that you can see the, the outcome from. But it's stealth isn't it. It's, it's the things you're not consciously taking the decision about. And all the way along, it seems, people are only just waking up to the power of the data these systems have been housing, and I'm a data queen, I love data. If somebody asks me some sort of, philosophical question, or some sort of strategic question, I have to back it up with numbers and figures behind. It's not a maths situation, it's, I like patterns. Probably would have loved, if I'd ever been given an opportunity in sort of, Bletchley Park or something, you know. So, I love watching for patterns. So, I'll always compare this year with last year, then put it into context. So, the data element about, choosing to switch off Google data tracking, when I realise that actually I can see it's shown me everywhere I've walked over the last five days. It enlightens you of the power of that data. So the mission to tell my clients, the data you are putting into our software, it's not the software you're buying, but the value of that data. How can we now leverage that with you? And I think, the whole industry has got two channels. There's the choice channels of, Alexa, or anything. Don't say it too loud, she'll answer. But there's also the stealth technology behind where we're not overly aware it's happening, and we might... But we're adopting it by default.

*Mhm.*

I think that has, is, it's so big a deal, that, users both at home and in the workplace, 20 years ago your computer at work would have been infinitely more powerful than your

computer at home. Now it's the reverse. And everyone has an expectation that what they can do at home, a fingerprint on their, on their downloadable app for 56 pence, is, what they should expect in the workplace. And those worlds are still quite substantially apart. So it'll be an interesting journey over the next to three to five years.

*It will.*

Or three to five months. [both laugh] Works so fast.

[40:53]

*For young people starting a career in technology, do you have any advice for them?*

Get stuck in. Seriously. Don't narrow your channel of education. If you want to go and do a university degree, and this is entirely my personal view, and it's a bit sort of, pot calling kettle black because I did, but don't think your degree is going to tell you your career. Seriously decide, if you're going to into IT, do you need a degree?

*Mm.*

Quite seriously, my view is, well I mean I, I do have a couple of graduates, I even have a couple of PhDs, but I didn't employ them because of those qualifications. I didn't even disregard them as being a minimum entry requirement. I almost regarded them as a hindrance, because they were behind the times. So, my, one of my most shining developers that I saw early on came to me the day after he got his A Level results, and he announced to me in the interview, 'Hi. I'm Asperger's, and I don't think I did, I didn't do very well in my, in my exam results.' I said, 'Well what did you get?' He said, 'Well I got a Distinction star in my IT, but I got,' I think he might have got two Ds in physics and maths. And I said, 'OK. Well, what do you want to do?' Because if you don't take a job in what you want to do, you will never be happy.

*Mm.*

So, you need to find out what you want to do, and that means taking work experience, it means taking, sadly, unpaid work, shadowing, doing days, taking anything that anyone is prepared to offer you, so that you can find what you want to do. And there probably isn't a degree course in it.

*No.*

So, get practical experience, and build up something that says, 'I can make a difference to you, Mr Employer, and this is how I think I could do it, but what I'd also like to do is for you to teach me what else I can do.'

[42:43]

*Yup. What brings you most joy in your life?*

[pause] Oh. Crikey. Now that is a question. Which also shows I haven't read the questions before we had this interview. [both laugh] What's the most joy? The most joy is, quite honestly, is having a happy employee. Someone who comes up and asks for more work, and wants to do more things. And if that's an employee permanent or a returning contractor, or if it's a, a youngster who wants to come back for another week or whatever. Because it validates what you're doing, somebody else wants. And I think that is hugely... I mean I also love watching my kids achieve something, or... I just love watching them... Actually, I like it when both my children are together and they're not bickering. So I have a very low expectation, you know. [both laugh] But it's absolutely fine, I'm easily pleased. I like sitting on the sofa and watching a box set. But, in terms of my professional environment, it's, it's seeing the people around me, and seeing their eyes sparkle. And you cannot hide that. You cannot hide that.

[43:51]

*No. What goals do you have for the future?*

The... I think the main one is, not to screw up. Because if, if you set that your benchmark, everything else has got to be better. [both laugh] When you're running a company approaching a two million turnover, it's, it's, there are plenty people who



have got a bigger number of noughts in what they're doing, but you're also at quite a sensitive size. You could still always fail. So it's all about, waking up every day, doing something that makes a little bit of a difference. There's no need to set, climbing Mount Everest, but there's, there's, getting that next happy client, getting that next happy member of the team, getting that next happy person who turns round to you when you're chatting over a glass of wine and they sort of say, 'Oh I heard about Morning Data. They were saying,' and it's a favourable response. That, continuing that, and growing the business off the back of that, means, as you said in the opening thing, doing things a bit differently.

[44:53]

*A little bit differently. Absolutely. What were the most positive, and negative, financial outcomes you have experienced in your career?*

The most positive is just quite a recent element, from the company's point of view. We were looking to have some additional finance into the company so that we could expand, partly, recruiting additional seniors, growing the team, all the traditional things that you would want to do to sort of kick you over to that next level. And in doing that, we were faced with, the only options was to give away shares. The only option was to get an angel, and they want an exit plan in three years. All the things that didn't make me feel comfortable. And even the people involved, it was all about the numbers. And where's, where's the humanity? Where's the people? Where's... What are you thinking about the team in Dorset? You know, what, how are we going to see this happen? And, I was introduced, through the livery company, to a gentleman some years ago, and we've remained in contact, and I was talking to one of my mentors, and they said, 'Well why don't you ask him? He's bound to know, he's in finance.' And he did. The chain started off, the network leveraged itself, and we are one of the first companies to leverage a new product from Spherion, then, it was Lombard, which allows for the IP of our software to be leveraged as security. That's changed, just changed the way our next year and two years will go. So that, that's a real positive, of thinking outside the box, and sticking to your guns, and not going the traditional route everyone tells you you should.

[46:27]

The most negative is the first sizable client we ever lost. Well apart from anything else, we didn't think you lost clients, that seemed to be quite a strange kind of concept. My father had been running the company with the four or five clients for ten, fifteen years by that point. And suddenly, we lost a client. And we had had to pitch for the client to retain our business. It had been a very unpleasant environment, how it had gone through. It was an eye-opening experience about how you were treated, hoops you had to go through, and then we still lost. And that knocked over 28 per cent off our top line, overnight. But it was the silver lining. Now we suddenly realised, you can't be complacent. And that was 2008, and during the financial crisis. So the two things hit us at the same time. And so, immediately we got the news, not waiting to see the effect it would have in the next quarter or anything. We sat down with the team, it was about, sixteen of us at the time, and I sat there and said, with my lovely spreadsheets out on the table, 'There's option one, there's option two, there's option three. Now do any of you have another option?' And it had all the figures, everything open, books open. And the guys had a look at it. And I said, 'My favoured is, everyone takes a pay cut.' The staff take a pay cut, and the directors have double that, in a percentage terms pay cut. The other options involve people being made redundant et cetera, all the traditional things that you would do. Universally, they voted we all took a pay cut. And I said, 'Remember, it's not that you get that money back in two years' time. This is where we have to reset.' And we didn't lose anybody over it. And that meant that, despite the trauma, despite that sort of rethinking, and despite that inevitability we should have seen coming if we were less naïve at the time. And that was a really, really useful learning curve as well. Again, a small company having to be agile, reactionary, and think on your feet.

[48:20]

*Yes. When you work with others, what are your experiences of facilitating their personal development?*

Well, they get a little bit of a wake-up call when they first start, because the first thing they have to do is do their CII courses in insurance. So, I sort of set the tone from the moment they walk through, it's part of the original negotiation. They either have to have clocked up over 20 years' experience in either financials or insurance, so we might get some more mature members of our team thinking, I'm not going back to

school, but they have accrued perhaps infinite knowledge. But anyone who has had less than ten years' experience, straight onto the CII courses. And then when they've done that, we try and look at, well what else do they want to do? Do they want to do something in their area? So the developers might want to do some courses in their particular area of expertise, or something that interests them. But equally, they may decide they want to do a course in basket weaving, or, Pilates, or whatever it is. Because, once they've done that, they, they've basically unlocked, it's a bit like gamification, they've gone through the first level, now they can unlock, you know, sort of, you know, sort of, coins, or whatever, to enable them to go on and do something else. And that makes the workplace be more of their life, not a job that they turn up to between 8.30 and 5.30. And if you do that, then you have, you know, you have that partnership between the employer and the employee, both words I even slightly struggle to say. I don't even like referring to it that way. We call it team or whatever other, you know, words you might use. But it is about, the family. You spend an awful lot of hours in a week with this group of people. A) you need to get on with them; and b) you need to feel as though you're going somewhere, and that you're able to continually contribute back into the company as well.

[50:14]

*Yes. And finally, what about you is least documented, that you would like people to know?*

Oh. [laughs] Oh you are, you thought long and hard about that one didn't you. Least documented. Well I mean I, I'm not backwards in coming forwards at talking about most things. [pause] I guess, perhaps it's the vulnerability, because, despite the, the front face, and, even to the point of the treatment I'm going through at the moment, and losing my hair has really knocked me sideways, because of the image you portray, and, and how people see you. I had a wonderful lunch with some colleagues and people from the London Market a couple of weeks ago, before my first treatment. And one of the people arrived a few minutes late, and walked in and said, 'Oh hi crazy lady.' And I sort of thought, isn't it interesting how people see you, you know, truly, from the outside. And I think, the feedback I sometimes get, I don't recognise. I don't recognise when people say, 'Oh, you're, you're always incredibly committed in your view,' or, perhaps obstinate, or, any other less favourable terms. And I guess

learning that you can be a bit Marmite is, is a little bit of... I always thought I was nice. I think that's the, that's interesting... I always thought I was very nice. And, and frankly, sometimes you realise, perhaps actually some people don't see you that way. So, me, inside, is probably not documented, despite the fact I feel as though I often bear my soul quite openly. So maybe that is the real me underneath, whatever that is. And it's probably a bit more marshmallow-y and soft and a bit, you know, I'm a bit too nice sometimes. So. But, apparently, not everyone sees it that way.

*Not everyone sees that. It's been a pleasure to meet you, and to have such an interesting and inspiring conversation.*

Thank you.

*Thank you very much for being open and candid in your answers, and willing to share your knowledge and experience. Thank you.*

It's my pleasure, thank you Kerri.

[End of Interview]