



Capturing the Past, Inspiring the Future

# Susan Cuff

Interviewed by

**Ian Symonds**

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**Archives of IT**

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*Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology. It's the twenty-seventh of June 2019 and we're in the offices of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists in Smithfield, London. I'm Ian Symonds and I've been working in information technology and management consultancy since 1976, a period of enormous change in the industry. Today I'm talking to Susan Cuff. Sue has been intimately involved in the IT recruitment, resourcing and contracting industry almost from its inception, back in the 1970s. We'll be talking about Sue's background and influences, some key events that shaped her career and her views on the industry today.*

*Hello, Sue.*

Good morning.

*So, just to kick off, where and when were you born?*

Altrincham in Cheshire in 1954, October, to a medical doctor and my mum who is a housewife and mum.

*Ok, and what was your family life like?*

I was the eldest of four children, I was away at boarding school from when I was ten. The fourth child was very sick so I grew up with a very big focus on the youngest of the siblings, in and out of hospital, in and out of operations, which was a big shaper on family life obviously. Dad - in those days doctors really were doctors and actually visited people in their homes – he qualified before the NHS was born, so he took it all very seriously and worked extremely hard. Memories also, we then moved to Yorkshire, memories of a lot of immigration in Dewsbury and Batley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire and dad dealing with all kinds of people he'd never come across before. Very, very interesting, very busy, memories of him going out, all night visits, Christmas Days with the carving knife raised over the turkey and the 'phone ringing and him dashing off. Very busy, four kids, the usual hurley-burley, you know, dogs, cats, kids. And then, when I was thirteen my father, who was a Cornishman, was offered a practice in Cornwall, right on the Lizard peninsula, very south-westerly

point, and he took it and everyone went down to Cornwall and that's where the rest of the time was spent. I remained at boarding school in Yorkshire until I was fifteen and then I transferred to another boarding school in Penzance in Cornwall and, at seventeen, I left having got A-levels and went to London University at the tender age of seventeen, from Mullion Cove in Cornwall to the Mile End Road which was quite a culture shock. [laughs]

*So what do you think were the most important influences on you in your early life?*

00:02:48

My father's job. Being the eldest. Having a sick sister who, by the way, I'm happy to say survived and is now fifty-three. And, yeah, boarding school which I absolutely loved. I was spectacularly expelled from the first one.[laughs]

*So hang on, let's just trace your education through. You started, you did your O levels in Harrogate I think, is that right?*

Yes.

*So that was at the boarding school?*

Yes. A very posh girls' boarding school. It was great fun and exactly as you might imagine it to be in the 1960s. I was expelled for being – I think the phrase they used was 'we can't control her' - and I used to escape out of the laundry room window onto the golf course and get up to all sort of very innocent shenanigans, but having got very, very good O levels and been form captain and all that sort of stuff, they decided I was uncontrollable, but I did leave with a whole clutch of excellent O levels, I'm glad to say, and then went on to the Cornish boarding school which was a very different kettle of fish. Much smaller, much less formal, I had a great two years there, again used to escape at weekends but hey, you know.

*And what A levels did you study?*

English, French, German and Latin, a Latin S level.

*Hmm, that's unusual.*

Well, yeah.

*So languages are your thing then, are they?*

Well, no, literature really, and Latin I loved, but because the school was so small it didn't have an in-house German or Latin teacher so in order to study those two subjects I had to go over to the boys' grammar school in Penzance and study with a different teacher. So I used to be trekking around Penzance weekday afternoons which, of course, was a great thrill because I was out in a boys' grammar school. [laughs] But I did get very good results and I went to London University to study law which was a massive mistake. In those days I was interviewed, my first time ever in London, by one of the professors face to face to get onto the course and he asked me – Professor Ian Yates, I won't forget it ever – why I thought it was appropriate for a woman to be studying a man's subject, which I thought was quite interesting. This was in 1972, but the intake that year was 83 students of which only seventeen were female. It was very much a man's subject in those days and the reason, I think, I got in, was that in those days again, having Latin was useful because Roman law was sort of a thing which it's not so much, I don't think anyway, these days, I don't know. But I did the first year, fell in love – not with the subject, with a fellow student – and I left after the first year to go to work to support the two of us. So we were living together which didn't go down well with the parents so one of us needed to work and I decided that was going to be me and off I went and I met, to my eternal gratitude, Michael Heseltine and Josephine Hart at Haymarket Publishing.

*Just to go on from that ...*

Sorry, yes.

*So do you regret the fact that you gave up your studies after the first year?*

Yes, I do.

*Because you were successful at school so that must have been ...*

Yes, it was stupid but I wasn't even eighteen, I mean, I was at university at seventeen and I was in love and foolhardy. And I didn't take any advice, my parents were just shocked, my then boyfriend's parents couldn't really have cared less, so there was nobody around to advise and I was headstrong, very headstrong, and I thought the world of work was beckoning.

*Apart from men, what were your interests outside of education?*

Always sport, my father had always played rugby, I've been a lifelong rugby supporter, I absolutely love the game, all my male children play. My then boyfriend, he also played so I've supported rugby all through my childhood. Horses, inevitably, from early until I was about ...yeah, about sixteen, seventeen, I was very horsey. Always books, I was very bookish and always an avid, avid reader. I also loved, even though it was not so accessible in those days, the cinema and that's a lifelong love as is the theatre. So yeah, arty, sporty, very sociable.

00:07:46

*Were you able to do all of that down on the Lizard Peninsula?*

Yes, very much so. Obviously horses, riding on the beach was a love...

*Sounds great.*

Yeah. Rugby, yes, big time, all the Cornishmen loved rugby. So yes, and books, and the youth club and – you know – all that.

*So, although you didn't continue with your degree, how important were your education achievements at school to your career, do you think, if they were at all?*

I think that a grounding in Latin is useful all your life. It breeds in you a curiosity about language and the root of words and the derivatives of words and phrases which, I think, is good for the soul and good for the mind and good for one's levels of eloquence and writing style. I think that's useful all your life and I do very much enjoy that. Yes, I regret not being able to pursue a more academic career and I regret that what I did study, apart from the Latin and things I've just mentioned, has really had much effect on me.

*Did you form any friendships during your education that were to help you later in life?*

University, very much so. I have very, very close friends now who I was at university with. A lot of them are very successful lawyers of course, [laughs] so the answer to that question is yes, most certainly. School, no, but university most certainly yes, and all through my working life.

*So, as you said just now, your first job was with Haymarket Publishing.*

Yes.

*How did you get that job?*

I saw an advert in the Telegraph asking for bright young people, seventeen plus, with A levels, 'ring this number'. So I did and it said something about the need to be bright and sociable and something along the lines of dynamic which you wouldn't be allowed to say these days, I don't think. I thought, ok that sounds like me, so I called the number and it was for telesales, advertising sales, and off I trot to what I later discovered was a recruitment company. I didn't know what a recruitment company was, I had no idea, so I went to Regent Street to meet a man called Gary Denman, I'll never forget his name. I had no idea whether he was going to be my boss, whether he was a company, I just trotted very innocently into this interview - I can see his face now - and it turned out that he was a recruitment company working on behalf of Haymarket Publishing, to hire bright young telesales people. Anyway, having met him I got sent into what I think we'd now call an assessment centre and I was put

through a battery of questions and exercises and what I now know was a psychometric assessment, and I was offered a job and I thought, well this is marvellous. I think it was about £1,400 a year to sell space, which I didn't understand the concept of, of course. So yes, after a couple of days, literally, Josephine Hart came – and I will use the word 'dashing' because she was extraordinarily dashing herself – she came rushing up to my station and said, 'I'd like to take you in a different direction'. I was being trained at the time by a telesales supervisor with the headphones on scripts, how to sell the space, and I was grasping the concepts and I got it, and then Josephine said, 'I've got another business as part of the company I'd like to show you, I think you'd be very good.' And the company that she was referring to was called Graduate Girls. And Graduate Girls was exactly as it sounds, it was a recruitment company focused on female graduates, and it was in the Brompton Road, opposite Harrods. She took me over there in a taxi, I'll never forget it, she was wearing an enormous hat, she was incredibly striking ... she's probably only about 28 at the time [laughs] ... and we went up to the Brompton Road and she showed me these desks and a couple of very nice ladies and she said, 'I want you to hire Sue' in her broad, lovely Irish accent, 'I want you to hire Sue, I think she's a star' and I was completely befuddled and in awe of this woman in a good way, and she put me under the management of the office manager, Fiona, who proceeded to teach me about the principles of recruitment which in those days, of course, was pretty basic but it was a huge amount of fun. The people we were meeting were largely girls of a certain ... what we used to call Sloane Rangers ... who'd all graduated or hadn't - from Lucie Clayton and finishing schools and whatever - and were looking for nice part-time work at the V&A or perhaps in a gallery or something along those lines. And we had jobs in PR, we had jobs in publishing, we had jobs in advertising, we had jobs in art galleries, museums - nothing vulgar like banks or anything - and they were PR assistants and advertising assistants and graphic designers – that's probably a little bit far-fetched – but it wasn't secretarial, perhaps the odd what we'd now call an executive assistant. Anyway, a huge amount of fun, all female staff.

*Josephine Hart, herself, kind of moved into what you'd call the arts and media industry, didn't she, later in life?*

Yes, exactly. She was a poet. She wrote wonderful poetry and sponsored the arts hugely and brought young aspiring poets and writers to the fore. So she was the boss of the manager of Graduate Girls and, of course, then, in 197... it must have been ... when did the Equal Opportunities Act come in? '73... we had to call it then Graduate Girls and Graduate Men. [laughs] I mean, we had our first male employee, poor man, Ken, who either was thrilled to bits about all these women or wasn't at all, and the business continued and it was just a lot of fun. I did latch onto the – you know – the sort of matching concept quickly and I loved it and I was very successful there and I got headhunted out of that business by a man who was senior sales trainer at what was then Gestetner Duplicators.

*Just before we talk about Gestetner, you also met Michael Heseltine as well because Haymarket was his company, wasn't it.*

Yes. So he used to come in on a Friday afternoon for the round-up of the week's sales meetings and go through how we'd all got on, how much money we'd made, how many placements we'd made, and he would run ... and he was terrifying but marvellous ... and he would run a fairly formal sales meeting with Josephine as well and Fiona – I can't remember Fiona's surname. Yes, he was massively inspirational, just to have him around. Inspirational, flamboyant, somebody to this day I have great fond memories ... he wouldn't remember me, I'm sure ... but great fond memories of. Of course, we then had the three-day week in '73, we were working by candlelight, and we took all that in our stride completely, we really were working by candlelight, and I'm trying to remember when there was a Harrods bomb 'cos it was very much, you know, the IRA was active and we went through a lot of disasters as well as fun ... yeah, it was an interesting time. The training that Haymarket gave, at all levels, was always absolutely great, they really did concentrate on making sure that you could do your job well, they were a great employer, and yeah, I have great fond memories of that, it was a very good grounding in the basics of sales and sort of customer management.

00;17:04



*But you decided to, when you were approached by Gestetner, move there. What was the attraction?*

Well, they were offering me a telesales supervisor role so it was a climb up a ladder, more money and I think, looking back, yes, it was ambition, it was a career step. I had a national telesales supervisor role there, covering about 39 girls actually, mainly girls, from Scotland down to Bristol, so it was quite a big job, well a very busy job. Very, very busy. Again, headsets on, scripts, training. I was then training lots of people and I liked the idea of that, having been well-trained myself. I was definitely an ambitious person, definitely, and I wanted to climb a ladder, I wanted to earn more money, I'd bought our first house, so yes, I was married very young, I was married at nineteen, and yeah, I took on responsibility with great alacrity.

*So, when was it, about 1978, I think, you made the move into IT recruitment, so what persuaded you to do that?*

Well, I had a friend, Roger Smith, who was drinking in a pub in St. Martin's Lane, called the Green Man with the French Horn – or was it the French Man with the Green Horn – anyway, an iconic institution. He had been at Gestetner in sales and I'd met him there and he then moved to Computer People, of which of course I'd never heard, and the concept of, in those days, data processing and recruitment in that I didn't understand. Anyway, he invited me over for drinks regularly and I went over to this pub in St. Martin's Lane on a regular basis and met his boss, a wonderful, wonderful Glaswegian, sadly long since dead, Jim Kane who was a mover and shaker at Computer People and a wonderful, wonderful, hugely intelligent, mercurial man, wonderful inspiration, and he was the head of sales in London for Computer People.

*The company hadn't existed all that long, had it?*

'73.

*'73, it was formed, yeah. And it's kind of important to recognise that the sort of notion of IT contracting and so on was quite new at the time.*

It was almost a brand new concept, yeah, and Jim ... it was all invented by what was called then VLI, Vincent Landfield International, which was an amalgam of the surnames of the founders of the company – Tony Vickers, Rupert Bayfield and Anthony Lambie, so it was VLI and Computer People was the sort of trading name, if you like. The building, of course, famously was VLI House which is now MacDonalds. So we were all in VLI House and I was approached in the pub by Jim Kane, this mercurial Glaswegian, hugely gifted man, jazz aficionado amongst many other things, and he approached me in the pub and said ... I won't attempt to do his accent, but in a broad Glaswegian accent ... he said 'You, I want you on my team.' And he's just, I think, watched me function socially and decided I was his type. Without much ado offered me a job across the bar and more money and the first woman in the company as a sales person, I think probably one of the first ever, in fact, Christina Simons of DP People I think it was called, and I were the first female contract sales people in London. I didn't know that then but, anyway, onto the team I came, on February the first, 1978, in the snow, and I got into the office at some obscenely early hour – it wouldn't be obscenely early now but in those days about half-past eight – and of course, nobody was there, absolutely nobody. All the salesmen were men in their – probably, looking back – in their thirties, perhaps early forties. I was this eager-beaver girl, what was I, twenty something, twenty-four, and I was all eager-beaver and innocent and hard-working and they'd been paid so much money. When they eventually turned up to work, these men, all of whom I remember very well, it was feet on desks, talking about what they were buying at lunchtime for their wives, where they were going for lunch, I was absolutely astonished, and in I go and I just start working very hard. Of course, there were no computers, candidates in those days, all the cvs were on paper, we stored them in shoeboxes which were meticulously organised, yellow Kalamazoo cards in order to enter details of the various jobs we were trying to fill, telex machines. I'm not sure we even had faxes quite yet, lots of jobs and the whole motion. Jim, Jim Kane, trained me in detail about the process, the industry, the business, what is an IT contractor – I'd never heard of it – obviously I knew about temps so it was the equivalent really of a temp but we never ever used that expression.

*Is it true that Rupert Bayfield invented the term 'contractor'?*

He will tell you that, as he calls himself the grandfather of the industry. I think you probably should just believe him, really, that's the safest thing to do. [laughs] I think he probably did. So yes, and of course the concept was completely new, so I remember my first ... I started off on what we would call resourcing, so in a support function, finding candidates for these blokes who put their feet on the desks, and I was very good at it and after a very short time Jim said, 'Right, you're going to start selling' and I was frustrated, I wanted to be out there selling, I didn't want to be in the back office, I wanted to be in the front office and I wanted to compete with the men. I could see that the men were bone idle and I thought I could beat them. And beat them I did. Of course, in those days all the mail arrived in sacks, literally, at five or six in the morning it was delivered to the office, and what I learned very quickly to do was to get to the office first, meet the postman, get the mail, empty the mailbag and all the cvs would tumble out. I'd rip them open, get first pass on the cvs of the candidates, hide them in my bottom drawer and beat the boys at their own game. They soon caught on but they didn't get to work early enough so it was hilarious. We had the most fantastic time there. Business was booming, I remember my first ever client visit was to Courage Breweries in Acton and I hadn't got any appropriate clothes. Jim Kane sent me to Marks and Spencers with some cash to buy a proper business skirt and I duly went off for my first ever client visit and met the data processing manager at Courage Breweries in a room full of computers the size of houses of course, ICL 1900s and whatever, in temperature controlled conditions, and then my career started to take off.

00:25:04

*As you say, it was a booming market back then. What were the biggest challenges?*

It was very corrupt, the data processing managers were routinely lining their own pockets by hiring staff and taking a margin on them, so that was very routine, pretty much. The challenges were, sort of, how to get any quality into it. It was a numbers game, you needed to get some quality into it, and learning and understanding the different technologies, emerging technology. I remember when SAP, German of course, hit the market and learning new ways of finding people with skills that nobody had ever heard of. Also, introducing the customer or the prospect to the concept of

contracting, explaining it to him or her, well, nearly always him. Why, what the benefits were to their business of taking on a contract with the flexibility of that model which was all new, why it was better in many ways and in many cases than hiring a permanent member of staff. We ... interestingly looking back at the business of the agency, we were then actually regulated, there was an agency licensing act and requirement which no longer exists, but I remember proudly looking at our certificate, our licence on the wall of VLI House and that was like our licence to, you know, our professional licence. And it felt like a growing profession, which is not the case today which I can comment on later.

*I mean, you didn't have any training in IT specifically, did you?*

No, none at all.

*Presumably you didn't really need it for this role, but you picked up what you needed from, about your understanding of the IT industry, was just on the job. Training as it were.*

Exactly and it was talking and listening to those IT contractors themselves. I ran for a short time, for about two years, I was assigned to the American business, and Jim Kane and Rupert Bayfield had established a presence in New York via some agents and I was assigned to that business and sent out – memorably – to New York. I'd never had a passport in my life, I was sent on a Freddie Laker flight ... having camped overnight outside Victoria Station to get into the queue ... Freddie Laker flight to New York, I had ...

*Just for listeners who are not familiar with this, Freddie Laker was probably the first low-cost airline, wasn't it.*

Yes.

*He was the first low-cost airline and you could fly to America what seemed to be very cheaply at the time.*

Exactly. At the time, the VLI group and Computer People within it was not very financially robust and we had contractors working out in New York who were working at, most memorably, Blue Cross Blue Shield, the medical insurance organisation. We had people working there who were demanding payment for work done and no means of paying them so I was sent out with a wad of cash - incredible to think about it now - and a cheque book, a huge cheque book with signed blank cheques, signed by Rupert and probably Anthony, to go and pay these contractors and sort of soothe the furrowed brows and the rising tempers of our contractor population out in New York. So off I trot, at the tender age of about twenty-five, with cash and a cheque book with signed cheques, to go and meet all these people and say, 'Right, don't worry, it's all ok, Computer People is in business, we can pay you, here's a cheque, how much do we owe you, where are your timesheets?' and all those good things. So I had a most extraordinary time, I did that a few times and met customers in America, met contractors in America, and the way I learned what I needed to know was to listen to them and I was genuinely fascinated and genuinely amazed by what they were achieving using computers and how it was all becoming ... how it translated into business, and they were very good to me. The contractor population was generous, they were nearly all English, it was the time of the skills shortage in the States, and the model was, I would meet the client at, for example, Blue Cross Blue Shield through our agent in New York, they would set up a week of interviews in London with English people who wanted to migrate to New York for a contract for, let's say a year. HB1 visa I think it was at the time, that must be the right one, and I would orchestrate a week-long interview process where the client and the agent were literally in a hotel in Bayswater, the White House Hotel I think it was, and they would spend day after day after day interviewing English people to do things like Cobol CICS and PL1 programming and IMSDL1 and all that good stuff, and I would just have hordes and hordes and hordes of candidates that I had selected and processed and interviewed myself over for technical interviews in Bayswater, and at the end of that week they would have made something like, let's say, fifteen offers. And they would go back to New York and then we would organise the candidates to go out to New York, accommodation, flights and visas, and that was a model that was very successful for a good few years. Again, it was an innovation on the part of VLI Computer People and it was profitable, good fun, it worked for all parties. That was one of my babies, if you like. I learnt a lot in that time and I have very fond memories

of the customers, of the agents themselves who were Larry Lavigne and Mike ... trying to think of the surname ... and yes, huge fun, learning curve.

*You were very successful at Computer People, weren't you?*

Yes.

*You ended up as a director.*

I did.

*So how did you get there, what was your career progression and what were the key events that made you successful, do you think?*

I think the key events were the growth of the business of course, so from being a London organisation it became international. The American business grew – I didn't stay with the American business – but they opened offices in Scotland, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, also of course London always, and Bristol. They divided the company up into regions, I became a London regional sales manager, London and the South, ended up with a big job. There were three regional managers, Midlands, North and London. London, of course, was by far the biggest region. I had a huge population of staff. Another innovation which was very successful, and has affected the lives of a lot of people in the IT staffing and resourcing business, was a graduate intake scheme which we invented in ... I would think it would have been 1982 ... and we were the first recruitment company to do a graduate intake scheme and it was really spearheaded by me, with massive support from Rupert and Anthony. And yes, from that year on we hired some extraordinarily bright people in a very professional way. We invented a whole ...well, we didn't invent ... we ran assessment centres for high numbers of people, whittled it down and hired probably ... we started in London, say 1982, I hired the first two, one of whom sadly died tragically young at forty, another of whom is a very close friend to this very day, and every year we hired good people straight from university. We were very fussy about their degree, their work ethic, their outside interests, their style, their leadership promise, their range of interests, their presentation skills, their personalities, and we actually I ended up on

television, Yorkshire TV which I think must now be Channel 4, picked up somehow what we were doing and I made a TV programme about this whole process in the recruitment sector which was aired at quite a peak time, my mum was very proud, and it was a real innovation in the staffing sector. It was really about raising standards because in those days, honestly, and these days of course, anybody could go into recruitment, no barriers to entry, it wasn't a very professional sector. It was now becoming very highly populated, highly competitive and any old Tom, Dick or Harry could start a recruitment company. The concept of the licence sort of vanished and we, I particularly, we were all very keen to raise standards, stand out, be different, be better, be more professional. Of course, the company floated and did an IPO in 1987, May '87. It was the first recruitment company to do that ...

*Were you a director by then?*

I was a director but not a shareholder, sadly, so I didn't make any money out of it. But I was also pregnant with my first child and I always remember the night of the IPO, when we had the cocktail party with the press and the PR people and all that stuff, Rupert saying to me 'Stand with your back to the wall' – he was born in July so I must have been seven months pregnant – 'Stand with your back to the wall, Sue, in case they can see that you're pregnant' because obviously I was a key player in the IPO, one of the three sales directors. So I stood with my back to the wall obediently in the top floor of VLI House, hoping that nobody would see me sideways, and I was talking to one of the PR people, or one of the advisers, a banker I think, and he said he had to dash home because his wife was pregnant and he had to be there to help her and look after her, I mean, he just hadn't spotted it at all that I was so pregnant [laughs] so that was an exciting time. Yeah, we were professionalising the company, we were raising standards, we were professionalising our approach and always very insistent, I've always been very insistent, about quality, professionalism, standards, being different, standing out, not succumbing to the sheer sloppiness that, I would say, is prevalent today and was creeping in very much at that time.

00:36:51

*Did you make any decisions that you later considered to be wrong decisions?*

About people or ...?

*About anything, really, in terms of developing the company.*

No, I think Rupert and his colleagues, Rupert particularly, did a fantastic job with Computer People. It was highly motivational, it was very people-focused, they cared a lot about their people, that's what made it work really. In this business you must never forget, it's all about the people and you need people to be motivated, focused, well-trained, well-managed and rewarded. It's hard, the hours were very, very long and great changes came in, you know, suddenly there were the first computers and the company changed, it had to be made to embrace technology, it was huge.

*Personal computers, you mean?*

Yes. So automating our processes was a huge change. Simultaneously, in our industry there was huge change too, the acknowledged which we had to learn about, massive competition, massive. We had to adapt quickly and we did some very clever, good things. We embraced automation well, Anthony spearheaded that very well, he trained everybody well. The communications in the company were extremely good and I'm a firm believer in that today, hugely. I think poor communication can wreck an organisation and they always made sure that was good. I, as a senior player in the company, always made sure that communication was excellent. We trained our people in communications skills, presentation skills, professionalising the business was important.

*So how big was the company at this time?*

I would think it was probably, in terms of people, a couple of hundred. I forget the numbers for the IPO, I can't remember.

*Across the whole country and abroad perhaps, as well?*



Yes. I also had one important growth surge for me in terms of business base. It was dealing with Aramco in Dahrán, in Saudi Arabia, which was a huge piece of business which I fell upon via another agent. That became a very, very, very big, profitable piece of business for the company and rewarding for me personally in financial terms. Of course, I couldn't go out there, being a woman, but they used to come into the country three times a year and, rather like the American model, I would line up people for them to see in our boardroom and they would hire them and I would get them out to Dahrán, on the right visa with the right housing and accommodation and so on, and that was very successful for about three years. Amusingly, there were many, many ups and downs in that piece of work. It was very hard, obviously it was male only, single status only, so the sifting and the vetting of those people was hugely important, you had to have the right style of person, because being out there working, in an alcohol-free country with some laws that they have, some customs that would have been very hard for them to live with, I had to make sure that I sent the right people out there. That was a huge piece of work for about three years, as I say.

00:40:37

*Was there a learning curve on that as well?*

Yes.

*Because presumably a few people drop by the wayside.*

Yes, very much so. And I became, for those three years, a sounding board for all their families as well, so the ones that went out that had wives and kids I would become a sort of link between the home and the contractor himself. There were some very interesting and some very difficult emotional situations to manage and then every four months they would come home. The men would come home and land at Heathrow for their two weeks ... or was it three weeks, I forget ... sabbatical at home before they went out again. It was always in those three or four month chunks and they would arrive at Heathrow Airport absolutely drunk as lords having had their first drinks for, you know, four months or whatever. [laughs] They would ring me and jump in cabs and come up from Heathrow to St. Martin's Lane where I'd be waiting for them at

about seven in the morning and these incredibly drunk men would roll in to the office and the day would start, and we would then get them all back to their various homes, wherever they'd come from – it could have been from Scotland, Manchester, London, wherever. So that was a rollercoaster, highly profitable business. Aramco was hoovering up IT skills at the time and we were a good source, so that was interesting, big learning curve, had its rough moments, but made lots of money.

*And still does, I think, doesn't it? Not necessarily Aramco but certainly the Middle East.*

The kingdom, yeah, well yes, it's not a market I've ever gone anywhere near since, actually. It's not been an appropriate market for me since so I'm out of touch, but I imagine so, yeah.

*So, round about this time, probably we're talking about the nineties now, did the founders move on from Computer People?*

Yes. So then there was a massive sea change. I had my first two children, in '87 and '89, and in 1994 there was a big sea change and the founders wanted to realise their wealth, which is more than fair enough, and we had new management brought into the company, Tony Reeves who became the new CEO, that was in 1994, April or May of that year, and the whole company changed dramatically. He had a different view about culture, a different view specifically around management of people, and ...

*Where did he come from?*

He came from a healthcare recruitment company, I can't remember the name of it. He was already a very, very wealthy man and he bought two companies when he became CEO and the MD of one of those companies became the sales lead for the company and my new immediate boss. The whole company just changed dramatically. The culture no longer seemed to be important to them, some of the perks we'd enjoyed as successful salespeople were taken away, it became, frankly, pretty brutal, very unenjoyable, and I decided I wasn't going to be a part of it anymore. So, in 1996, in the December, I and my two most senior reports resigned *en masse* to start our own

company which is Best International. So I lasted about two years in the new regime but was desperately unhappy. The whole company was unhappy and when I left to start Best an awful lot of people resigned to come with me because I was, if you like, and I don't mean to sound arrogant at all, but I remained passionate, really passionate about the importance of people and all the things I've talked about and it just wasn't respected by the new regime, it wasn't valued at all. I'll never forget saying to my new boss, after about a year, 'People are unhappy, we can't muck about with things like commission plans and reward schemes', and he said, 'Oh, they're just people, Sue, there are plenty of people out there, people come and go' and that was it for me. Also, the importance of the customer had stopped being as high as it should be. Board meetings were all about numbers, numbers, numbers ... not about customer, customer, customer or people. They were numbers-obsessed and it just wasn't - for me - about service, all the things we used to do for customers and contractors like reward, for example, long service in contractors. If a contractor was with us on site for three, five, seven years they'd get hugely feted and rewarded and thanked, as did all our good sales people, and that was all slashed and just not valued at all.

00:46:14

*So when you set up Best International you had some involvement from some of your erstwhile colleagues from Computer People as well, didn't you?*

Yes, three of us resigned together.

*Were Rupert Bayfield and Anthony Lambie involved in setting this up as well?*

Rupert Bayfield was, as the Executive Chairman, yes, and I was CEO.

*You were CEO? Ok.*

Anthony was not involved, no.

*Ok. And what was the ... I mean, the market presumably had changed a lot in the twenty years, it was probably a sort of mature and probably crowded market.*

Yes.

*So what was going to be the USP of Best International and how was it going to do things differently?*

Exactly as you said, and I said a few minutes ago, the industry was now becoming not as commoditised as it is now, at all, but getting that way, and crowded and overly colourful by which I mean we were still paper-based advertising, of course, so that leading magazines were Computer Weekly and Computing, they were very, very powerful organs in those days and they were the home for all the advertising for jobs, as well as comment and debate and so on. I should have mentioned that, in that time at Computer People, one of my clients was Jean Irvine from the Post Office, she was the head of IT, and she was on Women in IT as a committee and I got drafted onto that committee for a long time, early seventies I served on that body if you like, with some very interesting people for ...

*What sort of body was that, Women in IT?*

It was a committee about promoting women in IT, looking at why women didn't enter IT, what were the barriers, what were the reasons.

*Was it a government committee or ...*

No. I can't remember if we were hand in hand with the BCS, the British Computer Society, I rather think we might have been, but Jean was its Chair and she led research, she led publications, published papers about women in IT. I did some work with her, a lot of work with her, researching why women didn't want to enter IT - did they not want to, were there no role models, was it because the degrees that were demanded in computer science were still not attractive. Today seventeen per cent of people in IT are women; back then our research showed about eleven per cent were women. We were challenging – I'll give you an example – we did some work for IBM Global Services who wanted to bring more graduates into IT, and IBM Global Services very far-sightedly approached us for some graduates not with IT or computer

science degrees. They wanted people with either classics or music degrees because they felt that (a) there was going to be a different candidate pool and, of course, they were right, but also because they felt that people who were musically inclined or classically inclined had the right sort of brain, that logic that applies, and that was very successful. So that, of course, appealed more to women, so that particular campaign of graduates – this would be the mid, early eighties – for IBM Global Services attracted more women than we ever had done before. We weren't asking for computer science graduates or engineering graduates. So, moving back onto 1996, yes, a huge change, the industry was burgeoning and the competition was huge and we set out as Best. We started off, we remained all the six years of the company's life, black and white, monochrome, in terms of our brand. So all the advertising, which was a first, was in black and white, so pages of Computing and Computer Weekly, you suddenly opened them when we formed and find sophisticated, minimalist black and white advertising, and that compared very starkly with our competitors who were routinely multicoloured and quite confusing, but that was the style of the day. A bit, sort of, you know, florid. We were minimalist, sophisticated, different, better, hence Best as our name. We were determined to continue with the graduate intake scheme in the same way, and we did, to carry on training, and we did, the professional sales meetings, the professional management, and we did, we had some absolutely brilliant people who joined us which was very exciting and we were seen as ... you know, please bear in mind that we were quite well-known because we were leaders, we'd been already in the business for nearly twenty years, so we had good customers who respected us, customers were keen to deal with us, we offered something fresh, highly professional, and that was our USP, I mean, really it was about our people.

00:51:43

*You acquired other companies as well, didn't you, during this time.*

Yes, we did.

*Was that a deliberate part of the strategy, to sort of consolidate a bit in the industry?*

Yes. Rupert, as a leader, was highly acquisitive and he – and in my view this was wrong – insisted on opening an American business to mirror the one that he'd built in America for Computer People. I think that was an error in terms of our strategy at Best and it ultimately sunk the company really, we invested too much money in it. The American model is very different from ours in the UK. In fact, it's worth noting that the only countries that adopt, and still use, the freelance model as we understand it here today, the only two countries are England and Australia. The European model, the American model, are all completely different and they're all about employee status, not about freelance status. So, they're just those two countries and, in my view, we were wrong to go into America. It cost huge amounts of money and we didn't understand it well enough to make money out of it, and we didn't and we incurred huge losses. That was wrong. The UK strategy, of buying small companies regionally to expand the regional presence, was fine so a company in Scotland, a company in Yorkshire and a company in Bristol was successfully acquired and integrated. I spearheaded that, with Rupert, and that worked fine but America was our undoing really. Simultaneously, in the first eighteen months, or under two years of Best's life it went really, really well and we grew to over a hundred million pounds in revenues within two years and we decided to take an aggressive stance to wealth creation and try and do an IPO in America because we were too young, of course, in the UK, the rules were against us, we were too young, but in America we could go. So Rupert and I went out to the States on roadshows, I should add that we funded the company, Apax was our major investor in the UK, we raised five million pounds with Apax, and that's how Best was started. It grew to 112 million pounds, went out to America and we were literally on the brink of an IPO in Wall Street, on Nasdaq, in 1998, in October, and then world events overtook us and George Soros singlehandedly melted the Russian rouble down and then of course the European model followed, so the market collapsed and the IPO couldn't happen, that was October 1998.

00:54:41

*So tell me a bit more about that, I mean, I don't remember much, there being a sort of collapse so much in this country. Was it more of a global thing?*

It was global, yes.

*And you were too exposed globally?*

No, it was just, in Wall Street the appetite for an IPO just died.

*Because the share prices in recruitment companies collapsed at that time, did they?*

I don't remember because it wasn't an English flotation, so this was all about the US.

*So it was a difficult time, anyway, for the industry.*

For the industry, yeah. But the US was much more aggressive, obviously, about this young company and its prospects. In the UK there wasn't so much interest at that time, but then the following year, so it would have been round about 2000, we decided we were mature enough by now to try for a flotation in the UK and we did and we got very close again, but then we had that sort of blip, '01 to '03, and so that killed it and we couldn't go. So, two attempts at flotation, two attempts at wealth creation...

*Presumably Apax were looking for you to float, were they, because that was their investment, just the case for investing in you [laughs].*

Of course, yeah, payback time, absolutely.

*So how did that work out then?*

Well, obviously it didn't because we had to sell. We had to sell in '03 and Spring bought us, but obviously it wasn't a successful sale because we were then trading at a loss, at best break even, so it was very unfortunate and I do regret that US venture in Best which was our undoing. It was foolhardy and we shouldn't have done it, but we did, so by now, just more broadly around the industry, recruitment companies were floating, people were making an awful lot of money and after '03 - there was a mini-recession '01 to '03, 2000 of course was a damp squib, it didn't provide the market

with the fillip that we thought it would, it turned out that the country was much better prepared for 2000 than we thought they were ... you were about to ask a question?

*No, I was going to say, there was a lot of work in the run-up to the year 2000, wasn't there, in terms of preparations for Y2K as it was known in the industry.*

Yes, exactly.

*And also there was a lot of work in the financial sector as well, round about that time, wasn't there?*

That was all around the regulations.

*The regulations in Europe, I think, yeah.*

Exactly. So there was a lot of work but then when it actually happened nothing happened [laughs], and there wasn't much mop-up at all, so the industry wasn't really particularly affected, nothing like what we expected.

*So what was your proudest moment with Best International?*

Making the speech at the Christmas party in 2000 at the Natural History Museum, on the steps above the dinosaur in candlelight with a phantom on a piano, making a speech about our success and how well everybody had done and thanking all my people for a phenomenal three and a half years in Best and that we really were the best. We had a fantastic year, we'd made a couple of million pounds in the bottom line and I really thought it was going to go flying. I remember the dress I wore, I remember the table, I can see everybody now, it was absolutely brilliant and I was very, very proud of what we'd done. I remain very proud of having formed best Best and I remain very proud of having hired some absolutely fantastic people and I formed friendships with Computer People and Best which are massively important to me today. There's a huge network of people who really are bound together by those two organisations in their background and that's very special.



*Did you have any particular people who you would regard as mentors?*

Yes, most definitely, starting with Michael Heseltine and Josephine Hart definitely. Then Jim Kane most certainly, he then sadly passed away, Rupert to an extent in how he built the culture of Computer People and how he kept it going, it was fantastic. I do think he made a big mistake, as I say, at Best with the American business but I said that before. I had some customers who taught me a lot about their business, the business they were in, how important IT was. Remember, in those days, in the early days, sorry, seventies and early eighties, IT, or DP, was seen as a huge cost centre, it wasn't seen as part of the business, it was seen as a sort of, dare I say, an adjunct where strange men in leather sandals worked and you threw raw meat at them occasionally and they would come up with some gobbledygook that nobody understood. It was highly jargonised, it wasn't seen as part of the business, it never had a seat on the board, it would always report into finance or possibly a COO of some sort, it didn't have, as I say, a voice. Looking back I met some customers who made me understand what data processing meant to the business and how it was measured and how it should be measured and how it should be perceived and that was a learning curve for all of us really, for my clients and certainly for me as a supplier. The other thing that was changing was procurement and the role of procurement in the hiring of staff and that started the commoditisation, also the role of HR in hiring staff, and our relationships with HR on procurement became more important as time went by. We used to deal directly with data processing managers and the hiring managers and, of course, as the industry grew and the numbers grew, and bigger companies like BT for example, who were big customers, they grew to refer us to heads of procurement and heads of HR rather than getting the business involved and that was, I thought, very bad, very poor. In my view, the person, the hiring manager, should be involved in the process of hiring the people, not abdicate it to a procurement or an HR person ... and this is not their fault, they don't understand the business, the business purpose.

*1:02:10*

*I mean, I don't know if the same was true in other sectors, but certainly in government, this was the time when frameworks were sort of invented, weren't they,*

*whereby they defined the roles and so on that they were looking for and then you competed to be a preferred supplier on the framework?*

Yes. Exactly. That's still the case now. That was rising in prevalence all through that time ...

*It changes the nature of the business completely, doesn't it?*

It does. Relationship goes out of the window and box-ticking comes in. I remember, in those situations, making presentations, standard presentations which we had on flipcharts, and carrying briefcases full of predetermined and pre-set presentations to customers. You'd make them word for word and what were your USPs and we, at Computer People and Best, veered always away from 'it's all about size', you know, 'we've got the biggest database as recruitment companies, the biggest database, we've got the biggest number of countries covered, we've got the biggest number of clients'. We were always the opposite to that at Computer People and at Best, it wasn't about size, it was about quality, but I remember pitching, as you say, exactly like that in competition. Beauty parades were common, you know, we'd go into a room and queue up with other recruitment companies to go and make our pitch, or be invited to a session where there would be a presentation from the head of procurement or the head of HR, or sometimes the head of IT, about what they needed and we'd be invited to respond having listened to their presentations. Looking back, it was a very poor way to select the vendor. In my view, it's all about track record and credibility and relationship and service and value add. Those are my principles and I stick to them to this day, but over all these forty years those things have got alternately lost in the mists of time, or not valued, or because of increasing commodisation just gone by the wayside, and that was all happening at this time. Other things that were happening, of course, was increasing regulation in the industry, in the financial markets and in software, increasing competition, also in the software industry, better, faster, better databases, faster this, better that, bigger speeds, more innovation. We're leading up, I suppose, to the whole concept of disruption which is so prevalent now but all those changes and it was hard to keep pace with them. It was fun, it was exciting but you had to keep pace, and one of the things that recruitment companies can do, to be a bit different from the herd, is to understand those changes and to understand that business

and to keep pace with technology that is important to the customers. So, understanding the importance of ... today, for example, it would be AI and machine learning ... back then it would have been new databases, faster databases and why is speed important to a telecoms company or a bank. So we always made it our business, at CP and at Best, to, if you like, to study, to understand what impact a new database software would have on the financial markets, for example. I think that's gone, the training within recruitment doesn't seem to me to include that and I think it should. Going back over the years and the massive change you do have to equip yourself so you can speak the customer's language as a recruiter.

*Coming up to date, you're still working in the industry now...*

Very much so.

*...in your own companies, over the last ten years or so. What do you think, in terms of all this change, what do you think are the key, 'success factors' I suppose is the word, for a recruitment company now? In addition to what you've just been saying it's all about the Internet now, isn't it, and LinkedIn.*

LinkedIn, either our best friend or our biggest enemy, I'm not quite sure [laughs] as a recruiter.

*So, tell us a little bit about what makes a successful company now in this business?*

I will answer that question, and thank you for asking it, but there was just one thing I wanted to add to what I've just said. The rise of automation in the staffing, resourcing and candidate selection has been, in many ways, the bane of our lives and in many ways, of course, a brilliant tool. I'll never forget, at Best, a moment when I as a trained resourcer, which would mean in the old days ringing candidates up until 8.30 at night and from 8.30 in the morning to catch them at home and, of course, on Saturdays, that was routine, that was how you found people, it's how you contacted people, by telephone, to their homes, at times of the day when they were available. So those were long hours and hard work and very detailed and very personal, getting personal phone calls to candidates to select them and alert them to opportunity. Wind

forward a few years, and at Best, and the rise of the jobs boards, so things like City Jobs and Job Serve, Reed and all those job boards where suddenly candidates' cvs could be uploaded by the candidate onto an automated job board, so agents, recruiters, could then receive a job from a customer in whatever form, by fax or by email of course later, load up a job onto a job board and then go home. Then the following morning they would go in, and candidates overnight would have put their cv up against a job. So the automation of the candidate selection process meant no personal phone calls, no commitment, no emotional, psychological commitment from the candidate to the recruiter, just a cv on a screen, no control in terms of quality on the part of the recruiter to check out the person's background, voice tone, levels of energy on the phone, inviting them for a personal interview, all that was going out of the window with the rise of the job boards. I railed against that, and famously to the, I think probably, chagrin of my staff at the time, I banned job boards for a month. I said, nobody is going to put any jobs onto job boards, you're all going to work in the evenings, calling people like we used to because that's a much better way of identifying people and getting commitment, and everybody was duly upset. But anyway, it worked and my message really, what I was trying to say was, 'don't let the rise of automation cut out the vital communication face to face and on the 'phone that will secure you candidates who are committed to you and therefore ultimately to your customer.' So that's just a little anecdote, and I think that's just got worse and worse and worse. So, to answer your question, the USPs now would be exactly that. The fact that the customer knows that you, the recruiter, are going to physically meet face to face the candidate and suss that person out properly, and align that person with the customer's culture and expectations, is a USP, I know it is. I think, not being a fairweather friend in our business is important as well. As a recruiter ... you know, you used to be able to predict things like recessions, they were every ten years pretty much, then after '08 that all went out of the window and they are no longer very predictable at all. The markets, and I include in this, as I said earlier on to you, Brexit of course is an unexpected shock, particularly in the financial markets, and I think it's very easy as a recruiter to befriend and to be pally with your customer when he or she wants to do some business with you. When he or she is out of work or not hiring it's easy to completely ignore them and not be engaged with them. Speaking personally I have never fallen into that trap, it might sound a bit arrogant but one of my commitments is to stay close and engage with people whether or not they're doing

business with me. That's very hard work but it works and I definitely won business and retained business, I've got some very, very, very long-term clients and, of course, candidates because candidates become clients and clients become candidates. That's a very tried and trusted and tested route of a relationship between a good recruiter and her marketplace and having the discipline to make sure that you engage with people when they are out of work or they've not got a budget, or they're facing redundancy themselves, and supporting them is something that if you do it well you'll absolutely bring back rewards in spades. And I think that makes us stand out, stand apart, the good recruiters from the mediocre ones, and I think that knowing how to add value and what that really means, which might mean things like doing some market research for a client, doing stuff for free like salary surveys ... it happened to me last week, the head of HR in a particular organisation in the City, 'you're not paying enough and here's the evidence to show you why you're not paying enough and why you won't be able to recruit at the right standard'. Those sorts of things are valued and they make you stand apart from recruiters who are always in receive mode and they only work when they've got the jobs to work on. A lot behind the scenes to do and, as I've said a couple of times, the other thing is, certainly speaking personally, I'm involved in lots and lots of things outside recruitment - special interest groups, technology groups, again to understand what's topical, what's important, what's coming up, what is the City going to need next, what's the next regulation coming along, what's the impact of that going to be, and making it my business to ensure that I'm up to date with that. Again, customers don't necessarily expect that, don't expect a recruiter to understand that stuff. Expectations of recruitment companies are routinely very low, they're low on the part of the candidates who don't expect to be interviewed face to face, they don't expect to be quizzed at all really, they have no expectation of getting any feedback, so they put their cv out, come to meet me, go for an interview with my client and they don't expect to hear from me ever again. And of course we routinely shock them because we always, always, always do follow up. That's another answer to your question about what are USPs for recruitment companies today, it's that follow-up, that feedback. Getting it out of clients can sometimes be difficult but I'm not afraid at all of saying to clients 'I expect to get feedback. These people are professionals, they have invested time in coming to meet you for an interview and I want to know why you don't want to progress with them if you don't.' So always making sure that you are managing expectations, raising expectations and, with my

people, making sure that the people with whom I work and who are associates for my company, that they follow that and don't let any stone go unturned. I think that sets recruitment companies apart but right now, and for the last few years, the whole business is – I've used the word several times – commoditised. You will have huge organisations who are just process organisations, who manage services as they are now called. You have two and half thousand contractors at Royal Bank of Scotland, they can't possibly, and I know they're not, having personal relationships with those contractors or those hiring managers, it doesn't happen. That's a different business, that's a whole model that I've never ever wanted to get involved in, I don't think it's got anything to do with candidate management, client management, service, quality or added value, it's merely process and that is the accepted recruitment model these days when there is volume involved.

1:15:48

*But of course, another thing which is perhaps changing the industry, and other sectors as well, is the government's attempt to change the regulations around agency workers and to tackle what they see as tax avoidance by freelancers, not just in IT to be fair but it does impact the IT industry in a big way. What impact has that had?*

Well, it's making contracting look less appealing for the individuals themselves, because obviously they're seeking to make everything, as you say, it's all about tax, so it's making it less appealing, but as ever there'll be a way round it. We'll have to look at things like statement of work for everything, rebinding as consultancies because, bluntly, it's not fair. The consultancies who are ... the recruiter for what we do is always body shopping and, bluntly, consultancies are no more than posh body shoppers. The consultancies won't like that very much but in terms of a model that's what they are, and they dress it up and call it an associate or whatever they want to call it but all they're doing, really, is shopping bodies and they are not going to be subject to this same draconian legislation that HMRC are seeking to bring in, which I think is wrong. We'll have to find ways round it otherwise what is our BS going to do when it can't have its three or four thousand contractors who are doing vital work. You name me any leading organisation, certainly in the City, the bulge bracket banks

and the tier one asset managers and so on, they are all reliant on contractors, in bulk, and what are they going to do?

*It's interesting, what you were saying earlier, about the model being different in America and in continental Europe from the UK and Australia. I mean, it sounds almost as if ... when you said that, I said, well, is that the way the government's trying to take it here as well now, to that sort of model.*

It looks like it, yeah, I think it is. They're all an employee model so yes, I do assume so. I've been to a couple of seminars on this whole subject and the government themselves, of course, are not playing by the rules they are seeking to apply, we all know that all the government departments are hugely reliant on freelancers, hugely, and have always been, so I think there's a lot of – what's the word I'm looking for – a lot of water to go under the bridge or something, there's a lot to be done yet before that's all set in stone and applying everywhere, because it won't, it can't.

*So, looking back and reflecting on your career, what role did colleagues and friends play in it? Have they helped you, supported you?*

The answer is definitely yes, I'm blessed to have had some absolutely stunning people around me always, loyal, productive, engaged, helpful, clever, inspiring, so the answer is yes, definitely. As I said earlier on to you, also some great clients who I've watched grow and move around the City, build their careers. I've watched some very well-known people in the City build businesses, buy businesses, sell businesses, float businesses. I've watched people become eminent commentators and speakers. I've watched the rise of lots of great people in the City. As a liveryman, of the WCIT of course, I'm privileged to know some real leaders, particularly in the City and in IT, and that is an absolute inspiration. One of the reasons that I joined the Worshipful Company was that, was that I wanted to learn and engage with people who cared about the practices in the City and in IT and the good practices around things like apprenticeships and training and learning and good management and transparency and ethics and values. I remain very, very impassioned by those things. For example, I'm working with a woman who leads the Conduct Academy, the Transparency Task Force, all those good initiatives, great initiatives that are driving good behaviours and

raising standards and ethics and ethical behaviours. I'm a strong believer in all of those things and I've watched some great people emerge over the last forty years.

*What would you say was your proudest achievement of your whole career?*

Weathering the storms. The big crash. I was MD of a small company within Randstad and that was a very difficult time, holding people together through – bluntly – panic and not trying to panic myself and then emerging from that and coming out on my own which, at the time, was an absolutely terrifying prospect. The market was in smithereens, I was redundant, all my whole company was redundant and I didn't quite know what to do next. So I thought, well, I think perhaps I better get control of my own destiny and started on my own, so I'm proud that I did that, I'm glad I did that, it's been very, very tough and it remains very tough but I'm very glad I did it and I'm proud that I've lived by those values.

*And what would you have done differently if you had your time again and why?*

Got my degree. Probably not gone into recruitment because it's so unregulated and it's so full of cowboys and it's so disrespected. It's routine to be at a professional network, for example, in the financial services marketplace and people ask what you do, and I routinely answer 'I'm a headhunter' or 'I'm a recruiter' depending on what I think's going to fit the moment, and the look on their face is nearly always 'oh Lord'. It's rarely met with respect, we are not regarded as professionals really. I don't like, in fact I rail regularly against, the fact that we are not respected for what we know and what we do and that causes me pain, so I probably would not have gone into recruitment. I wish that I had done something more academic but I didn't and I think I've made the best of what I possibly could have done and it's far from over. At the moment, with the rise of the Fintech organisations and some innovations that are going on, which is very exciting, I'm on the cusp I hope of another couple of years of exciting work and I can certainly point my finger to some opportunities that are facing me now which require all the things I've said to you, and they've all emerged as a result of very long-term relationships.

*Great, and do you find the time to do anything outside of your work?*



I do. I've got three kids who are a source of endless joy, all living very near us in London, central London, all working in central London doing very exciting things. A stack of rugby always, both the boys play, I sponsor their team and that's all huge fun. A massive theatre-goer and cinema-goer and library haunter. So all the things I like doing I make sure I do and I'm also extremely sociable, so, yeah. And I do charitable things as well and I like to do long-distance walking, all sorts of things so yes, very active.

*Any particular charities you want to mention?*

Yes, so I'm a supporter of, obviously Cancer Research, the World Wildlife Fund and of Unicef. So I do long-distance walking for those charities. I used to run until I got a bit too old for it. [laughs]

*So, looking to the future, and you just touched on Fintech for example, how do you think IT will impact society in the next ten years?*

Society ... well, it's part of our fabric isn't it, it's part of how we communicate, how we behave. I think .. I don't like the obsession with screens. I've never been a TV person, my own kids didn't have TV whilst they were growing up at all and I actively dislike TV myself pretty much. I don't like seeing people staring at screens and not talking and I think that's been a very bad impact of increased automation and increased computing power, I suppose. I don't like to see families that aren't talking to each other because all the kids are on mobile phones. I mean, that sounds dreadfully old-fashioned but you asked my opinion. Moving forward I see that not getting any better at all. I feel very excited about innovations and the impact of IT on business and, as IT is an enabler I think is very exciting, so some of the things that are going on ...

*So for the industry the outlook's much more ... you see a lot of opportunities?*

Yes, I do. I most certainly do. I'll give you an example, that's an American company called Kinetica who have produced an astonishingly fast database adopted initially by

the US military to track men, machines - you name it - then adopted by the US Postal Service to track trillions of items of mail on a daily, weekly, monthly basis, and Kinetica is now in this country and they're looking at the target audience for that sort of power. It would be phenomenal for pharmaceuticals industry, the banking industry and it's so powerful, so fast, and that's transformative. Things that are transformative are very exciting and very important and they can be used for good as well as for material gain, so enabling hospitals to process results, for example, much faster is all to the good. So I think there's some really exciting stuff for the industry and for business. I'm not sure about social. I like ... for example, technology has enabled more people to appreciate the arts and a stunning example of that would be the streaming live of performances at the Royal Opera House and the theatres and so on and bringing into cinemas. So suddenly you can see an opera for the affordable price of a cinema ticket as opposed to the unaffordable price of the Royal Opera House seat. I think that's fabulous and I think things like talking books - my elderly father benefits from things like that for example - I think that's all marvellous, so socially there are of course some good things, and the ability to take to the elderly images that they can see to help to entertain them and that's great. But I don't like the social addiction to screens.

*May I ask a final question. We ask everyone this question but your being in recruitment it's especially pertinent to you, actually, which is what advice would you give to someone entering the IT industry today?*

Don't get too niche, make sure that you have a basket of skills including interpersonal skills on which you can draw. Keep abreast of change, keep learning, keep learning, keep learning, don't forget that what you're doing is part of a bigger picture, it's part of a business, understand the benefits and the purpose of what you do and its place in the broader business picture. And make sure you always have a mentor or mentors within the business as well as personally. I think there's nothing as powerful as a mentor that has your back, if you like, and on whom you can draw for advice and whose opinion is of value to you.

*Sue, it's been fascinating hearing about your life and the development of the IT recruitment and resourcing industry. On behalf of Archives of IT thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us.*

A pleasure, thank you.

*Thank you.*

[recording ends at 1:30:00]