



# **Rob Wirszycz**

Interviewed by

**Richard Sharpe**

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By Zoom

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*Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology where we capture the past and inspire the future. It's the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, just the day after, erm, the Platinum weekend for Her Majesty, erm, but it's raining; it didn't rain mostly over the weekend, so, we had a pretty good time; we're in Zoom obviously.*

*I'm Richard Sharpe and I've been covering the IT industry, first of all, o-on the computing side, erm, since the early 1970s. Quite a number of people who have made their contributions to the archives have been totally dedicated to the IT industry and some of them have been in the same company for the whole of their working lives. So, it's refreshing to find somebody making his contribution today who has a very varied background. One of the things that, er, the contribution of, erm, Robert Wirszycz will show us is that you don't have to come straight into the IT industry, you can bring a whole number of skills that you have built up, and attitudes and habits, erm, that you've built up in a very varied career, which is what Robert has. Robert, good morning to you.*

[00:01:04]

Hi, thank you, Richard. By the way, I'm mostly known as Rob, Rob than Robert.

[00:01:10]

*Rob, righty-o, Rob it shall be, and it shall be Wirszycz as well.*

[00:01:17]

Absolutely, it's a very difficult name, thank you, dad.

[00:01:20]

*SZYCZ. Now, your father was Paul Wirszycz, erm, and there must therefore be some, erm, honour a-a-and pride in having such a Polish name, being a Polish extraction, is that important to you?*

[00:01:43]

It has become so, erm, when I was younger, it was, erm, it was less so. In fact, actually, in the last, erm, two years, erm, possibly, erm, triggered by Brexit, but not really, not wholly, erm, I've taken Polish citizenship, so, I'm now a dual national,

erm, UK and Polish citizen and my two daughters have also, er, got Polish citizenship as well, and erm, it was convoluted process, but erm, erm, yeah, something I'm now quite proud of. Although I don't speak one word of Polish, erm, you know, my name is, erm, er, probably the-the only identifier I have. My father, when he came, erm, to the UK, erm, er, following—when he was demobbed, erm, he had left his family in Siberia and, erm, he thought—He had no contact with them and then, in fact, he thought they were all dead, erm, likely dead, I should say. Erm, and it was only, erm, a year after I was born, that the Polish Red Cross got in touch with him and said that his family were actually alive and living in Poland.

[00:02:56]

*Where was he born?*

[00:02:58]

Erm, sorry?

[00:02:59]

*Where was he born?*

[00:03:01]

He was born in the 1920—Oh gosh.

[00:03:06]

28.

[00:03:07]

Something like that, yes, I mean, he was... When-when, erm, apparently the story is this, so, when Hitler came on one side of Poland, Stalin came on the other, and erm, my father's family were taken off very early in the morning in a cattle truck to Siberia to work in the gold mines. And when my father was 15, he, erm, lied about his age and said he was 16, and he went to war. Erm, so, er—

[00:03:35]

*He came-came to the UK and became part of the Polish Free Army.*

[00:03:38]

He was part of the Polish Free Army under General Anders, erm, and he fought at El Alamein, erm, he fought in the Sicily Crossing and at Monte, erm, Battle of Monte Cassino, which makes me very proud that, erm, he managed to a) to, you know, to live through that and survive that, although he was a very modest man, he never, he never, ever, erm, really mentioned any of this.

[00:04:09]

*He didn't share these memories with you.*

[00:04:13]

Not really, no, I've heard some of them were quite painful. My mother and he went to actually, on a coach trip on holiday after they retired, to Italy, and they went to Monte Cassino, and my mum said it was the only time she had ever seen him cry.

[00:04:28]

*Oh.*

[00:04:30]

Erm, and it was, er, quite a... She said it was—he was really quite distraught. I'll be interesting—I'll give you one interesting fact about my dad though is, erm, he'd never told me, he's got some medal which he's left for me, erm, when he died about six or seven years ago. And erm, I-I didn't know anything about these medals, erm, but erm, we were... About 20 years ago, we were looking for a new house and my dad was up from Devon, and erm, he was with me, erm, looking around this house. And this guy said, erm, “You-you're Polish, aren't you?” and the said, and I said, “Yeah” and my dad said, “Yeah.” And he said, erm, “So, erm, erm, I-I collect medals,” he said, “Would you like to see my collection of medals?” And, er, so, he showed my dad, he basically, sort of medal miniatures, the dress-the dress medals. And he showed my dad and he was going like this, and my dad said, “Yeah, I've got that one” showing him, “Yeah, I've got that one, that one, that one, and that one, and then this one.” And the guy said, “You don't have that one, do you?” and he said, “Yeah, I've got that one” and it was basically, like the Polish Military Cross, that my dad had from—And I had no idea till that point.

[00:05:47]

*[Laughs] Amazing, amazing. Erm, so, he was a-a clay miner when he settled in England?*

[00:05:54]

Yes, I mean, obviously, there was a shortage of-of men at the end of the war and erm, when the war ended and er, he was sent to Devon, er, demobbed to Devon to work in the clay mines. And these were ball clay, so, it was like, just on the edge of Dartmoor, er, ball clay being the stuff that you make pottery from, and various other things, so, it's not the china clay, the white stuff, this was the grey mucky stuff. And, er, yeah, he'd-he mined that from-from when he arrived in the UK and all the time until he-until he-he retired.

[00:06:26]

*He must have been, erm, a tough, physical man.*

[00:06:32]

He was, erm, I always remember him, erm, being, erm, a very stubborn man, erm, but-but yeah, very, very, very muscular [laughs], I mean, erm, he, erm, his-his party trick used to be to take an apple and go like this, and he could break an apple in two with his fingers, erm [laughs].

[00:06:58]

*[Laughs] he married, erm, Betty, erm, Pirriman, a school dinner lady who was, erm, born two years after him, and erm, and they had three children, you're the middle one, is that right?*

[00:07:13]

I am the middle one, erm, yeah, my elder sister lives in Canada, with her husband who is a doctor. My younger sister lives in Nottingham, er, with her partner and, erm, that have, erm, two-two twin boys which they had over the last-in the last five-five years, which is great.

[00:07:28]

*So, this was in Newton Abbot in Devon and you were born, erm, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, erm, 1957, erm, a-a-a-an important year for you, I'm sure. You-your parents didn't have very much education, did they?*

[00:07:43]

No, my dad obviously left for war at, you know was war-affected, I think he-the last year of education he had was in Poland, actually, the part of Russia where they were from, sorry, Poland they were from, was in Belorussia, erm, which is now Belorussia because Poland's, erm, lines have been redefined over the years. Erm, but he left school at 12, erm, and my mum, er, left school at 13.

[00:08:13]

*Were they Catholics?*

[00:08:17]

My dad was Catholic, er, family but he never practiced, erm, any religion at all. Erm, er, you know, when he came to the UK, so, er, there was no-no real religion in my family, erm, I-I was sent to Sun-Sunday school I think to get rid of me on a Sunday morning, but erm, that was about right, about it.

[00:08:44]

*Did your parents consider education important, Rob?*

[00:08:49]

Do you know, they did, erm, you know, er, it was interesting, you know, we-the-the area that I grew up in was, erm, er, most of the people worked in the clay, in the clay pits and you know, er, it was very unusual for, erm, er, there weren't that many Poles or non-non people who hadn't just lived all their life in that area, erm, so, we-we were a little unusual. Erm, but erm, yeah, they were the only-I was the only child from my primary school to actually go to the grammar-the-the grammar school in the next town, erm, in my year, I should say. Erm, and it, and you know, in those days people had to-had to put, erm, you had to put a choice, "Do you want your child to go here or

there?” And erm, so, I was—And I passed my 11 plus so, erm, I went to grammar school, which I guess was quite defining for me.

[00:09:37]

*Yes, we, erm, I interviewed, erm, somebody from South Wales, erm, quite recently and his father was a miner, and his father said, “Well, you know if you fail in life, there is always a shovel for you.” He made sure—*

[00:09:45]

Well, my dad, my dad took me, took me down the clay mines when I was 12 and I’m not sure whether he took me there to, erm, to put me off or whether it was some kind of soc-sociological experiment, erm, to see whether I was tough enough. Erm, but erm, it was, erm, it wasn’t very pleasant, but erm... No, so, yeah, I guess they thought education was important but they didn’t know much about it if you know what I mean, so, you know, not had-had very much experience, so, you know. And-and I was a bright kid, erm, you know, I-I learned to read, erm, probably before I went to primary school, erm, so, you know, I was very bright and very curious and spent most of my primary school in the-in the library, erm, you know, sort of sucking down every piece of written material I could find. So, you know, I was a different child.

[00:10:46]

*You, erm, had two teachers in your secondary-primary and secondary education that you point to as being, erm, inspirational. Mr Baker, your fourth-year teacher in primary school was one, the first one; fed your hunger for learning, that’s what you have, Rob, is it?*

[00:11:10]

Yeah, absolutely, I still have that actually, I mean, you know, one of the things that I-I do a lot of things, you know, now, and one of the big rules I’ve got is that if I’m not learning something, I stop. Erm, because learning for me is everything, it’s, you know it’s part of the growth, personal growth, and everything else. So, he-he recognised that I was getting really bored at school, erm, and he kind of almost devised a curriculum for me, erm, and that curriculum was just, you know, explore the world, you know. He just gave me-he gave me loads of books, he sort of got more

things out, he gave me tasks, you know it was-it was brilliant actually. Erm, so, er, yeah, he was a lovely fella. Erm, apart from that, my schooling was a little bit boring.

[00:12:08]

*Did you play sports there?*

[00:12:11]

I'm... Erm, yeah, I played football, played cricket, erm, and erm, and very occasionally, very badly, rugby. I was a skinny little runt, erm, so, therefore, erm, you know rugby wasn't... Apart from that, I could run-I could run pretty fast. Erm, so, at secondary school I did lots of cross-country running and that kind of stuff and so, er, I was pretty good at that. But erm, no, no, football and cricket were my games.

[00:12:26]

*And you passed your, erm, your 11 plus, well done. You went to Newton Abbot Grammar School, erm, what-what happened as well to your younger sister, did she go to grammar school?*

[00:12:35]

My-my elder sister, Linda, she went to the grammar school before me but she left at the age of 16, erm, to become a nurse. Erm, my, er, my younger sister, erm, Julie, who was born 10 years after, erm, after me, erm, she eventually ended up being a teacher and she's still a teacher. She teaches at the, erm, the University in Nottingham, erm, and a further education college in Nottingham. So, er, yeah, but she went to the local school. By then, er, the-by the time that she, erm, was at school, erm, people... Sorry, the-the grammar school had been, erm, switched to a comprehensive. So, I was probably the last two or three years of-of, erm, grammar school education in that area of Devon.

[00:13:23]

*You were firmly in the arts stream, were you not? English literature, language, maths, art, history, geography, German.*



[00:13:36]

Yeah, I guess the humanities and all that kind of stuff, I mean, so, my-my love of reading continues, erm, and erm, so, yes, I mean, I-I-my-my science teaching wasn't... I probably could have done quite well but my science was, er, erm, let's put-s-s-say less than-less than, erm, erm, adequate but, erm, er, even so, I-I-I guess I must have tended towards the linguistic part of-or the language, erm, part of erm, of-of education.

[00:14:15]

*Do you find languages easy?*

[00:14:18]

Er, not particularly. Erm, I think I'm pretty skilled at English, and erm, you know, in my life, I've l-lived, er, in a coup-in-in, erm, a couple of places overseas and I think, erm, I was able to, er, erm, to pick up some of the language then, but I'm certainly not a-not a linguist in a way, shape or form.

[00:14:34]

*The second inspirational teacher you point to is Mr Fletcher, your sixth form economics teacher, what did Mr Fletcher give you?*

[00:14:43]

Oh, Mr Fletcher was, erm, er, he-he eventually became an MP actually, erm, in Plymouth, erm, but he was... Brian Fletcher, he was, erm, erm, he-he opened my world, I mean, coming from Devon, from a little mining village and-and all that kind of stuff, we never travelled very far, I mean, it was very much a-a rural existence, erm, you know. But he opened my-my eyes to the world. Erm, he opened my eyes to, you know macro-economics and-and you know, the impact of, erm, er, how economics worked, how money worked and-and-and how, erm, the social impacts of-of policies. And you know, he-he was genuinely an interest-such an interesting man. And you know, I was sort of, I looked forward to those lessons and you know, with-with absolute joy. So, it's probably the only... In fact, I got an A in economics, erm, for my A-Level, which, erm, erm, was erm, the only one I got, because it was the only one I was desperately interested in.

[00:15:37]

*If you could-could label yourself as an economist, what would be your label?*

[00:15:44]

Gosh, erm, I think you know, I think my background, sort of recent background has largely been around, erm, you know growing-growing businesses and erm, so, therefore, it would be very much around entrepreneurial economics, put it that way.

[00:16:05]

*Okay, you went to the Royal College Exeter for a BA in Art, for....*

[00:16:15]

Yeah, I trained as a teacher and, erm, and my-my main was art and my second was geography, erm, and, er, it was for primary school teaching. Now, you know, again, probably poorly advised, erm, you know, my parents thought that, hey, this, you know. Because I left-I had a year after, erm, between, erm, school and-and going to, erm, college, going to university. And erm, because of like, er, my-the grammar school you did your... I was in-I was in what was known as the X stream, which did their O'Levels, as was then, in four years, and your A-Levels in six rather than seven. So, I was basically, erm, I had just, erm, turned 17 and I was, erm, I had left school, with my A-Levels. Erm, so, I went to work for the local government at that time, erm, the local government.

And then, but I had a girlfriend, this is always this thing. I had a girlfriend who had actually gone to that, er, that er, teacher training college, part of Exeter University, and so, I followed her. And you know, there was no real thought about long-term career or-or anything, I was sort of following her I think. And erm, it was-it was kind of assumed by my mum and dad, they thought this was a great thing. You know, teaching, you know, he's not down the mines, so, er, what a good thing for him to do. And I had a great time actually, I really enjoyed it, it was, erm, erm, a lot of fun. It probably wasn't very intellectually taxing, erm, but maybe that's okay too.

Erm, but you know, I kind of grew up there, erm, and, er, eventually ended up being the student union president, erm, er, at the part of Exeter University, erm, had a year as a sabbatical, erm, enjoying myself so it was great fun.

[00:17:57]

*Were you political as a student union president or you-were you good on the social side?*

[00:18:04]

Oh, p-political very much so, erm, we, erm, er, I-I was a, erm, I was-was known in those student politics times as the part of the broad left, erm, so, not the-not the, erm, the Maoist, Trotskyist, Marxist end, erm, but more the sort of the, erm, the er, soft socialist end of, erm, of erm, politics. And erm, I guess I've still got a bit of that in my, erm, i-i-it's hard to, er, to not be that-that really. Erm, but he, erm, but erm, but then but the social side was also important too. And I was, erm, er, lucky enough to be involved in, erm, booking, er, a lot of the bands just coming into the South West in the 1970s, was, er, you know... I saw a tee-shirt recently, erm, and it was about sort of, erm, and the tee-shirt was basically, like old guys, and it said, "At least we got to see all the good bands."

And erm, you know, we certainly did in the 1970s, there was some brilliant music going around and people were touring and lots of gigs in universities and so on and so, we booked some amazing bands, in-including The Police, erm, who on their-on their main tour of the UK, they were a support act to a band called Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias, and The Police were a support act and we got them for £50. Erm, so, erm, [laughs] they, that's one of my, erm, one of my favourite stories.

[00:19:50]

*You, erm, er, er, almost immediately, you go abroad, you decided to volunteer.*

[00:19:57]

Yes, I erm, yeah, I-I-I've-I've, at the teacher college there was a number of, there were a number of Kenyan, erm, students and they had come over from... The principal of the college was an-was an extraordinary man, called Francis Cammaerts,

and Francis Cammaerts, there have been two books made about him, er, so, written about him and a film. I mean he was a-a-a-he was of Belgian extraction in the UK, erm, and erm, he was a French Resistance organiser during the war. Unbelievable back story, erm, er, if anybody who is watching this is actually interested, just type you know Francis Cammaerts into Google and you'll see the story. But he...Part of his life post-war, was that he became, erm, he was a-an advisor to the, erm, erm, Minister of Education in, erm, Kenya, post-independence, erm, Ngala Mwendwa, and erm, so, he was bringing Kenyan, erm, teachers over to be trained further. And I got in touch with—So, I really got on with these guys and I thought, hey, why not go to Kenya and-and volunteer. So, I ended up going there and it was-it was actually interesting enough... My trip to Kenya was the first time I had ever been on an aeroplane. So, I was 22 years old, the first time I had ever been on an aeroplane and it was the first time I had ever been anywhere outside of the UK.

[00:21:34]

*So, what was it like?*

[00:21:38]

What; flying to, erm, flying--?

[00:21:41]

*No, being a kindergarten teacher in Kenya?*

[00:21:45]

It was great actually, and-and you know one of the stories I often tell is the fact that, erm, being a kindergarten teacher prepares you for a-a life in business. Because erm, children, young children actually are just like dealing with, erm, senior executives in that they-they don't listen, they argue all the time, they need to be told what to do and, erm, and they can be, you know, of great joy, but o-o-occasionally, erm, but erm, erm, and they-and-and they-they write very little. Erm, so, erm, you know, it-it was very, very similar to erm, to most of my-my previous, my subsequent life. But erm, no, it was-it was amazing fun, I mean-I mean, Kenya in, erm, in the late '70s was, erm, still relatively open, I mean-I mean, interestingly enough, the population of Kenya in the late '70s, was 12 million. Erm, the population if you look now, is probably nearer 75,

so, you know you've got a pop-you've got a country where over the last 40 odd years, it-it-it's just literally exploded, erm, erm, in terms of population. So, it was a very different experience from if you go to Kenya now.

Erm, but erm, it was just huge fun, it was-it was, you know, we, erm, didn't have very much money, so, you know, we used to-used to do house sitting, for, erm, er, families, like ex-pat families or, or other families, so-so, basically I looked after their houses and didn't pay any rent, which was rather nice. So, erm, but it was-it was a lot of fun. And, er, yeah, my experiences there were probably, erm, erm, you know, quite formative.

[00:23:23]

*Was it quite an outdoor life?*

[00:23:27]

Yeah, every, erm, every erm, Wednesday night, er, me and a few used to up to the Ngong Hills. I don't know if anybody has ever seen the film, Out of Africa, but we, erm, start with the, erm, "I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills" and-and we used to go running along the top of that like fell running. And, you know, because Af-because and that area was a-about a mile high in-in altitude, you know, you-you I was as fit as butcher's dog then. And, er, I remember once we, erm, at the time, Tanzania was, erm, the border was closed between Kenya and-and Tanzania and we-we thought one weekend, "Hey, let's go and climb Mount Kilimanjaro." So, erm, er, this guy I knew had an aeroplane and we-we literally flew over on a Friday night, and erm, we-we came back on the Monday, having-having walked, literally walked up Kilimanjaro and back.

[00:24:28]

*[Laughs]*

[00:24:29]

Erm, you know, we were... It was just that sort of carefree time, it was, erm, it was quite delightful.

[00:24:36]

*Is that why there are so many good long-distance runners from Kenya, because of the altitude?*

[00:24:41]

It must be-it must be, I think you know. When you've got that, erm, that, erm, you know, advantage of erm, you know, having your er, your body trained from-from-from birth to be, to live with less, er, less oxygen, I'm sure that does help, but I-they, erm, they, I think the physiology also helps too.

[00:25:00]

*Now, you got the-you got the travel bug, by the looks of it because, erm, you then spent, erm, at least a year in Hong Kong?*

[00:25:07]

I did, yeah, and erm, yeah, that was fun, erm, I-I kind of, erm, just thought, hey, why not, erm, why not go and do this? Erm, so a friend of mine was actually working in an ad agency in Hong Kong and he said, "Hey, come on out." And I stayed [laughs] and erm, so, I kind of did-did lots of writing and that kind of stuff, so, again, it was fun. You know, Hong Kong in the-in the, erm, erm, l-l-late '70s, early '80s, was, erm, you know, a different, a different world to the one which it is now. Erm, and again, er, the, yeah, you know, it was quite a privileged-privileged position being a, erm, being-being-being sort of in the sense, who you were in-in-in that place, but erm...

And then decided that it was time to, erm, to, erm, you know, go, and get a proper job, so, I ended up, erm, getting a job as an English teacher in erm, in-in Japan. Erm, so, which was, erm, amazing fun actually. Again, Japan, erm, in the '80s was-was booming, and erm, you know, it was, erm... They call it the bubble-the bubble years, and erm, so, I had a phenomenal time, erm, working in Nagoya, and Tsukuba, and Tokyo, and erm, yeah, it was great. Erm, and then I, so, just adding, move-moving on from that, I sort of erm, decided to take, a-a job as a-as back to my job, my, er, prior career as a teacher, and ended up working at an international school for a few years, and ended up being head of the lower school. Erm, and then, erm, decided that erm, teaching wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and erm, went off and

did, erm, er, working again, back as a copywriter and, er, creative director as part of an ad agency. So, that was huge fun.

[00:27:07]

*Do you know Japanese?*

[00:27:13]

Enough to get by, Richard, enough to get by.

[00:27:15]

*Well, that's very good, isn't it?*

[00:27:18]

Erm, yeah, yeah, it's-it-I-I'm kind of embarrassed that I don't, that I didn't erm, you know, really, erm, deeply get into. Most of my-my sort of working life was in English and, you know, er... I-I, erm, I ended up marrying, getting married in Japan actually, erm, so, erm, I met, er, Hilary, erm, in Japan and we-we got married in Japan in 1987. Erm, so, er, which was, which caused the challenge when I wanted to become a Polish citizen because our marriage certificate was in Japanese.

[00:28:01]

*[Laughs]*

[00:28:04]

And-and the Polish, erm, authorities wanted, erm, my marriage certificate to be, to be erm, erm, stamped with an apostille by the, erm, Ministry of, erm, of fi-of Foreign Affairs in Japan, so, that proved to be an interesting challenge.

[00:28:25]

*[Laughs] you haven't met a computer yet, had you?*

[00:28:29]

I certainly had.

[00:28:31]

*Oh, you had.*

[00:28:31]

Erm, while I was at, erm, in the international school in Japan, they, erm, I-I-I sort of, I bought an Apple IIC computer. So, my first, erm, computer, was an Apple IIC which I absolutely loved, got into it. Erm, I-I taught myself to type, which I realised was my little barrier if I was going to be using computing, so, I-I taught myself to touch-type using it. Erm, and erm, I then, er, the school I was at was very wealthy, erm, so different from, you know, my previous experience of being part of a-a voluntary organisation. Erm, and they started buying Apple Mac into-very early Apple Macs. And the Apple Macs in Japan, Steve Jobs was very fond of Japan, one of the first, so, therefore, it was a very graphical interface and, erm, the Japanese absolutely loved the Mac.

And so, erm, I started getting into them, into-into, erm, Apple, erm, and new people in Apple in Japan, erm, and erm, I, and I took that knowledge of what was then Apple computing, erm, both, erm, at-at all levels when I came back to the UK in-in-in 1988.

[00:29:35]

*Why did you come back?*

[00:29:38]

Erm, well, Hilary, my wife, had left... We got married and then we left, we-we separated, erm, erm, because she was doing a, erm, a master's in IT, at erm, Aston University. At the time, erm, the UK government was, erm, offering conversion courses, erm, in the late '80s for people to convert from erm, their prior career into-into IT. And so, she did a-a master's in IT at Aston, and I stayed in Japan earning money, erm, and we bought our first flat in Acton, so, I left Japan, in-in order to re-join my wife, erm.

[00:30:29]

*And you were then—*

[00:30:32]



Erm, erm, sorry.

[00:30:32]

*You were then three years at Callhaven, and Apple, Sun, and Oracle reseller.*

[00:30:40]

Yeah, that was huge fun, I mean, it was a, erm, very early days, erm, of, erm, of computing and-and I sort of... I-I got a job there as a trainer, erm, training people on using Apple Mac computers, erm, which sounds a bit sort of odd these days, when people just sort of pick them up and, there's no-there no instruction book and there's no training. Erm, but erm, [laughs] and then I-I rapidly, erm, sort of, I was part of a gang of four or five people and we-we sort of helped to grow the business, I ended up being marketing director of the business. Erm, and erm, [laughs], we-we sold, erm, BP-BP was doing a huge, erm, corporate erm, reorganisation at the time, and-and erm, erm, the-the then CEO, wanted to use Apple Macs as part of a, er, change. So, I remember, er, the, er, I-I went in to train his, erm, his PA and she-she-she had her PC taken off her desk and an Apple Mac plonked in front her, you know, one of the little R2D2 type things, and, er, and she was holding the mouse like this, and she was pointing the mouse at the screen like a remote control. Erm, that was quite fun.

[00:31:46]

*[Laughs], I think that's a good place to take a break, and erm, this is the end of part 1.*

*Welcome to part 2 of the contribution of Rob Wirszyycz to the archives. Erm, we have just got to the point at which he's erm, now marketing director of Callhaven, erm, one of the fast-growing, what would you call them, dealers or VARS, what would call it, Rob?*

[00:32:13]

VARS I suppose, yeah, sort of a value-added reseller, yeah, absolutely, yeah.

[00:32:21]

*And it's re-it's reselling, Apple, Sun, and Oracle, what were you doing--?*

[00:32:26]

Yeah, we started off selling-selling Apple, then, erm, then, er, got into selling Sun into, er, into education, and then Oracle off the back of Sun. Erm, so, erm, that was-that was our journey and we also did lots of fun things like multimedia as well. Erm, which was the very early days of people trying to essentially pre-build websites, you know, this was-this was pre-pre-internet times, this was all dial-up.

[00:33:08]

*Yeah, what were you doing with Oracle?*

[00:33:12]

Literally selling databases, erm, selling, selling licences, erm, erm, which, erm, which was a pretty lucrative, erm, business at the time. I mean, and, er, this is where I met, erm, I met, er, a couple of rather famous, erm, erm, Oracle people, Geoff Squire, and Mike Evans, who were, er, erm, running Oracle at the time.

[00:33:47]

*Geoff Squire, the man who saved Oracle.*

[00:33:50]

Absolutely, absolutely.

[00:33:53]

*Erm, you're now marketing director.*

[00:33:57]

Yes.

[00:33:57]

*And presumably, you are, erm, therefore, erm, erm, sorry, it's just asked me to do something. And therefore, you're managing people.*

[00:34:04]

That's a very interesting point, yeah, yeah. It was-it was good to do that, erm, I guess, I'd been sort of leaning towards that anyway. Erm, you know, erm, I-I sort of, you know, when I was in, erm, in Japan, I managed people, erm, you know, I was managing people in the school I was at and also in the, er, in the agency that I was at, so, erm, yeah, managing people, erm. I-I find it relatively easy to, erm, er, to lead, erm, people in that way. Erm, and-and over the years I think I've learned how to deliver bad news to people as well, erm,

[00:34:31]

*What is the Rob Wirszycz style of management?*

[00:34:33]

Rather enthusiastic I would say, erm, Richard. Erm, but erm, erm, encouraging, erm, erm, hopefully with a-with a soupçon of, erm, inspiration, but you know, effectively trying to lead people- lead people towards a-a-a goal. Erm, you know, I like to make sure that everybody has meaning in their life and meaning in what they do. Erm, otherwise, it just feels like, erm, just you're carrying out a task. Erm, so, er, that's something I've learned over the years. But also, inclusiveness is really important, you know, people like to feel that they have a say in-in decisions and-and I like to make sure that people at least feel they've had an opportunity to give their opinion prior to a decision taking place.

[00:35:29]

*But as you say, you can deliver bad news.*

[00:35:34]

Yes, erm, yeah, I think, erm, I mean, over the years, er, you know, when you're in business, you-you occasionally have to, er, invite people to, er, conduct their career elsewhere and-and, erm, that is, erm, you know, something which the first time you do it, is always a little bit, er, challenging, and then after a while, you kind of get the, er, the idea that it-it-it's not-it's not them or you, it's the situation that you're dealing with. And erm, so, erm, that-that makes it a lot easier, to, er, to-to handle and-and not feel overly concerned about the impact that might have on people.

[00:36:17]

*Who were your competition to Callhaven?*

[00:36:19]

Oh, there was a company called, er, Rothwell, erm, who, in fact, Richard Holloway, who many people know, Richard Holloway was a director of Rothwell, so, I knew Richard from that time. Erm, and erm, yeah, they were-they-they had taken... We were-we were both, erm, corporate, erm, resellers, so, we were selling into the corp- rather than... There are people, the Apple world, erm, originally started, erm, you know, around design and so on, desktop publishing and so. So, we really didn't deal with that too much, we dealt largely with-with companies, corporations, enterprises, who wanted to adopt the different way of operating. Erm, and Rothwell had just, erm, er, got a major deal with Mercury, if people remember Mercury, erm, as the-as the alternative to BT at the time. Erm, so, they got a major deal with-with Mercury and, erm, erm, that was erm, er... A-a-and so, we were a bit annoyed because that was the deal we were also after as well, so, er. But, er, er, competition is always good though, it sharpens-it sharpens your focus.

[00:37:32]

*Why did you leave?*

[00:37:36]

Erm, well, we spun off... actually, interestingly enough, I mean, the, erm, the-the, we- we had made quite a bit of money, er, as a company and we put our money into buying property. Erm, so, we bought, we owned all of our own offices, erm, which didn't-which wasn't a brilliant thing to do in probably the early '90s when there was a bit of a property crash. Erm, so, that kind of didn't help with, er, our balance sheets. So, we decided to break the company up into pieces, and one of the bits of the company that went out was, erm, Omnimedia, erm, which was a multimedia company. Erm, and erm, so, I-I helped with that, and that became listed on the unlisted, erm, securities market.

Erm, but then I was looking around for something else and, erm, and, er, er, a friend of mine, erm, er, told-told me that CSSA or CSA as it was known at the time, erm,

was looking for a-a, erm, someone to look after their marketing. And I thought oh, this might be quite good for a stopgap, erm, while I looked at something-I-I-looked for other things. So, erm, I spoke to Doug Irons, who was the director-general of the CSA as was. And, er, Doug famously, by the way, said that he had all of the vowels and I had all of the consonants, which made us quite a good team. Erm, but erm, but luckily, he, erm, he-I managed to convince him because in many ways, the er, the-the role I took with CSSA, CSA, as it became, erm, you know, was a bit of turning point in my-in my career by opening.

So, I-I have these sort of points in my-my career where, I've had these, where I've been opened up to a new world. And, you know the CSA opened me up to a-a whole new world of-of different types of businesses to ones that I'd known before. And erm, again, that-that learning effect takes place there. So, I decided to learn a lot-a lot about, you know, IT services and other software businesses and so on, you know, a bit as part of that, and I was-I was like a little sponge, I was just sort of learn-learn-learning-learning all the things I possibly could from all the people I met.

[00:39:59]

*What was it like working with Doug Irons who was, after all, a-a legend in his own lunchtime?*

[00:40:07]

Well, precisely, the lunchtime thing is, yeah, Doug-Doug, I mean, obviously, er, Doug has-has his own story, but, er, he was, erm, yeah, obviously, you know, a member of the very early days of the, erm, the computing services industry, you know, from the, er, from the bureaus and so on, so, erm. Actually, interestingly enough, back with, erm, Callhaven, our chairman at Callhaven, was Barney Gibbens.

[00:40:38]

*Oh, yeah.*

[00:40:38]

And erm, and we had a shop in Kingston Upon Thames and Barney lived down there, and he went into the shop to buy an Apple Mac because he was rather fond of them

and he eventually ended up becoming our chairman. And, so, I knew-I've known Barney for a long time, erm, and you know, that was one of my links to the sort of the-the early, the early pioneers if you like of the, er, of the, er, IT industry in the UK. And Doug was obviously then the connection with a whole bunch of others. He-he could be, he could be a cantankerous old bugger but he could also be an absolute joy because, erm, he was exceptionally bright, erm, exceptionally insightful, erm, and, you know, you had me, I was like this sort of bundle of energy and ideas, and he was sort of, erm, you know, shaping those ideas and that energy, erm, towards some kind of value, erm, that the organisation could-could-could-could-could generate from it and you know, we were a good team.

[00:41:32]

*He was a great advocate for his sector, wasn't he?*

[00:41:32]

He was phenomenal, he was phenomenal. He was-he didn't suffer fools gladly, erm, he wasn't, erm, a big fan of sort of dealing with government, erm, which, erm, you know felt that the-the software and services industry probably couldn't get much from inter-much interaction from government. And-and that was beginning to change though as you know, the internet, and-and-and soft power, I should say, you know, became more relevant as you came through the 1990s, you know the government seemed to understand that there was a, erm, there was a-a fundamental need for, you know, IT in schools, and-and so on. There-was, er, there was something big happening during those, that 1990-mid to late 1990s. Erm, so, erm, so, yes, so-so he was a, erm, a terrific guy, erm, erm, and, er, sadly-sadly missed. And I-I-I was erm, I attended his, erm, memorial service, which was er, erm, at which I learned an awful lot more about-about Doug than I knew before, which was, er, often the way when you go to a memorial service, right.

[00:42:53]

*[Laughs], I should think there's more to learn yet [coughs].*

[00:42:59]

Yes.

[00:42:59]

*Erm, so, erm, he left, to say the least, and erm, and you became DG, director-general, er, you were 38 at the time.*

[00:43:13]

Yeah, Doug retired, erm, and erm, obviously, there was a, erm, and-and I applied for the role, and erm, you know, probably surprisingly, I-I was appointed. Erm, you know, so, erm, and-and it was-it was huge fun at the time because obviously, there was the-the-the internet was, erm, you know world wide web, had just sort of come out if you like, erm, and it was being known. Erm, the UK software industry was-was developing, erm, a-a-and erm, we did a thing, and I sort of combined with erm, erm, Philip Crawford at-at Oracle, and we created this thing called the IT Manifesto, which we sent to all the, er, the head of all the major parties ahead of the, erm, general election, and challenged them to put these items, these 10 points in this IT Manifesto, into their own manifestos. And erm, so, that was huge fun, erm, you know, talking to, er, the then, erm, er, you know, Tory, Labour, and lib-Liberal Democratic Party, erm, lea-leads on, erm, the science and technology, and business. So, that was huge fun.

[00:44:21]

*You were stepping into the shoes of a giant, were you not? But your approach and your style is very, very, very different from Doug Irons', erm, as I know well. Tell me, how did you make sure that people knew it was now you that was leading it?*

[00:44:33]

That's a really interesting point, I-I-we had to build some initiatives, so, that was one of the initiatives, we built this thing called the software business network. Well, we got money from the government actually. So, we were effectively trying to create a-a-an experience-sharing and-and business improvement for the UK, erm, erm software sector. Which was, you know, the-the US, you know, had its Oracle, and-and Informix and all the others. The UK didn't have that, erm, as a software industry, we were trying to create a UK software industry.

And then we also had things like the Y2K, so, we turned it, so, the only thing I could do in a sense to, was-was to use my marketing nous, and so, we became a campaigning organisation. Erm, so, we campaigned on-on readiness for-for, erm, the year 2000, erm, we campaigned on-on-on, erm, software, erm, erm, the-the business of software, I should say. We campaigned around the IT Manifesto, erm, and we also, erm, we also grew the com-grew the association. So, you know, we doubled, erm, the-the number of-of members. So, we had an active, proactive, outreach to get more people to join the organ-the-the organisation. And erm, and that worked extremely well, erm, so...

And we were also having discussions, erm, with the then FEI, the Federation of Electronics Industries, which was a far better funded, erm organisation, far more government-oriented, defence-oriented as well. Erm, organisation about whether we could form an alliance, to, erm, cover the entire, if you like, UK tech industry, you know, from electronics all the way through to software and services. Which eventually, happened after I left, erm...

[00:46:35]

*Why was that important? I would have thought, well I suggest to you, a niche lobbying process would be much more effective.*

[00:46:44]

Probably, but it was actually, the-the, erm, the FEI at the time, had, erm, erm, had more-more funding, and erm, the way in which it was funded was very different. I mean the way in which CSSA was funded by its members, because it came from software and services, the subscriptions were done on the number of-of employees. Whereas in the FEI, it was done on-on-on your revenues, and therefore, you know, the big players tended to pay an awful lot more in the FEI. So, therefore, they had more staff, they, and you know, permanent staff matter in-in an organisation like that. I mean the permanent staff at the CSSA was, I think probably 7 or 8.

[00:47:42]

*Yeah.*



[00:47:43]

Whereas the FEI had upwards of 50 or 60, and erm, so, you know, you can do more, erm, when you've got a bigger secretariat.

[00:47:58]

*You've mentioned, erm, er, a contentious issue, Y2K. Now, we have in the archive, erm, an immense spectrum of opinions about it, from someone saying, "It was the finest con that the, erm, that the consultants ever managed to pull" to people who said, "It was absolutely essential and look how essential it was, 'cause nothing really fell over." Where are you on that spectrum, Rob?*

[00:48:21]

Well, I-I-I, erm, initiated a group called Task Force 2000, with Robin Guenier, erm, and erm, which was partly government-funded. And erm, you know, we spent a lot of time, erm, trying to create, to make people aware that this-this could be an issue. And erm I remember going on-on Newsnight, erm, being queried by Jeremy Paxman, erm, and being asked, you know, "Are you really saying that your industry is so stupid as to not have known this many years ago?" And obviously, my reply being, "We never knew that the computers we were making were going to last that long. Erm, you know, so, and-and that's part of it, you know. I mean, part of the reason for the Y2K issue was about the, you had, erm, compute-computing resources, which-for which there was no business case to replace them. And erm, you know, they were, and-and resources were very limited. So, therefore, if you could create a smaller field, erm, with fewer bits and bytes, then you probably did it. Erm, so, you know, that-that became a, erm, you know, a-a-a-a reason why.

Erm, and erm, so, it-it was a great campaign, we-we did-we did an awful lot and then, and then we kind of lost control of it to a certain extent because the government decided they were going to fund their own thing called Action 2000, and so...

[00:50:04]

And it became very political, did it not?

[00:50:08]

It became very political, yeah, and er, we kind of had to back out of it. Erm, we were also, by the way, running a little campaign at the time in relation to the Euro, because the Euro, and we were all fundamentally saying that, you know, why on earth would you even think of-of launching a single currency while you've got this, impending, erm, computing challenge? Erm, and erm, so, that was a, erm, an interesting, erm, you know campaign which we... And I remember going to-to Brussels, erm, and speaking at several, erm, erm, European Commission meetings, about, you know, the-the impact of-of, erm, er, the Y2-Y2K, on-on the Euro and-and, you know, wh-why-why, you know, there may need to be a delay to the implementation of the Euro.

[00:51:06]

*Do you like the political side of it?*

[00:51:08]

I, do you know, er, yes, well it was part of my job, so, you know, I-I, erm, my job was to be political, you know, to be-to be, to make a stand and to-and to give sound bites. I mean, you know, Richard, you and I knew-knew each other around that time, and-and, er, you know one of the things someone said to me once was, "Rob, you're quite good at giving a sound bite, you know, erm, you know, some, a pithy phrase or something. And-and so, I did quite a lot of that but that wasn't because I wanted to be famous or-or you know, sort of in the public eye, that was my job.

[00:51:30]

*Yeah.*

[00:51:30]

You know, so-so-so, and so, you know, the political side of things, erm, I mean, oddly enough, I mean, during the, erm, you know while I was there, I mean, I-I was approached by, erm, a couple of politicians on two separate occasions, to ask whether I wished to be considered, erm, on their MP sort of prospective MP roster, and I had to disabuse people that that was not my-the career choice that I'd, erm, I wanted. Erm, but you know, I did what I did and-and it was because that was my job.

[00:52:04]

*Erm, when I started, erm, covering this industry, there were two people you went to all the time for a quote, you weren't around yet then; erm, Alan Benjamin, and David Thornberg, do you remember those two?*

[00:52:18]

Absolutely, absolutely, yes.

[00:52:21]

*And we-we called them Benjiberg, so, if you wanted a quote, we said, phone up Benjiberg and you got one.*

[00:52:30]

[Laughs]

[00:52:31]

*Thank you very much, very good.*

[00:52:34]

Well, Alan-Alan was, in particular, was a-was a marketing guy too, wasn't he? He was a-a terrific marketing man, you know, erm, so, er, yeah, great.

[00:52:47]

*He was indeed, er, in my opinion, he never got the, erm, the credit he deserved.*

[00:52:54]

Totally agree, totally, but you know, in a sense, I kind of get that because, you know, he was doing his job if you know what I mean, his job was actually to promote what he was promoting rather than to promote to Alan Benjamin.

[00:53:09]

*Well, he did it for ICL as well extremely successfully, in very, very hard times for ICL.*

[00:53:14]

I agree I agree, no he was-he was a-a very, very talented man.

[00:53:18]

*19, er, 70, 1997, something happens, Rob, to you, you suddenly move to EDS.*

[00:53:26]

Yeah, I was sort of, I realised that I-I-I erm, I er, needed to, you know... Having been doing what I'd done in the past, I-I needed sort of a-a name on my CV, erm, a branded name. You know, having worked for lots of different, different things in the past I felt it was important that I did that. And erm, er, a number of, erm, people approached me as to whether I'd be interested, my profile was relatively high at the time. And erm, I-I took a role at, erm, at EDS. Erm, which was, erm, which was great fun, erm, there was an awful lot of things going on at the time, and the-the whole outsourcing, erm, you know, boom was-was in place, erm, and erm, you know there was-there was Y2K, there was all sorts of things. And-and then from a marketing perspective, erm, EDS was, erm, erm, you know, looking to improve its image, erm, you know, there were times when, erm, it was being hit by the work it was doing at the Charles Ford Agency, if-if people, you know remember that it had a very poor image in, erm, in-in Private Eye, and Computer Weekly through the erm, esteemed Tony Collins, was, erm, you know, looking at, you know various, erm, erm, issues between management and the outsourced staff at HMRC, for example. So, it was a difficult time.

[00:55:00]

*Rob, you're the only person who I know who has ever worked with EDS who called it fun.*

[00:55:05]

It was fun, because erm, they... Look, as I said to you, I'm a kind of learning sort of guy and-and there was an awful lot, erm, to assimilate, there was an awful lot... One of the great things about EDS, by the way, at-at that time, is that it actually had, erm, it was dealing with big stuff, you know. It was dealing with, you know, the Oyster Card shift on London Underground, it was dealing with the change of the way in which the, erm, armed forces got paid, you know, it was dealing with, erm, erm, the

digitisation of DWP, you know, the, you know, all of those things, I mean, you know it even had to deal with the, erm, the issue, for example, when, erm, er, Gordon Brown brought in, erm, tax credits, you know, for over 200 years, the tax system took money, it didn't give it back. So, you know, there was a, erm, there was a-a fundamental shift required in these sorts of massive systems. Erm, so, and-and EDS was dealing with all of this stuff.

[00:56:16]

*The work ethic in EDS though was brutal, was it not?*

[00:56:19]

Say again, sorry?

[00:56:20]

*The work ethic in EDS was brutal.*

[00:56:24]

It was-it was, erm, hmm... The work ethic, it was more like, er, because we were an outsourcing, erm, world, you know, it's a zero-sum game, you either win the deal or you don't, right. So, I think the sales ethic it was brutal, the work ethic was pretty normal, but the sales ethic was-was strong, you had to win those deals, erm, you know, they-they-they were, erm, almost like war room type, erm, you know, bids were done on-on a war room type im-impact. You know, you bring you-your best and your brightest together to, er, to win those deals.

[00:57:05]

*So, you became, erm, director of EMEA Marketing, and then...*

[00:57:12]

[unclear 00:57:13]

[00:57:13]

*Then you went to Dallas, to be head of Global Alliances.*

[00:57:20]

Yeah, I did some... The Alliances stuff was very, very powerful, erm, the, erm, you know, the-the-at the time, I mean you had people like Cisco and-and-and Microsoft, and Oracle who were-who were, erm, you know, more powerful I think than they are now. Erm, you know, and-and it was vitally important that, erm, and they were trying to affect the technology choices made by the outsourcers, because the outsourcers, in a sense, were fundamentally proxy buyers, for the organisations they worked for. And so, therefore, there was quite a tight, erm, tie erm, erm, that the, erm, these organisations were trying to create with the outsourcers. And therefore, but there was also a strange situation that I found myself in, is that-is that obviously these, these highly-tuned, erm, sales resources didn't want to be affected by-by the, erm, lobbying, if you like from the, erm, from the technology, erm, guys. You know, it was hard to find a-a tie which really worked for-for both parties.

[00:58:27]

*You were now, therefore, in the very engine of the culture of EDS. There was still a culture, I think left over after Ross Perot had left it, was there not?*

[00:58:37]

Probably not. I mean, the only bit, I mean, remember Ross Perot, erm, sold EDS, erm, in the-to-to General Motors, and you know, I was part of EDS after it had been through the General Motors filter and it had come out the other side and had been, erm, er, acquired. So, it was [unclear 00:59:07] so, it was publicly listed and it had just acquired AT Kearney, if you remember the, erm, the er, consultancy. So, you know, it was, erm, it was very much a public company. Erm, you know the one thing that I did recall during the time I was there, was there was-there was a shift, I mean the largesse, erm, private aeroplanes, erm, flying different places and so on for executives, erm, you know, and that kind of ended during the time I was there. You know, there was a-a need to, you know tighten the belt and-and-and that fleet of-of aeroplanes that were at Dove, Love Air-Love Airport in, er, Dallas, erm, you know, got sold off, for example. So, erm, you know, there was a-there were things were happening at that time, to er.... Because the profits were getting lower.

Because this was the rise also of the Indian, erm, and-and other, erm, sort of, what you would call lower cost, erm, people. I mean, the interesting thing about outsourcing, erm, the outsourcing world, for about 30 or 40 years, the equation was really quite simple, is that—But from economies of scale and better buying, erm, we can probably do what you do, you know, your mess for less, we can actually do, erm, the same kind of thing for about 40% off. You know you take 20 we'll take 20 and then, the input costs for companies operating in India and elsewhere became different. They were fundamentally saying, well if the majority of the input costs are labour, our labour costs are significantly lower, so, we can do this for, you know, 60%, 70% less than you could do it yourself. So, therefore, this was the beginning of the offshoring movement, as well as the outsourcing movement. And so, that-that was part of the-the need to, er, to cut back.

[01:01:11]

*I've also thought that outsourcing, erm, was the revenge of the finance director on the IT director.*

[01:01:16]

Erm, [laughs] yeah, yes, yes, I think so, I mean, it erm, but also, remember that we, er, didn't have the pace and change in technology as we have now. Erm, you know, I mean, if we-if we applied outsourcing now, then, you know, I-I don't know how you would ever write a-a service level agreement for the pace and change of business right now, you, now, it would be almost impossible, you know. Erm, so, those-those big steady-state outsourcing deals, you know, just don't exist anymore, unless there is a true steady-state.

[01:01:54]

*You spent six months, erm, jumping across the Atlantic a lot, presumably, mostly now on commercial jets, and erm, you were head-hunted as erm, CEO, of, erm, InterX.*

[01:02:11]

It was the IT Net-It Network part of InterX, I mean, InterX, erm, was, you know, was again part of the dot.com thing, you know, there was a, a software company, a really smart software company. There was a, erm, a-an IT, erm, a publishing business as

well, erm, online publishing business which was, you know, trying to give data for IT directors, erm, about what to buy and how to buy it. Erm, and erm, and-and there was also a distribution company, erm, and that distribution company, erm, was sold off in order to provide funds for the software company. Everybody was try-trying to create internet software and, erm, so, you know, the bit I was running was, the bit that was using the software, as almost like a demonstrator, erm, for anybody else, as to what they could do with the software. Erm, but it was a-it was a wild time, the, erm, the-the, erm, er, the late, erm, sorry, the early 2000s, late 1990, 1990s, and early dot.com thing, it really was wild.

[01:03:14]

*Erm, the erm... I want to move on quite quickly because we don't have a lot of time left. Erm, I want to, erm, I want to get to at least two things; what are the biggest mistakes you've made in your career, Rob?*

[01:03:27]

Erm, I think, well, a very early career, probably, erm, you know, not actually becoming a teacher, it might sort of sound strange, I really did have some great times. But I think if I had better advice, either from school or if my folks would have actually known, but they didn't, erm, I-I think I would have gone into business, erm, a lot earlier. Erm, and erm, and I think I would have enjoyed that, but that's not really a mistake, it's more like a regret.

Erm, I think as a mistake, I think, erm, I-I may have jumped around things, erm, erm, you know, quite a lot, but at the same time, that's been on the-on the plus side, that's actually allowed me to have a lot of different experiences and-and learning which I've been able to transfer into what I've been doing over the last 20 years which is working with lots of different companies. So, you know, erm, do I think I've made many mistakes, you know, I'm sure I have, I've made lots of mini mistakes, major ones? No, I have gained from everything I've done.

[01:04:46]

*And would you, or would you not, erm, advise people to move straight into the industry? Now, I know you've said you perhaps regret not moving faster into*



*industry, but isn't a hinterland that you have, a set of skills that you develop outside the industry, a very good starting point; or would your advice now, to people on the edge of the industry, coming out of university now, get into it right away; would that be it?*

[01:05:26]

That's a really good point, but the-the key... I-I do advise and mentor, erm, a number of, or have done over the last few years, a number of young people, who are faced with these kinds of decisions. And what I say is actually, do something, and erm, and really get into it, throw yourself into it, but it doesn't mean that's what you're going to do for the rest of your life. You know, if what you can, I mean I think I've proved and to your point, Richard, earlier on, is that you can do a-a wide variety of things as long as you've got some transferrable attributes, that you can bring into the next thing. You know, be that your ability to-to write, your ability to, erm, sell, your ability to erm, er, to create change, you know, whatever it is, those attributes can, are-can be almost universally applied in organisations, in different places.

So, my advice will always be, you know, erm, find value personally, and-and organisationally wherever you work. And then you, and then, but understand what it is. I mean, I see some people coming out of, erm, you know long careers in a-in a-in A company, and then thinking, well, I don't have the network now, or I don't have, erm, I don't... A-a-all I've got are skills in this one or I'm really skilled in this one organisation, I'm not skilled in many. So, I-I think we need more plural attitudes, but probably deeper insight into, erm, into your own value, erm, in-in-in-in your career.

[01:06:53]

*Finally, in, erm, 1997, er, you joined the Livery company, The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists. Why did you do that?*

[01:07:09]

Erm, I-I was at-I was at the CSSA at the time and I knew many of the people who were part of the-the early days, I mean, Dame Stephanie Shirley, and Barney, and Alan Benjamin, and others, you know, through the CSSA. And it seemed like a-a pretty natural thing for me to do. Erm, and erm, and-and I've really gained a lot from

it actually. Erm, I-I-I-I like the fact that the CS... That WCIT is the philanthropic part of the industry, you know, the, erm, you know, it's not the trade bit, which now, Tech UK covers. It's not the, erm, professional bit, which BCS and-and-and others actually cover. It's about philanthropy, it's about understanding, you know, what can we do of IT or tech, as it's now understood, you know as a force for good. You know, wh-what can we do? And-and-and-and each providing a-a-a what I call a third space, for people, erm, you know, it's not your family, your first space, or-or friends. It's not your professional world, it's a third space for people's energy and ideas, and time, and money, and I-I think that's, you know, really quite powerful as a-as a-as a force. And-and I-I'm dedicated to, erm, to you know making it bigger and better.

[01:08:23]

*Erm, you are warden, master?*

[01:08:25]

I am currently senior warden and, erm, you know, all things being-being correct, I will be master of the company in, October this year, which I'm very much looking forward to.

[01:08:32]

*Most people who-who, erm, head these organisations, I think everybody does, erm, they have one or two projects in mind, what are your projects, Rob.*

[01:08:43]

Er, I have two projects, erm, one which I've been working on with a number of other people over the last year, which has been relating to social value. There has been a lot of stuff in the press about ESG, Environmental Social Governance, and we see the-the, erm, that is very much about managing the downside risks of the environment social and governance. We see social value as being the other side, the positive side of, erm—And it's almost like two sides of a coin, you've got the financial value, which as a company, you need to actually develop, and the social value, you also need to develop as well. So-so, that's what we've been doing, we've got a group with WCIT, which has got about 20 different companies in it and we're looking for more, erm, called The Social Value Leadership Group, and we helped to grow that.

Erm, and secondly, I'm exploring how we could potentially create a, erm, a digital twin for WCIT, the, er, pandemic has meant a lot of stuff has been on Zoom like we're talking now, and I-I think that's not sufficient. Erm, you know, the, erm, the-when-when you meet with people in a group with people, you can generate far more ideas. I mean, Zoom is somewhat transactional in nature, erm, you know, but talking to a screen is not normal. Erm, erm, and it has become so, but I don't think it is. So, therefore I like the idea of whether some of these sorts of digital twinning, metaverse style, erm, you know, virtual environments can be utilised to, erm, to improve our work. So, I'm looking at doing that as well.

[01:10:23]

*Thank you very much. I think you brought the whole thing, er, very neatly to the same point. That same point, about social value, was made many, many, many years ago, erm, by a hero of yours and of mine, Alan Benjamin. He was attempting to do something like that, and I wish you the best in doing so. Thank you very much, erm, for a lively and interesting contribution to the archives, thanks a lot, Rob Wirszycz.*

*End of Interview*



