

# NOTES TO SELF

## Mark Lee

LIFELINE ALARM SYSTEMS

### What was your first job? What were you like?

I had a part time job at 16 whilst I was still in school, at an old Spar shop just outside Norwich. I did a lot of shelf-stacking, retail and over the counter delivery. My first real job was as an apprentice lathe operator, turning pieces of metal for fire extinguisher systems. As a person I was probably horrible! I definitely liked nice things. My first paycheck went on a brand new Amstrad double tape-deck hi-fi and it was around £120 and I was earning £33 a week. My next paycheck went on a Pierre Cardin jacket, suit and tie. Very Miami Vice! My 16 year old self wasn't ambitious, but I knew what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go.

### Are you naturally a leader and a boss?

I suppose I like to take control in situations. I always recognise my limitations, so if there is someone in an event or a situation and I feel that they've got better leadership skills or qualities than I have, then I will let that individual take the lead. At Lifeline I suppose I set the standards, the goals and the passion for the organisation to follow. I probably am a natural leader to a point but I always recognise that there is someone that can probably do it better than me.

### What are you best at?

I like meeting new people. I can read most people and "get behind the screen". I enjoy taking a new proposal to an individual or an organisation and winning - not because we were the cheapest, but because we have emphasised that we were the best. I like to be able to identify our differentiators and deliver those, so that the customer looks at it and thinks that they're paying a little bit more but they're going to get what they deserve and what they want.

### Can you switch off?

No, not at all! Years ago, we had a two week holiday and it took me the first seven days to unwind. It would then take me another few days to fully relax and then the next three days I'd be preparing to come back. So out of a 14 day holiday I actually only got about a couple of days to relax. I had a mobile phone before they were fashionable and I have always been in contact with the business. I always check our inbox and enquiries box over the weekend too. I wouldn't say that I am a workaholic but I like to know what is going on all the time and I always like to be involved. So no, I can't switch off.

### Do you still recognise that 16 year old shelf-stacker? How have you changed?

Deep down I have still got the same values and passions but I've grown up a lot. I've had to! I have two fully grown daughters and I've been married for thirty years. I will always stand up for justice and passion. If I see someone being really badly treated, it doesn't matter what it is or if I know them or not, I will stand up for them and take the consequences later. The younger version of me would go into battles with all guns blazing and hang the consequences, but as you go through life you get a lot more experience. As long as you win the war, you don't have to win every battle.

**Lifeline Alarm Systems won the Professional And Business Services award and were named Member Of The Year at the 2015 IW Chamber Business Awards. Mark Lee has been elected to the Chamber's General Business board. ■**

