

Notes To Self

Graeme Lee Lifeline Security



Lifeline Security was founded in 1990 by Graeme Lee and his wife Jean. Graeme is Lifeline's financial director and today the business employs three generations of the Lee family.

What was your first job?

I worked in an ironmongers shop in the Canton district of Cardiff, the city where I was born and brought up. I delivered paraffin in gallon cans to householders on an "Arkwright's Store" style bike with a basket on the front to hold the cans. I was thirteen years old, so it was an after school job.

My first proper job was as a trainee butcher. A close friend of mine got me the job at the shop where he worked but he lost his job just before I started. I was fourteen years old and left school just before taking my GCE exams. Jobs were scarce so taking the offer was practical. I stayed in the meat industry for a few years before joining a company that supplied equipment to the meat trade. This company led me to a position in London in their Smithfield showroom.

Jean and I married in 1963 and I had a number of different jobs around that time. I particularly enjoyed being an assistant Advertisement Manager on a local newspaper in the East End of London. I felt really proud earning £1,000 a year for the first time.

Our family moved to Norfolk and for three years I ran a small country garage together with my father-in-law who was an engineer. When the 1970s oil crisis hit we sold up and I went to work for a fire appliance company. This eventually led to me forming my own company designing and manufacturing automatically operated fire systems and supplying them to the motor sport industry. This was the beginning of the "Lifeline" brand.

At one stage during the 1980s every Formula 1 car on the Grand Prix grid had Lifeline fire systems fitted. However in 1989 the Montreal Protocol banned the use of the extinguishing agent we were using and production ceased. By this time we were established on the Isle of Wight and had bought a local company that installed intruder and fire alarms. We decided that this was the market to concentrate on and Lifeline Alarm Systems Ltd was born in 1990.

How has Lifeline grown since then?

The new company originally comprised myself, Jean, her mother and two engineers. Jean had the foresight to see that NSI approval would greatly benefit the company. I was not so sure we would be able to obtain such an accolade. She proved me wrong and we have built on that success. In time we brought in other family members to the business - we now have three generations - each adding

individual skills to the management of the company. In addition, other skilled individuals have supplemented our team and melded into the first-class team we have today.

What have you learned about business?

Most importantly business is about people. Forming and maintaining good relationships with clients and suppliers is paramount.

What have you learned about yourself?

I don't know it all. Listening to and taking advice from others is so important, as well as relying on the ability of others, letting them use their responsibilities wisely.

Is the Isle of Wight a different place to do business?

Certainly, the Island is a small community. There is little room for poor quality service as bad news travels and does not have far to go. But the Island has proved to be a wonderful place to live and bring up a family as well as an ideal microcosm in which to be in business.

What advice would you give to a younger version of yourself?

Whatever you choose to do, work hard at it. A practical skill is worth so much more than theoretical knowledge. Remember to work as part of a team. Ask others for advice. Never think you know it all. ■