Why did you decide to work in HR?

Well, I’ve been running big commercial teams for quite a long time, and I think that part of the job I realised that I loved was developing people and seeing them grow, and after a while people started sending their people to me to train them up and I thought, I wonder if there’s actually a job where I can just train people, develop people, really see how I can get the best out of them. And it’s amazing once you decide those things what can happen. And so I started working for a consultancy that specialised in training and developing people in publishing in the media. Once I was there I developed that passion even further and decided that I would take my qualifications, and I’m very glad that I did, because I think without those I wouldn’t have risen as quickly as I had of done. So, I decided to do my CIPD alongside some other training qualifications so that I really felt confident as a facilitator and a trainer. I then got picked up by one of my then clients to go and run their learning and development function and also develop an HR function alongside that, which was something they didn’t have at the time, and by the end of my role there, there were 600 people within that particular function who were taking part in huge learning development programmes. We put all the systems and processes in place for HR but we’ve really made it something that was very interactive with the business, so it felt like a fantastic thing to have achieved and I’m very glad that I decided to go into that part of my career.

What impact can HR, and particularly coaching, have on an organization’s business strategy?

I think, certainly, over the last five years HRD and learning and development specialists within that function have really seen the benefit of coaching in terms of putting that within their people strategy. Probably the biggest things I’ve noticed is, and if you look at the CIPD figures for this, 80% of companies in the UK are now using coaching, some kind of learning intervention, which is enormous. If you go back 15 years, you know, that figure was probably more likely 10%, 15% and that means that companies are using coaching to look at skills deficit, they’re using it to help people build their confidence, for performance management, they’re looking at the cultural change, behavioral change, there’s so many functions that coaching can help them change within their own organisation and I think what’s started to change now as a result companies are looking for professional coaches, coaches who have training, coaches who are accredited because with such a choice of places to go they’re starting to become a little bit more discerning about who they bring into their business. There’s no doubt that coaching is having an enormous impact and I think that’s for several reasons. We are still in, or some might say coming out of a recession, and where we’ve seen coaching really make an impact, firstly is on creating coaching academies within organisations so that they can train their managers to coach. The impact it has there often is speedier organic growth because they can coach their people internally up the career ladder. At executive level coaching is being used not only to accelerate people’s development but also as a perk in the absence of pay or further benefits which have been sadly missing for the
last two or three years but certainly now coaching is seen as a way of rewarding and recognising people’s contribution at a senior level. So, I think it’s having impact at both ends of the spectrum. The third area, I think, where we’ve seen coaching really have an impact is on management and leadership programmes to support and enhance the learning that’s being done, maybe on a modular basis and between that helping that person work through some personal and some professional change.

**How do you become a coach? What training is needed?**

I think in terms of starting to say you are a professional coach is an important element and certainly, as I’ve said, with companies becoming more robust in their selection progress. Definitely it’s going to be important to go and get some training, a qualification. If you then decide that you want to have an accreditation with a certain body, the Association for Coaching or the International Coach Federation, then again that’s forcing you to take yourself through a path of self development leading to some standards. I think then what’s important depending on where you pitch yourself as a coach is to think about the number of hours that you need to build up so that you feel confident in your own ability as a coach and therefore that is going to shine through when you start talking to companies about what you can do and the results that you can get.

**What advice would you give to students who want to work in HR in the future?**

Keep learning I think is the big one. I now coach and mentor lots of people within HR and some MDs, Chief Executives of companies and I think what stands the excellent practitioners apart from, maybe, just the good practitioners is they keep learning, they keep thinking about how can I develop my expertise and certainly I think the ones who seem to take on board positions are the ones that recognise that what they need to do is develop business acumen alongside their HR expertise. The ones who think about how can I create a language that’s going to work in the board room and not just work alongside the HR function? How can I have impact with a group of people who won’t necessarily be on side about all the people objectives that we have? How can I develop a language and some confidence where I can challenge the top team? I can challenge the people on the board to help them make really robust decisions within their business. So I think it’s about matching those two things. It’s about developing your HR ability and your expertise, but also thinking about becoming a good all round business person. Once you align those two things I think the result has huge impact.