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Chris Gorman

Founder of DX Communications

Chris Gorman showed his first signs of entrepreneurial flair at the age of 13. He did a paper round each day and persuaded the shop owner to let him organise delivery of all the newspapers because he thought he could do it better. He says: 'It cost the owner fifty pounds a week to run the paper round, so I told him I would still do it for the same money but keep any profit for myself. I reorganised some of the rounds and was able to get the whole thing done for forty pounds. So I went from making two pounds a week doing a round to making ten pounds a week managing it.'

Brought up in a poor area of Hartlepool, Gorman left school at 16 to become a management trainee with a local supermarket. His ambition was to become manager of the store by the time he was 30 and to earn £30,000 a year. Then one day he read Dale Carnegie's classic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It changed his life. He says: 'Everything in the book rang so true, the fact that we have this amazing opportunity in life if only we grasp it. I started to wonder whether I really wanted to spend the next



thirteen years becoming a store manager or whether I was going to do something different with my life.'

He was sufficiently inspired to quit his supermarket job and became a self-employed salesperson selling LED display screens to businesses around Newcastle. He moved on to selling mobile phones and answering machines, and by the time he was 20 was earning £35,000 a year.

Gorman was convinced that mobile phones had huge potential, so he moved to London where he got a job selling them to large corporate clients. He was extremely successful at it but when his wife became pregnant they decided to move to Scotland and things took a turn for the worse financially. It was 1990 and the housing market had just crashed, wiping £30,000 off the value of the house Gorman had bought in Wimbledon. He had to take out a personal loan at 26 per cent interest to pay back the mortgage company. Then when he got a job selling mobile phones in Scotland he faced strong initial resistance from customers.

Gorman says: 'At my first meeting the guy said, "I really enjoyed your pitch, but I wouldn't buy anything off an Englishman." I went home that night almost in despair.' But he refused to give up and started spending three nights a week in the local library finding out everything he could about potential customers. His research paid off. Within 18 months he had become the best salesperson in the company and earned enough to pay off all his debts and put down a deposit on a house.

Having gone as far as he could within the company, however, Gorman decided it was time to do something for himself. So he left his job and invested £25,000 to become a founder shareholder in DX Communications, one of the first companies in the UK to sell mobile phones through retail shops. It was an inspired idea. Between 1995 and 1999 the company opened 140 stores and grew from £100,000 turnover to £70 million. Just before Gorman turned 30 the company sold a 25 per cent stake to BT Cellnet for £4 million, of which £1 million went straight to Gorman. He says: 'It was a life-changing moment. I ran into the house, saying "We made it, we made it."' He received a further £6 million when the rest of the company was sold to BT Cellnet for £42 million.

His next attempt at making money was not so successful, however. He invested £500,000 in setting up a recording studio and record label, but within a year had to close it down, losing his entire investment. He is philosophical about the loss, saying: 'It was a great learning experience for me to feel the pain of failure. It was the wrong place at the wrong time and it was better it happened then than when I had £20 million to lose.'

Undaunted, Gorman decided to turn his attention instead to the internet, and in 1999 invested £200,000 to start up an internet consultancy called Reality Group. On this occasion his timing was spot on. Within seven months he had

90 people working for him and an order book of £8 million. After just 15 months he sold the business to GUS for £35 million, reaping a personal profit of £14 million.

Gorman then joined forces with the Scottish entrepreneur Tom Hunter to take a majority stake in the ailing retail chain The Gadget Shop. A year later the pair also bought the Birthdays group, a national card and gift retailer, with the aim of turning both round with Gorman at the helm. The Gadget Shop and Birthdays achieved good results but a bitter shareholder dispute caused the closure of the former and sale of the latter.

Gorman however has gone from strength to strength. He is now a non-executive director of seven businesses including Quintessentially, Purple Lounge, Obsidian and Getfit and has appeared on several business-related television shows. He has collected many business awards for his entrepreneurialism over the years and in 2005 received an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for services to

Fact File

Date of birth: 25 December 1966

Marital status: married with four children

Highest level of education achieved: secondary school

Qualifications: five O levels

Interests: travelling, playing and writing music, films and charity work

Personal philosophy: 'Good things come to those that wait, but only the things left by those that hustle.'

business. In the same year he worked alongside Midge Ure and Sir Bob Geldof helping to organise the Live 8 concert from Murrayfield as part of the Make Poverty History Campaign.

Meanwhile his time spent in the music business over 10 years ago has not been wasted. He is now music advisor to online social networking site Bebo and director of Lucid PR, a public relations firm in the music industry. He has even put his recording studio to good use for a new band he is managing called Tamikas Treehouse which has his 18-year-old son Blair as lead singer.

Now 42, Gorman says the secret to being successful is all about seizing opportunities. He also believes that experiencing failure is an essential part of becoming a successful entrepreneur. He says: 'One of the things I love about America is that people accept failure as a natural part of entrepreneurialism. Unfortunately, in the UK, if you fail at something, all too often nobody wants to know you again. But failure can be one of the best lessons. Fear of failure stops people doing great things but learning from failure helps you achieve even greater things.'