

Yorkshire

Finance Leaders

YFL AWARDS
SPECIAL EDITION

INTELLIGENT PERSPECTIVES FROM BREWSTER PARTNERS RECRUITMENT GROUP | ISSUE 11 • NOVEMBER 2018



Q&A

Exclusive interviews with
all of the eleven winners
from the evening

CONGRATULATIONS
TO ALL THE YFL AWARDS
WINNERS

In this issue...

YFL Yorkshire
Finance Leaders
Awards

b Brewster
Partners™

Unique™
People

In this issue...

Exclusive
interviews with
all of the YFL
Award winners



Marcus Green,
CFO, Platinum Stairlifts



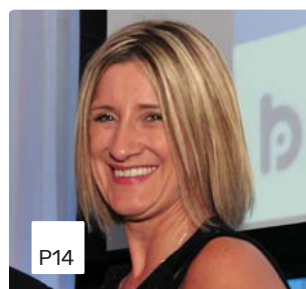
Ben Robinson, BR Financial
Consultancy – ilke Homes



Mike Porter
CFO, NG Bailey



Ciara Milne
Finance Director, Kloeckner Metals



Paula Smith
CFO, Plusnet Plc



Andrea Rossi
CFO, DB Cargo UK



Rob Blomfield, Vice President
Finance, Burberry Business Services



Rob Littlewood
Finance Director, Parseq



Matthias Seeger
Group Finance Director, Costcutter



Matthew Mitchell
Finance Director, Buy It Direct



Danny Taylor
Head of Finance & IT,
Evolution Power Tools

Celebrating Yorkshire's Finance Leaders

Hello and welcome to this special edition of Yorkshire Finance Leaders which celebrates the winners and all those nominated at this years' Yorkshire Finance Leaders Awards.

Held at the Queens Hotel in Leeds on Wednesday 26th October, this years' Yorkshire Finance Leaders Awards was attended by nearly 250 of the region's brightest and best finance professionals.

We were absolutely delighted to be involved this year as a sponsor of the event, working alongside the other sponsors; Walker Morris, BDO LLP, and Lockton Companies, whose teams all

thinking creatively and adding real value to their organisations as they continue to grow, move forward and take advantage of growth opportunities. The work being done by the regions' Finance Leaders to ensure the ongoing financial strength of small, medium and large organisations in the area is indeed of the highest quality and is something of which our region should be very proud.

The work being done by the regions' Finance Leaders to ensure the ongoing financial strength of small, medium and large organisations in the area is indeed of the highest quality and is something of which our region should be very proud.

contributed to making the event an undeniable success. Through the judging process we have been lucky to meet some truly exceptional and inspirational Finance Leaders, and though it is the biggest award ceremony cliché of them all... it really was incredibly difficult to pick the winners.

The evening was not only a celebration of the incredible talent currently working within the Accountancy and Finance sector in our region, but also living proof that in spite of some uncertainty in the current economic and political climate, our Finance Leaders are working hard,

This edition of the magazine features interviews with our winners, and talks through some of their experiences to date, the challenges they've faced in their careers, and what winning a Finance Leaders Award means to them.

I would personally like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved, including our three partners; Walker Morris, BDO LLP and Lockton Companies for their hard work in putting this event together, our fantastic speakers Victoria Woodings and Sir Ranulph Fiennes, and all of our nominees and winners.

Here's to next year!



Richard Chamberlain,
Director, Brewster Partners

"The Yorkshire Finance Leaders Awards was brilliant to be involved in right from the start, through the whole interview process, the robust judging session, culminating in an enjoyable evening showcasing fantastic talent in our region."

Elaine R Owen MBA FCII,
Senior Vice President,
Lockton Companies LLP
Chair of Variety Yorkshire

Sponsors



Unique™
People

And the winners were...

The lights were dimmed, the audience hushed, and the spotlight was beaming down on the top finance talent that Yorkshire has to offer. A year in the planning, over 1,000 potential Finance Leaders in the running to be nominated, 45 candidates interviewed, and 11 confirmed winners, this was an exciting night for all involved, and truly a celebration of the fantastic work being done in Yorkshire from finance professionals to keep organisations of all shapes and sizes moving forward and growing year-on-year.



Working with fellow sponsors BDO LLP, Lockton Companies and Walker Morris, the process began with the opportunity to interview some of the region's current and aspiring Finance Leaders to get a feel for the challenges they have overcome, the strategic planning they have driven, and the results they have achieved for their respective organisations.

From my perspective, I was blown away by the standard of talent, and the amazing stories some nominees had to tell about their past experience and achievements. It was a pleasure, and indeed a privilege, to hear directly about the hard work and creative strategies being developed to keep things moving during seemingly unpredictable and challenging times. The process of whittling these 45 shortlisted nominees down to 11 winners was most definitely

not an easy one, and whilst everyone in the process was more than worthy of recognition and praise, we were delighted with our final list of winners.

Support for the event from all those involved was absolutely brilliant, with over 250 tickets sold and our fantastic venue full to the brim with some of the region's most successful businesses. The night kicked off with a champagne reception, followed by a motivating speech from Chief Executive Officer at Principle Group (the award winning global brand specialist), Victoria Woodings. Hearing how Victoria worked hard from very humble beginnings to becoming FD and then CEO of a £155m-turnover international business was the perfect opener for a night all about the dedication and drive of our Finance Leaders.

After dinner, the excitement mounted and it was finally time to announce the winners. Each one was met with impressive applause as they took to the stage to accept their award, and you could feel the resounding support and mutual respect for each nominee and winner from the audience as they were announced. To close the event, we were then honoured with an awe-inspiring speech from the legendary explorer himself, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who regaled the audience with an exhilarating insight into his life of adventure.

The night truly was a testament to the inspirational leadership and incredible achievements of local Finance professionals, and Brewster Partners are so proud to be part of celebrating the wealth of talent we have in our region.

Richard Chamberlain,
Director, Brewster Partners



Finance Leader in a Private Equity Backed Company

Marcus Green

CFO, Platinum Stairlifts



Marcus Green (left) receiving his award from Jason Whitworth of BDO.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

Winning the award was a nice surprise – to be honest I was just hoping to have a good night out with my team and hadn't really considered I might win anything.

It was very flattering and completely unexpected but I was chuffed to have won. I spent a large part of my career operating within a Plc environment; the move into private equity has been a more recent part of my career, so to receive the recognition for my contributions in the PE space is very pleasing indeed.

2. You won the award for Finance Leader within a Private Equity backed business. How have you been able to carve a niche in this area?

When working in a PE environment, you have got to be very clear on what the value agenda is. If you are not in tune to what the PE owners are trying to achieve, you will be very quickly exposed.

At the same time, attention to detail is absolutely key – you need to be fully in control of not only the numbers but the wider context of the business, and be ready to justify or explain any aspect of the business or financials at any point in time. This means it can be an unforgiving environment if you hit any 'bumps in the road'. To weather difficulties in such an environment you need to be resilient and able to stand on your own two feet.

3. How do you balance the needs of your team vs the expectations of the PE firm?

Professional investors are information hungry, insight and analytics are in constant demand. Your team need to recognise the importance of getting the basics right as well responding to changing shareholder demands.

You need to be able to work as a team to put processes in place to generate information as a matter of routine so it is at your fingertips when you need it. Ultimately this makes your life, and that of your team, much easier. If you are constantly having to be reactive and respond to information requests in an ad-hoc fashion, it can make life quite stressful and you will be constantly chasing your tail. It is much better to be on the front foot and the more prepared you are, the more confidence you instil in the shareholders.

4. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

The strength of your team is absolutely key to your success. Attract ambitious and capable people, coach and support them, give them the space to grow and to develop their own skills.

Push people forward and accept you will not have all of the answers. You will only be successful if you have a strong team around you.

5. What is the key to a successful sale process?

Preparedness is vitally important, and your preparation for the sale starts at the point the previous transaction has completed.

Once a deal has been secured, your ultimate goal with PE is the exit and usually the only variable is time. Preparation starts on day 1, so it is important that your housekeeping is thorough, that the basics are in place at the outset and throughout the lifecycle of ownership. You need to instil a culture where detailed information and analytics become routine. If you and the team get this right, it will make the sale process much easier, and ultimately creates a more attractive proposition for the new owners. If you are able to point to the fact that high standards of information have been provided since the start, it will make for a straightforward diligence process, leaving any purchaser little room. You need to reach a point where all the risks are covered and maintaining a high level of visibility and control is as key as having the right numbers.

Interim Finance Leader

Ben Robinson

BR Financial Consultancy – ilke Homes



Ben Robinson (left) receiving his award from David Kilduff of Walker Morris.



ilke
HOMES

1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

Both thrilled and surprised in the same moment. Just being involved in the panel process and making new connections was already a success in my mind but, to win the award was a fantastic and unexpected moment, especially when all the finalists were of such high calibre.

2. How have you found the experience of being involved in the Yorkshire Finance Leaders awards?

Really enjoyable. The process from start to finish was well run and provided great networking opportunities throughout. The awards ceremony was a great evening and everyone enjoyed the event and speakers.

3. What does winning the award mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

On a personal level it's great receiving the recognition of the award especially within an area that usually does not get as much attention as the permanent Finance Leaders categories. Within this area of expertise there are a number of professional and exceptional interims in the Yorkshire market who face the challenges of pressured environments across a wide spectrum of projects at senior level. Each assignment brings its own set of challenges and unique environments to deal with and all require immediate impact. Winning the award has really filled me with fresh determination

and energy to keep pushing myself in this area of expertise and the support that has been shown since winning the award across my professional and personal network has added to that drive.

4. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

Working with a diverse range of companies, teams and fellow leaders across Yorkshire. It's always great to see companies you played a part in assisting along the way grow, succeed or drive through challenging periods.

5. What do you believe is the key to success in a finance leadership role?

Energy and adaptability coupled with ensuring you learn something new and challenge yourself every week. Approach every role or challenge with the concept of no matter how hard the task, make sure you and the team around you can smile and enjoy the process. Not always possible, but a successful work environment has to be an enjoyable one with a feeling of teamwork and a common goal.

6. What are the biggest challenges for you and the business in the coming years?

Maybe a typical interim answer, but take each day as it comes. It's pointless wasting time today worrying about what may not happen in the future. It's clear from a business perspective that 2019 will be a year of unknown challenges and nobody can predict what will happen with Brexit but the self-fulfilling doom approach

should be avoided. There undoubtedly will be challenges for the business world as a whole but equally opportunities will present themselves and for the interim market both of these scenarios will lead to high demand and interesting projects.

7. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Don't be afraid to escape from the normal routine. I've had many great mentors throughout my career and it's taught me everyone has a different perceived definition of success and the route to success. Do what feels right, put all your energy into it and the rewards will come. Plus take the lucky breaks when they come along. Every career needs a degree of luck or taking a risk – don't be afraid to try a new venture or step out of the comfort zone.

8. You won the award for Interim Finance Leader – talk us through briefly what it takes to be a successful professional interim

Adapting to different environments and identifying the issues quickly. Any interim leader must be prepared to not only cover the high level CFO/FD work but also be willing to roll up the sleeves and do any task that will ensure a projects success. The ability to work across commercial, HR, IT and operational matters also ensures the person can add extra value and work alongside colleagues effectively.

Finance Leader in a Family Owned Business

Mike Porter

CFO, NG Bailey



Mike Porter (right) receiving his award from Matt Davies of Lockton.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

I was very pleased and honoured to have been recognised. It was a strong category to be in with some exceptional professionals shortlisted from some great businesses across Yorkshire.

2. How have you found the experience of being involved in the Yorkshire Finance Leaders awards?

The process was robust and professional, and as such clearly meant something. It's great to see the region recognising and celebrating leaders from finance.

3. What does winning the award mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

The awards are a platform showcasing the achievements of some of Yorkshire's best Finance leaders – I'm proud to not only be shortlisted but win in my category. The reaction has been supportive and enthused.

4. You won the award for Finance Leader within a Family Owned Business – you have had two CFO roles for some of the largest family owned businesses in the region. What is it like working within this environment and how have you managed to succeed in family owned environment?

I clearly enjoy working within a family owned business environment, having worked back-to-back for two of Yorkshire's largest family owned businesses. The great thing is the long term and supportive view that both families provided, the people and the passion to do well; this, combined with financial stability, and a strong heritage.

5. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

Joining NG Bailey and taking up the position of CFO and Board member, plus also leading the successful acquisition of £100m+ business (Freedom Group). In several roles now, building great teams and seeing the guys deliver and develop.

6. What do you believe is the key to success in a finance leadership role?

First and foremost, the key to achieving success is to build a great team around you. As a leader you need to create an environment for the team to succeed with a professional work ethic and approach, and I am so proud of what this finance team has achieved. Being able to shape the strategy and the environment for the business to be stronger and increase shareholder value is the ultimate role of a Finance Leader, and you must be able to provide objective and pragmatic information to enable sensible decision making.

7. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Be resilient, Invest time in your continuous development and have fun!

Finance Leader within an International Group

Ciara Milne

Finance Director, Kloeckner Metals



Ciara Milne receiving her award from David Leyssens of Lockton.



kloeckner metals

UK

1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won the award?

It was a huge surprise to hear that I had won the award. I wasn't expecting to win and was actually just really pleased to be at the awards ceremony as a finalist.

It was clear that the competition was extremely tight, given the amount of highly skilled nominees that were there. I am very proud of the achievement, and it makes all the hard work seem worth it when it is recognised in such an open forum.

2. How have you found the experience of being in the awards?

The experience of the YFL awards was very impressive – the entire process has been handled very professionally.

A lot of people I have spoken to didn't actually realise there was a formal panel interview to get through (almost like a job interview). To have progressed through such a competitive process was very rewarding.

3. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

In recent years I would say that my biggest achievement has been in respect of the defined benefit pension scheme at Kloeckner. Having had no real experience in this area previously, I had to quickly get up to speed on the legal regulations and the current status of the companies'

scheme. It became evident early on that this area had not been a focus point within the company.

Within two years I made changes to the Scheme Trustees; Scheme Actuaries; Investment Managers and the actual Investment Strategy itself. From the company perspective I worked on a number of liability management exercises, introducing alternative retirement options and other salary related initiatives, both of which led to c£5M reduction in the schemes liability.

4. What do you believe is the key to success in a Finance Leadership role?

It is vital you have a strong team around you as it is impossible to work in isolation. You need to have the buy in and respect of your team as you can only lead if people want to follow you.

I always think it is important not to be afraid to open up when you don't understand something. No matter your role in an organisation, we all continue to learn and develop ourselves on a daily basis.

5. What are the biggest challenges for you and the business?

Kloeckner has experienced significant challenges in recent months as a result of Brexit. With a large proportion of our customer base operating within the construction sector, we have encountered long delays in projects due to economic uncertainty.

Therefore, our commercial performance has been challenging since Q4 2017. Unfortunately, due to our organisational structure, we have a very high fixed cost base that is difficult to flex when influenced negatively by macro-economic factors.

6. What advice do you have for any future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

I believe it is really important to have a clear goal and set yourself targets; short, medium and long term.

Having the vision of what you actually want to achieve will help you make the right decisions along the way. A good work ethic and staying focused are extremely important.

Personally, we must never forget who we are, stay true to ourselves and have a moral compass. Having empathy for those around us is a strength that many seem to neglect.

Finance Leader within a UK Group

Paula Smith

CFO, Plusnet



Paula Smith receiving her award from Kelvin Chadwick of Lockton.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

I was immensely proud and a little surprised. I was so pleased for the team, it's not just about being recognised as an individual – it's a personal award but celebrates and recognises joint success. It has given me time to reflect and acknowledge achievements and I take more pleasure in what I do.

2. What does winning the awards mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

The acknowledgment means a great deal and the reaction from colleagues, friends and family has been great, with me receiving notes from people that I've worked in the past and haven't heard from for a while which has been wonderful. The reaction from family has been really special as they have had to put up with a lot so I very much see it as a reward that they've earned too!

3. How did you find the whole process?

The interview panel were very supportive and I felt they were genuinely interested in what I had to say. The evening was very well structured with inspiring speakers. It was a real honour to listen to Sir Ranulph Fiennes speak about the many challenges he has set himself and overcome, and to hear him speak with such spirit and a great sense of humour.

4. What do you believe is the key to success in a Finance Leadership role?

I believe getting sponsors and buy in from outside of Finance is key. Many of my biggest advocates have been non finance and they can have a broader influence on things. You need to be personable and 'human' with the team, people have got to want to work with you and support you which is key, as you can't be successful alone. It is important to be very clear and honest with those around you.

5. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

As I've said, finding sponsors is critical and you have to look wider than Finance to find these. The reason for this is that to progress quickly you have to take risks and you'll only be able to do that with their sponsorship. This does mean taking roles that you don't necessarily feel ready for – something that women are especially cautious of. To overcome this we have to focus on what we bring to the role and over-index on that, rather than worry about the areas that are not natural strengths.

I think we're all guilty earlier in our careers at thinking we have to be brilliant at everything. The sooner we recognise that this is an impossible ask, the easier it becomes. Key is to recognise to succeed you have to have a great team around you, and that has to be a rounded team who all have their own personal strengths that result in the sum of the team having a greater impact than the individuals. You will be remembered for how good your team is and you don't need to be a master of everything.

6. How do you balance the needs of the group and the division?

At Plusnet you have to be a group citizen as well as a leader of Plusnet. You have to make sure decisions are right more for the group and not just for the unit you support. Sometimes this is a tricky balance. Ultimately our main responsibility is to our investors and therefore doing the right thing by them and putting personal agendas aside is fundamental.

7. You won the award for Finance Leader within a UK Group – talk to us about what it is like being a Finance Leader within this structure.

It can be a really difficult balancing act between the interests of the group business and the divisional business. Again my main responsibility lies with the shareholders and their interests, so it's important to properly communicate these to your division, making sure they understand what you want to achieve and why.





Transformation Finance Leader Award

Andrea Rossi

CFO, DB Cargo UK



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

I was attending a Talent Development Programme in Germany and received the news by SMS. I couldn't believe it. I felt honoured to have won the Transformation Finance Leader category, and was just sorry I wasn't there to receive the award in person.

2. How have you found the experience of being involved in the Yorkshire Finance Leaders Awards?

I thoroughly enjoyed the interview process and used it as an opportunity to reflect on all the changes we have gone through and challenges faced. I am really proud of what we have achieved over the last five years, how dedication, motivation and commitment across all teams is so important to make a difference.

3. What does winning the award mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

Colleagues, family and friends have been really happy for me and I have had many messages of congratulations. It has been great for internal PR, and I have made sure that I have honoured the work of the whole team and people's considerable dedication to their jobs. Even if the award shows my name on it, this award has really been earned by everyone in the company who has shown such commitment and dedication over the past 18 months to improve the company's financial position.

4. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

I have enjoyed being able to implement significant and worthwhile change which has allowed us to evolve quickly and to remain competitive in a difficult market. I have faced huge challenges in this role – when your two traditional core markets, coal and steel, lose 90% and 56% resp. of their revenues over a period of 18 months, then you have a big problem to tackle. We had to implement structural changes which were painful and we also had to rebuild the morale within the company and show them where the journey will go. We have definitely turned a corner and are going in the right direction. We are continuously streamlining our systems and processes, which is allowing us to continue to operate competitively and ensure that the business has a sustainable future.

5. What do you believe is the key to success in a finance leadership role?

Being able to lead by example and being able to motivate staff is extremely important. Ensuring staff have the right tools to do the job and the right environment to work in is key. It doesn't matter what you say to people, you need to demonstrate it in everything that you do. It is important to be able to challenge positively and always be there for staff to talk to in an open and honest way, listening to concerns and suggestions and requesting feedback at every opportunity. And within this context it is really important that your teams feel that they can actually make a difference with their work, suggestions and ideas. Their contributions not only need to be valued, but also be able to make positive contributions towards the success of the business.

6. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

I think it's really important to set clear expectations. I always make it clear what I expect from others, and from myself, to ensure we are all on the same page and everyone knows where they stand. Again, leading by example is critical, and I also believe it's important to have a hands-on approach and agility in decision making in order to seize opportunities as they arise.

7. You won the award for Transformational Finance Leader – how do you feel you have managed to perform so well in this environment?

It starts with the team. Building the right team around you is essential because you are only as good as your team. I also think that any successful Finance Leader in today's environment needs to be able to not only understand the bigger picture and how each area of the business contributes to this, but know how to communicate this effectively both internally and externally. It's also key to build relationships with all stakeholders to provide the basis for good discussions, which open up many opportunities and is absolutely key for finding solutions. As long as you invest the time to fully understand how your underlying business works and performs, and what the key levers are in order to have a firm grip and understanding of the company's profitability, you will be able to perform well in any environment.

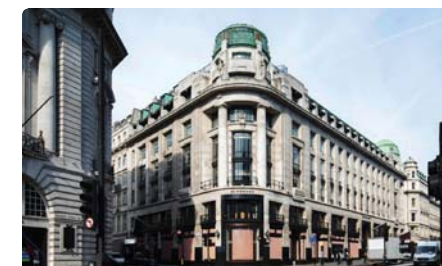
Shared Services Finance Leader

Rob Blomfield

Vice President Finance, Burberry Business Services



Rob Blomfield receiving his award from Gwendoline Davies from Walker Morris.



BURBERRY
LONDON ENGLAND

1. How have you found the experience of the YFL Awards, and how did you feel when you had found out you had won?

My experience has been very positive, right from when I first found out I had been nominated and asked to attend an interview, through to the end and ultimately winning the award.

The interview was an enjoyable experience, I was faced with some challenging questions but it was a great opportunity to tell the story of what we have achieved at Burberry in Leeds. When I found out I had won I was very surprised to hear my name read out, and I was very proud of what we have achieved as a team and that we were all there on the night to celebrate in our success.

2. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

I am most proud of what we have achieved at Burberry. It has been extremely rewarding to have had the opportunity to build something of this scale that supports the business and adds a huge amount of value.

To have started as the first member of the new finance team, built a strong team around me and started the journey to become a high performing shared service centre has been a great experience. I have been lucky enough to have some very interesting roles in my career at M&S, EY and PwC, however Burberry has been the most challenging and rewarding to date.

3. What do you believe are the keys to success in a finance leadership role?

I believe the most successful finance leaders are collegiate, and are able to demonstrate that they support other parts of the business as well as finance.

The core function of a finance department is to enable the business to do all the things that drive top-line growth.

4. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Believe in yourself, trust in others and take a chance.

To succeed you have to have the belief that you can do it, and the tenacity to drive it through. Also, it is vital to be aware that you are only as good as the team you have around you.

5. You won the award for Shared Service Finance Leader – how do you go about creating a successful shared service centre?

It is all about being customer focussed. A successful shared service centre should always put the customer at the heart of what they do.

Whilst providing an important back office function, it is also about having a keen focus on the cost of the operation,

and an understanding of what the value-add is for the operation. You must also strive to ensure that all the processes happen smoothly and efficiently, and that the customer receives the best possible service, enabling them to focus on driving the business forward.

6. How do you feel your background in consulting has helped you in this role?

Having worked in a consulting environment, I have worked with clients from well-established shared service centres, and have been able to learn what works well and what doesn't.

I have also learned that in the consulting environment you have to be responsive and reactive, and you need to learn how to spin a lot of plates, whilst staying focussed on the key objectives. This has been vital in my role at Burberry as the business is fast paced and we need to ensure we are answering to the needs of our customer in an agile and efficient manner at all times.

Fast Rising Finance Leader

Rob Littlewood

Finance Director, Parseq



Rob Littlewood (left) receiving his award from Richard Chamberlain of Brewster Partners.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won the award?

It was a shock and a surprise to hear my name read out. Being at the awards ceremony made you realise how many prominent businesses we have in Yorkshire, and the impressive amount of talented Finance Leaders who are associated with them. To be a finalist amongst 50 other people is one thing, but to win is a big deal, so I was delighted with the result. It took a few days to sink in, but for someone who is usually very humble and plays down my successes, I was very proud to have won.

2. How has your career progressed whilst being at Parseq?

I started as Group Financial Controller in 2013, and was brought in to support a new CFO. At the time the business was looking at its M&A activity, so finance was driving a lot of the decision making in the business at that time. Very quickly, I found I was taking a leading role in the M&A activity and we made two big acquisitions in the first year. In conjunction with a major contract win and the rapid growth of the business, from early on there was essentially a lot of firefighting in a short space of time. In my 2nd year, we were able to have a structured plan which led to an ideal opportunity to exit for the PE investors. As we began preparing for the next sale, I was ideally placed to take on the CFO role and that is where I was able to be strategically involved in the following sale.

3. You won the award for Fast Rising Finance Leader – how have you been able to achieve the progression you have experienced?

I had a very strong mentor for my first year at Parseq. With a strong mentor I felt as if I could get a head start, and this helped me to remain driven on my career and my development, whilst being thrown in the deep end and learning as much as I could. I found that this really set the scene on how I wanted to behave and perform in my role. I still find myself trying to emulate what I learnt in that first year in the business. It also helped to be immersed in things from an early start – none of us grow unless we are challenged or unless you change the environment you operate in. Looking back on my career, I have only left roles when the level of challenge had diminished, and one of the great things about Parseq is that I have never been bored, and this level of variety and challenge has not only been enjoyable and rewarding, but it has really helped progress and build the skills I need to advance in my career. I have learnt a lot about my own performance and the job I do, such as in the early days I found I would take things personally, and would feel the pressure, whereas now I feel I can take things in my stride and see things for as they are.

4. What are the keys to success in a Finance Leadership role?

A key part of it is to ensure you have the right team with you. It is vital that you have a team around you who can work autonomously, where the leader doesn't need to be dragged into the day-to-day too often. You need people who are able to speak up when they need help, but be proactive when it comes to finding solutions and getting to grips with core accounting matters. You also need a team who are pushing upwards and keen to further their own careers, so people can step up to the plate when you need them to. Also you can't inherit a team and assume it fits, make sure it works for you, and ensure the team is underpinned by having a good No. 2 supporting you.

5. What advice would you give to up and coming Finance Leaders looking to progress in their careers:

Push yourself to work outside your comfort zone, as this will help you learn qualities about yourself you may not have known already. Also, be aware that you can't do or learn everything by yourself, you need to have a good army of advisors around you who are there when you need them, who you can draw knowledge and experience from and guide you along the way.

Outstanding Finance Leader of the Year

Matthias Seeger

Group Finance Director, Costcutter



Matthias Seeger (right) receiving his award from Paul Davis of BDO.



Costcutter^c
Shop the way you live

1. How have you found the experience of being involved in the YFL awards?

It is great to see the success of so many talented individuals recognised in this way. Many of the people involved in the awards have grown up in the community, and this level of recognition and celebration really symbolises the spirit of the region, and the forward-looking, high-achieving culture we have in the finance community in Yorkshire.

2. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won the award?

I was truly honoured and humbled to be nominated. I am very surprised to have received the award I did, and extremely grateful to all those involved in the process. In the context of so many nominations and so many deserving candidates in the room, it was a huge honour.

3. What do you believe is the key to success in a Finance Leadership role?

I see there being three key elements to this that have helped me achieve my goals throughout my career:

1. You must be able to establish a solid foundation in your business, where high standards run through all basic, fundamental controls and procedures. To not have the right controls in place is a huge distraction when things aren't right, and it is a detriment to the business. As the leader you must be focussed on this objective at all times. It is also key to remain business focussed, and be an active, willing business partner to your stakeholders. You must demonstrate that you can

help the business find solutions, and look through their eyes to see the problems.

2. Never be satisfied with the status quo. You should always find ways to make an impact, and have a restlessness about you to keep challenging assumptions and ensuring you are doing the best you can for the team and the business. However, don't change things for change's sake - I have experienced leaders who have suffered by wanting to change the world too quickly, so you must always remain focussed and realistic with your objectives.

3. No leader is a leader without the support of the team and the organisation. It is vital you have the buy in of the people around you, and that they understand what is expected of them and what success looks like to them, whilst keeping their own personal motivations and objectives in mind. Also, it is your responsibility to communicate the successes and priorities of your team externally - be a sales person and advocate of your team. Understand their strengths and weaknesses, but don't overplay the strengths.

4. What are the biggest challenges for you and the business in the coming years?

Like any business at the moment, we are in a highly competitive and uncertain environment, with all the challenges brought about by Brexit, and the changing landscape of our marketplace and customers' needs. It is vital we stay on the front foot of customer trends by anticipating and influencing their needs and behaviours. It is critical to think a few steps ahead, and have alternative plans in place if the unexpected happens, and be agile to situations that are different to what you expected.

The most successful businesses have evolved in anticipation of their changes, and the less successful businesses are those who believe their business model and customers will never change.

5. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Recognise that you are on an eternal learning journey. Always ensure you keep that hunger for learning and never be satisfied. Surround yourself with people who want to make an impact, in an environment where people are not shy to come up with ideas and who are self-starters. One of the biggest hindrances you can have is to be surrounded by needy people who don't have the same enthusiasm and drive that you have.

6. You mentioned that you see your role as being a 'quarterback' for the CEO - could you expand on this?

I spent two years in the US when I got the MBA, and became fond of American Football. The 'quarter-back' reference was meant loosely, but I was keen to make the point that it is critical for the CFO to work with the CEO in a true partnering capacity where trust is gained from both sides, and as CFO you put yourself in the CEO's shoes. The CEO should feel comfortable that you can step into their shoes when they aren't around, or could be a future successor should they move on. I see Finance Leaders as being the leader of the 'offence' rather than 'defence' - all too often finance is considered as defensive, so it is our job as Finance Leaders to change this mind-set in people and ensure finance leads from the front in the board room.



Finance Leader in a Private Company over £100m

Matthew Mitchell

Finance Director, Buy It Direct



Matthew Mitchell (left) receiving his award from Ben Sheppard at Walker Morris.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

I was genuinely surprised when I was announced as the winner of the award. Given the category I was nominated in and the strength of the other nominees, I wasn't expecting it. I was just proud to have been nominated alongside a number of my peers from some of Yorkshire's best businesses. It was a great feeling to have won and to share that not only with my colleagues (albeit two of them thought the two minute warning for the awards meant it gave them time to get to the bar and missed the presentation, which they have been made to feel bad about since.) but also a number of existing and new contacts from the Yorkshire business community.

2. How have you found the experience of being involved in the Yorkshire Finance Leaders awards?

This is a question I have been asked a number of times, both before and since the awards ceremony, and so one I have reflected on a lot. Honestly, I found the whole process really rewarding, even before finding out I had won. Buy It Direct is a great place to work and one that has grown substantially even in the six or so years I have been there, and so to take time to step back and reflect on everything I have achieved both personally and in collaboration with the wider business, really was something I enjoyed doing.

It was also nice to be recognised for the impact that finance can have on a business, not only of this size, but also the importance it can have on a business growing to the extent that Buy It Direct has.

3. What does winning the award mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

I was extremely proud to have won the award and to be recognised for the part that my team and I play in the wider business. The reaction and feedback I have had from everyone I have spoken to, both personally and professionally, has been nothing but supportive and it has already provided a number of new networking opportunities for me and the business.

4. You won the award for Finance Leader within a +£100m turnover business – what is it like working as a Finance Leader within a business of this scale, and what are the challenges you face?

Challenging but rewarding! Buy It Direct is a business that I am passionate about and want to see succeed further, and with the plans we have and the team supporting it across the whole business, I know it is only going to go from strength to strength. We still operate as a very entrepreneurial, fast paced business, despite our size and complexity, and this is one of the key drivers of our success. This is one of the challenges that I became aware of very quickly when I joined. The role of finance is changing and I don't believe you can succeed in businesses such as ours without having a strong commercial understanding as well as financial. Finance needs to grow and adapt with a business and needs to be entrepreneurial in the way it approaches its function, rather than the old stereotypical perception of a finance

team. Showing how finance can help and add genuine value to the commercial front of a business is one of the biggest challenges I have faced in my time at Buy It Direct, but one that I believe has added the most value to the wider business.

5. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

Each stage of my career has contributed towards the type of Finance Leader I am today. The people I have worked alongside and the lessons I have learned from them along the way (good and bad) have been the highlights of my career. I have worked with some truly inspiring and successful people in my career and I have always tried to take as much away from that as possible. I have not always worked in the easiest of environments, (whether that be success of the business, implications of external stakeholders, controls etc), but I have learnt something from each of them.

Being made a Director of Buy It Direct and being involved in its growth story over the last six and a half years is my definite highlight.

6. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Treat every experience as an opportunity to learn new things and help shape you as the Finance Leader you want to be. Nothing is ever a wasted opportunity.

Don't be afraid to push yourself outside of your comfort zone, take a chance and do what you believe in.



Finance Leader within a Company
with less than £100m Turnover

Danny Taylor

Head of Finance & IT, Evolution Power Tools



Danny Taylor (right) receiving his award from Richard Chamberlain of Brewster Partners.



1. Tell us how you felt when you found out you had won your award?

I was very surprised to hear my name read out. To be honest I considered it an achievement to make it here as a finalist. When Brendan, the speaker, was talking through the synopsis of the winner, I picked up on a few clues that it might be me, but still wasn't convinced and was actually taking a sip of wine when my name was announced by Richard. It was a surprise and an honour.

2. What does winning the award mean to you and what has the reaction been like amongst people who know you, both professionally and personally?

I had attended the awards evening with a few colleagues, so by the time I went to work the next day news had already spread. The award has been very well received by my colleagues and they all seem pleased I have received some recognition for the work I have been doing at Evolution Power Tools.

3. You won the award for Finance Leader within a less than £100m turnover business – talk us through briefly what your role entails and what it is like to work at Evolution Power Tools

No two days are the same, my role is extremely varied. We are an international business with our UK Head Office in Sheffield, with sales operations in France and the US, a supply chain office in China and we are currently expanding in Poland and China. The business is growing 20% year-on-year. On top of the day-to-day

financial and management reporting and managing finance and IT, I am here to help the business identify the best possible opportunities to keep maintaining the growth.

4. One of the things that stood out about your interview was the growth that the business has achieved – how have you been able to influence this?

We have managed to ensure our growth is sustainable by ensuring it comes from different routes. We have worked on promoting our brand, venturing into new territories and product ranges, and assessing where we should be focussing our investment and attention in the coming years. We always back up our growth strategies with regular analytics to provide insight to management.

5. What have been the key highlights of your career as a Finance Leader?

I have been very fortunate in that I have always worked in roles where I have been able to achieve a lot in a short space of time. My highlights tend to come from where I have been able to make an impact, or the fact that I have put in place things that have stood the test of time. I would say my most memorable successes have come from building a strong team, and the successes I have seen my team achieve. I also consider many highlights to have come from the international exposure I have at Evolution Power Tools, travelling across the world meeting with different cultures and learning new ways of working. We have been on a very positive journey at Evolution Power Tools and reaching the £40m turnover mark was certainly a major milestone, especially alongside refinancing the business and reducing the cash conversion cycle by almost half.

6. What do you believe is the key to success in a Finance Leadership role?

I believe the cornerstone of success in a senior finance role is being able to think commercially as well as financially. I believe that getting away from your desk, going to meet with customers, getting to know the staff at a granular level is absolutely key. It will help you work as a team to make sensible decisions, balancing the business needs with those of individual team members.

I also believe that being a strong leader in your team is a vital part of a senior finance role. When you have multi-site operations you can often find businesses have a siloed mentality and consist of disparate groups, who may be doing a great job in isolation, but to have an effective conjoined approach with the wider business' interests at heart, you need strong leadership to pull it together. Finally, to maintain integrity is vital – without integrity you have nothing.

7. What is the best advice you can give to future Finance Leaders looking to achieve the same success you have?

Learn the value of your team and those around you, and always strive to surround yourself with the best people. Also, always ensure you take as much time as possible to understand the business and apply your commercial knowledge. Finally you should always ensure you develop a plan (I am a devout list maker.). As important as developing that plan though, is being ready to adapt and be agile if the environment around you changes.



the children's charity

improving young lives every day

Yorkshire Region

"We are truly grateful for the support and donations received on the YFL evening. We raised an impressive £3,700 and also had pledges for equipment and people volunteering their time, all of which will make a real difference to the disadvantaged children in our region."



Across the UK there are children who, through no fault of their own, have to cope with sickness, disability or disadvantage.

It's tough. Really tough.

That's where Variety comes in.

We provide practical, tangible help that makes an immediate difference to those children and their families; aiding them in reaching their true potential.

To find out more, or to get involved with Variety Yorkshire, please call **01132 459 937** or visit **www.variety.org.uk**

Alternatively, visit **www.variety.org.uk**

How we help

Sunshine Coaches

Enable schools and organisations to plan educational, vocational and recreational trips that help develop the young minds of their pupils.

Wheelchairs

Help disabled children and young people reach their full potential by providing mobility and independence.

Specialist Equipment

Can help improve care and ease the burden of looking after a child who is seriously ill, disabled or who has additional needs.

Variety Great Days Out

Are fun and educational day trips provided free of charge for children from special needs or economically deprived schools. These days allow children to leave behind their daily struggles and be children.



@VarietyYorks