

OC OF THE MONTH

February 2020

Mark Felix (HG 1992)



A LEVELS: English, Politics, History
UNIVERSITY: History at UCL

1. Tell us about yourself – where do you currently work, and how did you get into that?

I started my career in strategy consulting - essentially helping companies face business challenges. It was a great role and I learnt a lot about how companies operate and how to support them improve performance. From there I went to work for retailers in management and commercial roles. I spent 8 years at Sainsburys, firstly in a strategy role and then running the pricing and promotions model - in essence setting and managing all the prices and promotions for the 60,000 items they sold per year. It was a great role, blending maths with economic and game theory. I then ran Grocery Online - the online shopping arm of Sainsburys, which delivered over 200,000 food shopping orders every week to customers up and down the country. After my time at Sainsburys I went to John Lewis as the Online Director. This was a fantastic role, running a website that drove sales of £2.4bn per year which represented 42% of all John Lewis sales. The trust the John Lewis brand has with customers meant we could do some great things to improve the customer experience. I also managed 150 employees which gave me a lot of challenging leadership experiences. After 4 years, I was approached to try something different and I'm currently the Commercial Director for MoneySupermarket.com, which is the one of the leading price comparison

websites. I run all the commercial relationships for the Insurance and Energy suppliers. It is a fast moving and very challenging environment.

2. What are some of your proudest achievements since graduating?

There were 3 or 4 times that I led initiatives that were more successful than I would have previously considered. A good example is that I launched a nationwide price match scheme for Sainsburys whereby we guaranteed that your shopping would be cheaper than competitors. To do this for a business that has a £26bn turnover feels pretty scary but, in the end, it was the right call. Another example was managing Black Friday for John Lewis.com. We would take c. £200m of sales during the week and it required careful planning, some bold decisions and a lot of management to ensure we could make sure the website could stand the sales impact. We had some very successful years and beat the competition in terms of sales

3. What advice would you give someone who is looking to follow a similar career path?

1 - Always try and challenge yourself and keep on learning. The roles I am doing now did not exist when I was at Highgate. I would not have got them had I not done many different roles in the past

2 - Whatever job you are doing, do it well. If you work hard and are good at your job, doors will open and you will progress

3 - Give back - I was lucky enough that people took a chance on me in the past, be it giving me advice or giving me the opportunity in a new role. So, I want to give this back. I've given work experience to 8 Highgate pupils in the past and they have all been great and hopefully learnt a lot from the experience

4 - Never ever give up. I have had some pretty tough times in jobs. Never give up trying - you will always get there in the end.

4. Did your time at Highgate help you? If so, how?

Highgate gave me such a breadth of opportunity - I didn't realise quite how I would use the skills and experience that I received, both academically and through the clubs, societies and activities that I took part in. From a management point of view, I look back at how teachers handled certain experiences which has helped a lot. Whilst at Highgate, I also became aware of how lucky I was - there were a significant amount of people who couldn't attend either due to finances or academics. It reminded me that no matter how hard times are, others are probably finding it harder.

5. In three words, how would you describe Highgate?

Challenging, caring, positive.

6. What's next?

To continue to try and progress in my roles, whilst keeping a work-life balance that works for the family (I have a fantastic wife who works full time and 3 children, including my son at Highgate Junior School) and develop my team around me.