

IB Construction worked on the Thomas Telford Swimming Pool and 6th Form Centre

Clichés, family ties and the brilliance of the Dude

The Hireman MD Neil Graham on loving his job, father-son teams and the joys of Jeff Bridges

Who would you most like to shoot with a paintball gun?

Whoever's on the opposing team. **You're God for the day. What's the first thing you do?**

I'd start with a very quick relocation of the British Isles. Perhaps somewhere just off the coast of western France or Portugal. We have a fantastic country but I think we'd all be a lot happier with a bit more sunshine.

Who is your hero?

Anyone who questions the status quo and then does something about it to improve the way things are done.

What has been your worst ever business decision?

I must admit I've never taken the time to rank any bad decisions I've made but they've probably involved me not having done enough. It's important to keep moving and developing.

And best?

Joining the family business. My father and I are a great team, I owe a lot to his guidance, patience and confidence in me.

Who are you enjoying listening to?

I love discovering new artists: some of my favourites right now are Alt-J, Django Django, Field Music and Roller Trio.

What is your favourite film?

The Big Lebowski starring Jeff Bridges – hilarious and brilliant at the same time.

What characteristic do you most dislike in others?

Insincerity: whether in the workplace or outside it, it's something I can't stand.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

'Manners maketh the man' – I remember a teacher repeating this mantra often.



If you were blessed with the necessary talent, what would your dream job be?

It may be a cliché but I really do love what I do. Running your own business allows you to be in control of your own destiny.

What would you take with you to a desert island?

Assuming that a means of escape is too obvious an answer, I'd say my Swiss army knife would probably come in quite handy. Oh, and a box of matches.

What should the construction industry be doing to help itself in the current climate?

I think the creation of an overall ratings system for contractors would go a long way towards protecting clients against low-price, low-quality firms and protecting the industry against loss of reputation. We must also continue to invest in our people – it's their skill and dedication that will help us to take advantage of an improving marketplace.

What's the best work-related thing you did recently?

Last year was a really important year for The Hireman: we opened two new businesses; a safety training business a third depot. To help us choose the location of our third depot we conducted an online poll of our customers and staff. It was gratifying that a good idea resulted in such great feedback from our staff and our customers.

How would you like to be remembered?

As a committed and loving family man, and a business leader who helped people reach their fullest potential.



REGULATION SHORTCUT

The issue: early warnings for contractors

When a project goes wrong and a contractor has not complied with its obligations, it's not guaranteed that the contractor will be able to pay the appropriate compensation under the contract. Clients would then need to ask: 'Could this have been avoided if the consultants had handled things differently?'

In a recent case we handled, the client had appointed a reputable team of project and cost managers, with broad duties to manage the construction of a new building.

The professionals devised a two-stage procurement: stage one aimed to get the contractor on board early, to be part of finalising the design and to introduce cost certainty before the client went on to stage two – the main works.

Time and cost were key, not least due to external funding deadlines. The contractor didn't perform from an early stage; when we came to advise, the client was in a difficult situation, as there was no cost certainty, the contractor was on site under letters of intent and refusing to let key packages until it

had a signed contract, and supervision was poor with serious concerns over the quality of work.

The contractor ended up in administration, leaving the client with a huge bill for a replacement to remedy defects and complete the works. The consultants should have warned the client early on; told the client before stage two it was unwise to begin building until the design had been finalised, costs ascertained and a contract entered into; and set out the risks of not following such advice.

In this case, settlement was reached between consultant and client at mediation – a reminder that when things do go wrong they don't necessarily need to end up being decided by a court. This is a lesson for SME consultants doing their all to please clients. Whatever the pressures, they will be obliged to give early warnings of risks facing clients as projects proceed.

Greater control is required now more than ever in the construction process, as contractors' mistakes may not be treatable later.

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