

Distinctive Interviews with Distinctive People



Professor Paddy Gray

Professor Paddy Gray OBE
finds out what we want to know about:

Elly Hoult
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Paddy Gray OBE:

1. What distinctive traits do you admire most in the team that you currently lead?

Elly Hoults:

I have only just started with the team that I've got 3 weeks ago, so I've not got much to base it on. I guess if I went on what I most admire in teams I have led and what I would look for in teams I will lead, I think passion – people who really care about getting the job done well. Getting the job done to a high standard, caring about people, be that an internal customer or resident. I think passion really drives a lot and most other things; if you care, then you will do a good job on every level. I think the other thing is graft, people who are prepared to put the hours in and go the extra mile. I've got people in my team who are only able to work shorter hours because they have families, but when they are in work, they are on it. I hear a lot of people say that they are "busy" like is negative, but they should be at work, it would be weird not to be. It is an overused word.

2. What is distinctive about your office?

So, we have just had our office refurbished and we have moved to activity-based working, which means that people work in a different space depending on what activity they are doing. It is enabling us to make the best use of space, so if you are doing something quiet, you can sit in the quiet area, if you want to do something collaboratively, we have collaborative spaces. It is all open plan and I guess fresh and modern.

3. Would you say you are naturally self-confident or do you have to work at it?

I think it depends on the situation. I guess the definition of self-confidence is to trust in your abilities. When I started the merger, that was quite a learning curve for me; I grew in confidence as I went through it. Things like public speaking don't come naturally to me, so I have to work at that to get my confidence and to trust that I am going to do a good job. There are some experiences that I will enter into feeling quite confident. I think it depends on the situation and I think that's ok, and when you know when you are going to be less confident, it is about doing your homework.

4. In a sliding doors world, what other job would you do?

I would probably be a Detective, a Police Detective. I am quite nosey and vocationally, it is not dissimilar to this job, doing a public good. It's got the people element but also, I do like problem solving and it is a problem-solving job. Or I might be an Interior Designer.

5. Do you find being the boss to be lonely?

Firstly, I don't really feel like the boss, I've always felt I'm part of a team. Whether that is with peers or people that I manage. I think when you are dealing with a difficult problem and you are trying to get it to a place before you share it with people, that can feel quite lonely. I am thinking about at the start of the merger, we couldn't announce things for commercial reasons and I wanted to get to a point where I could share information – I don't like holding things back. So that felt kind of lonely as I was dealing with that stuff on my own before I could bring my team in to help.

6. Professionally speaking, what keeps you up at night?

I'm quite lucky as I sleep like a log. If we talk about the question literally, I'm a solid 8 hours a night person, but I think with the role I've got at the moment, I have taken on a big aspect around property safety and compliance and those are the things that are at the forefront of my mind. If I actually think about what keeps me awake, again, I think it comes back to problem solving. If I have a big problem, I will find myself thinking about it before I go to sleep and often, I will wake up and have the solution. Generally, things that worry me are safety and making sure that I'm taking people with me, that's important as well.

7. What is the worst job that you have done?

When I was a teenager, I grew up in quite a touristy area and it had a lot of hotels and things like that and I was a Chamber Maid. It was awful, it was really hard work changing beds; people talk about divorce and moving house as being the most stressful things that you do in life, I would add changing a bed on your own. So, when you are changing 20 beds a day and it is other people's dirt and grime and you are up and down the stairs with piles of sheets and on minimum wage. It was quite a laugh but it was pretty grim.

8. Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Until recently I would have said "integration merger" as that was my whole role really for 18 months. I don't know if I overuse phrases, but I do ask a lot of questions. Like, I am always asking "why?", "how often?", I feel like I am always asking people questions. "How can we fix it?", "can we do it faster?", "is it possible to do this?". I also do that in my personal life, I am quite nosey, I do ask a lot of questions.

9. What do you owe your parents?

I owe my parents my work ethic. So, getting things done and getting on with it. I think I have spoken to you about this before, but we didn't have very much when I was younger and my parents sacrificed quite a lot for us and their mantra was always "you work for what you get". So, it has always been in the back of my mind - my work ethic and pushing forwards, regardless of your circumstances. I think I owe them that to be honest. Nothing is ever going to be given to you on a plate. If you want it, you are going to have to go and get it.

10. What advice would you give to someone starting their career now?

I think take opportunities when they present themselves and if they don't present themselves, you can create your own opportunities. What I mean by that is, things like "I'm really struggling to get promoted in my current organisation", or "how do I move to the next level". Well actually, if there is nothing for you there, where can you go and get more experience? Maybe you need to change your organisation or go on training courses. I think it is quite easy to look at a picture and think that things aren't going to change for me, but it does come down to you as an individual to keep pushing yourself as well. So, I would say grab chances and opportunities that come along.

11. What is your guiltiest pleasure?

I don't think you should feel guilty about pleasure. My motto is work hard, play hard and I literally live my life by that motto. I'm an atheist, but I'm sure if I was religious, I would probably be in hell, most of my pleasurable activities involve wine or some other deadly sin. We live in a bit of a work world and I talk a lot about work in this interview, but I don't take any guilt in having fun or having down time. For the purpose of this interview, I do like a portion of fish, chips and curry sauce and I do feel pretty guilty after eating that!

12. Which 4 people dead or alive would you invite to a dinner party?

This isn't too hard for me; I'm going to say my grandparents. They were a really important part of my extended family growing up and the family community, and I really miss them. I wouldn't hesitate to have them back in a second. The second one is along the same lines. My mum does genealogy and has been keeping a Blog about my family history. My mum recently wrote a blog about my Great Grandfather, who I didn't know and it was just so interesting. I would really like to meet him and talk to him. I guess if I was going to pick someone famous, I would maybe say Winston Churchill, he was just a good orator and he also liked a drink and I only want people at my party who can let themselves go. Lastly, Freddy Mercury, not only could he entertain us after dinner, but he is also a huge cat lover (so the conversation would be flowing).

13. An interesting fact which isn't on your CV?

When I was first married, Jon and I didn't have any money, we signed up to be mystery diners, which basically meant we got to eat out for free if we reported on the meal. It was great as we saved loads of money, but it was a really tedious task writing the reports. It has made me a really bad critic of restaurants now when I eat out, as I am constantly looking at the criteria, which is kind of annoying.

14. What would your super power be?

I would definitely want to talk to animals. I love animals and I really want to know what my cats think of me. I pretend that I know what they are thinking but for all I know they could hate me. Taking them to the vets is very expensive, it would save me loads if they could tell me what was wrong.

15. What do you consider is your greatest achievement?

The thing I am most proud of is the work I did on setting up CIH Futures, I am really proud of that because I feel that it is something that will continue to grow and develop. It was the first time that I felt young people had a decent voice in our sector and it has gone on to do some amazing things.

16. If you could go back in time, where would you go?

I would like to go back to the village I grew up in and see my ancestors but if I could choose to live in any era it would be the 1920's. It was peace time and it seemed like a fun time to be around. It seemed like everything was a bit simpler then than it is now.

17. If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?

I am going to say Dodo as that is the only thing I can think of and it was quite weird looking. If I could stop something from becoming extinct, it would be a hedgehog - those prickly fellas need all the help they can get.

18. How do you relax?

Although I said I work hard, play hard, I actually find it quite hard to relax. The time when I am most relaxed is when I am with people that I love. The only time I am truly relaxed is when I am on holiday and having a break. I obviously enjoy myself at weekends, but I am not very good at relaxing. So, holidays and being with people I want to be with are important to me. I do like reading as well and Jon and I love a pub quiz.

19. What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Relationships matter, what matters most in my life are the people in my life.

20. And finally, what makes you distinctive?

The thing I hear literally every day is “wow, how do you walk in those high shoes?”, so I think my shoe collection makes me quite distinctive. But probably, I am a country bumpkin working in the best city in the World, I think that makes me quite distinctive.