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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Jeremy Hillman, communications director at The World Bank. The organisation is the largest funder of development work in the world, with a mission to end extreme poverty. Jeremy was previously director of external communications for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, where he was responsible for their digital platforms, media profile and reputation. He has a background in broadcast and online journalism for the BBC, where he ran the newsroom for their global commercial news channel BBC World News.

Jeremy, thank you for joining me.

Thank you. Lovely introduction. I'm not sure I'm at the top of the media game, no longer in the media, but great to be here.

To be honest, we say that to all our guests to flatter them.

I've listened, it's a great show.

It's to lull them into a false sense of a security, so we can go for the killer question! Tell us about the World Bank. Because their mission is to end extreme poverty, how would you say it's going?

That's right. So we have twin goals; end extreme poverty, which is trying to end the number of people living on below a \$1.90 a day, and to tackle inequality, we call it boost share prosperity. So there's been incredible progress on those goals in the last few years. I know for many people that devour the news every day, it doesn't feel like there's been great progress, but the facts are millions and millions of people have been lifted out of poverty over the last decades. There's now fewer than 10% of the global population in extreme poverty. That's fallen dramatically. The number of children under five dying needless deaths has fallen dramatically over the last few years. So when you look at that big macro picture, there's been incredible global progress. That doesn't mean there aren't huge challenges still and lots of poverty

and lots of deprivation around the world, but things have absolutely been moving in the right direction.

And why is that?

I think it's a combination of things. Obviously, the huge global economic growth that we've seen, the transformation of particular countries. China is a country which has lifted millions of people out of poverty through its economic growth. Many other countries too. We still see obviously huge pockets of extreme poverty, increasingly concentrated in areas like sub-Saharan Africa, in India, there is still a large amount of poverty. But as I said, the trend has been incredibly positive, partly because of economic growth, a better understanding of what it takes to create jobs and opportunity. I'd like to think that the multilateral institutions like the World Bank and others have made a contribution to that through the infrastructure work that they build, through investing in human capital, in education, in health and many other developments. And the work of foundations as well. I know we'll come on and talk about the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation where I worked. So there's many factors that I think have contributed to the progress, but now it's really important to keep that progress going.

And when you joined the bank in 2014, it was going through a period of change. And you said it had struggled to tell a strong story about its role in global affairs; how have you changed things?

So I think it's true that most people don't really know what the World Bank is or really understand what it does. Obviously those within the development community, many journalists in that community have a higher level of understanding, but the World Bank is not, if you like, one of those consumer brands where you could stop someone in the street and they tell you exactly what it does. And that's probably fine. What I think it does do, and what is important to understand, is the institutions, these multilateral institutions, and the World Bank is one of the largest, are huge contributors to global development, to every aspect of global development. So World Bank works on health, education, agriculture, climate change, a huge number of areas of development, and puts massive resources into those, working in developing countries, working in lower middle-income countries, everywhere in the world. It's one of these huge diverse global organisations that will be very hard to invent today. You wouldn't be able to suddenly build a World Bank today. We're reaching the 75th anniversary of world, the Breton-Woods institutions. And they were conceived at the time post-Second World War, when the world realised that it needed to come together to tackle the biggest global challenges. Post-Second World War, that was rebuilding Europe after the Second World War, and that was the first task of institutions like the World Bank. But since then, the mission has changed over the years, and now as we've talked about, it's now very much about tackling extreme poverty and trying to lift those that were remaining in these terrible situations out of poverty.

And with the decline of poverty as you say in states like India, some have called for the bank to shrink and focus only on low-income and fragile states.

So this is absolutely right. And the bank puts most of its resource into the poorest people and focusing on the areas of highest need. And increasingly, we're going to see the highest proportion of the poorest people in the world living in fragile conflict-afflicted states, areas which are subject to extreme poverty, and those are going to be the priority areas for the bank going forward. But there is still a role in middle-income countries. There are still huge pockets of poverty in countries which people will think of as being richer, and indeed they are. And in those countries, it's probably still important for organisations like the bank to keep working, because there are areas where you can really test and learn and apply the experience from those countries to the poorest settings as well. So the Bank works in countries like India and China on health systems, where there are still millions of poor people as well, to really understand those lessons, and because it's part of the bank's financial model as well. The bank lends money to these middle-income countries, so it can create and generate the revenue, the income, so it can carry on lending and donating to the poorest countries.

The bank does some amazing research, like the report this month which found that only six countries have equal rights for men and women.

Yes, Women Business and the Law is one of our annual reports, it's a very powerful and well-covered report which looks and tracks the progress in creating equal opportunities and legal rights for women across the world. It always provides great talking points, and you've picked out this year that there's a very small number of countries that absolutely hit that 100%. But the biggest story here is there has been huge progress. You asked earlier about progress. We've seen every year more and more countries move towards equalising and greater rights for women. There are still areas in the world which are lagging quite badly, and those are contained in the Women in Business and Law report. But it's really important to be creating that legal framework, it's not all you need to create women's economic empowerment, because just having laws in place is not sufficient, it's necessary. You really need to address many of the cultural barriers, you need to address many of the other barriers that there are as well, and the bank works on many of those issues. But the Women Business and the Law report is definitely worth reading, just to see the progress that had been made and the gaps that still are.

What's a typical working week for you, and what's top of your to-do list at the moment?

It's quite interesting, a lot of my old colleagues from journalism tend to think I would spend the majority of my time doing media. In fact, that's probably the smallest part of my work. It might be 10-15% of my time which is spent working with the media. I'm lucky to run a large department with a very diverse skillset, everything from our audience research and insights from the countries through to internal communications which in organisations like the bank, 15,000-strong is a fair demand on time, to digital channels and platforms, social media, our websites, something we call digital governance, which is overseeing all the sets of digital platforms that the bank runs across the whole institution, of which there are many. So no week is the same. Anyone you've ever interviewed will tell you no week is the same, no day is the same. There's always a new issue, there's always something coming up. But it's

what I love about the job. I love the issues that we work on. There's always something to learn, there's always a report to read and understand. And then when you manage, as you know, whenever you're managing a team, there's always a lot of work to do to support that team and make sure they're getting what they need to do a good work. And I'm privileged to run a fantastic team.

I look forward to the day when I can replace all of them with robots.

Yes, well, it's definitely coming.

Well, actually that brings me on to the next question though, which is the economic changes, because the World Bank is predicated on the existing economics being roughly the same. When we look at the rise of automation, artificial intelligence, and so on, it might that we're all staring down the nose of a huge different economy 30 years from now.

Yes, it's a great question. And it's an area that we work on very closely at the bank. We talk about disruptive technology; machine learning and automation is going to have massive implications, certainly for the way that we work at the bank, but more importantly for the countries that we work with. One of the things that we really focus on at the bank is trying to understand how the developing countries, our client countries where we do most of the work are not going to get left further behind, because when you think about it, most of them have much lower capacity. They are going to potentially fall further behind in this digital race. So we are doing a huge amount of work in Africa where we're sponsoring a huge initiative now called the Africa Digital Moon Shot, which is really looking at how do we build the infrastructure, the skills and the capabilities, certainly across Africa, but in sub-Saharan Africa particularly to make sure that these economies understand and are able to carry on growing, and carry on succeeding in a competitive global economy, which is rapidly changing fast through technology. We've produced a number of reports over the last couple of years around that digital transformation, and the landscape is changing incredibly quickly. The technology is moving very fast. So I think the future of work is something that we've thought really hard about. And it's still only being understood by many policy makers around the world. There is still a relatively low level of knowledge and understanding within policymaking circles around the world of the speed and the depth of the changes that are coming, and certainly at the bank, we think it's part of our job to try and help navigate that landscape in the countries we work to understand the implications, and to get countries to be as resilient as possible, and to prepare for that changed economic landscape, that changed working landscape.

What's your view on the so-called white saviour dynamic within the media? So we work with a non-profit micro-finance bank. And I've been to work in many African countries, and found them to be quite prosperous. And yet when they're trying to raise funds for their microfinance bank for people in the West, if they show a dusty African village with a small boy with no shoes on, pandering to the African stereotype, their donations go up. And of course that doesn't actually reflect the reality of it.

No, it's a really interesting question. I'm sure like me you've been seeing the little to and fro for Comic Relief and some criticisms by David Lammy MP of Comic Relief, and in fact I think he specifically mentioned this white saviour-type complex. From the bank, we're not really involved with that because we work within countries, we work very closely with countries and we have that workforce that's embedded in those economies. But I think it's a really fascinating issue, and I think some of the criticism that David Lammy made, specifically raises really important issues. And I think you've pointed out, correctly, there is a tension between what some NGOs, potentially Comic Relief, have traditionally seen as being great ways to raise revenue, you target the heartstrings, you use those powerful images, and certainly we know that that's tried and tested. It works, and people in the UK particularly are incredibly generous and incredibly supportive, and they have over many years been very charitable and very generous. And they do that because they see on-screen the moving images and the real need. But at the same time, where the criticism is very valid is that stereotype has long been left behind, and the whole world of development, the whole shape of those economies, as you're describing has absolutely changed, and that stereotype now, it is time to leave that behind. And I think what is a much more complex story to tell is the one of this incredible innovation and entrepreneurship in these developing economies. This incredible optimism in lots of these developing economies as well. It's not the traditional images that target the heartstrings. I think David Lammy talked about the flies buzzing around the starving child. It's actually a much more nuanced, complex story. There was still those heart-tugging images to be found in the poorest parts of the world, of course that's true, and unfortunately that's probably going to be true for some time to come. But I think helping the public understand that development is done very differently now, the private sector is much more involved in development. It's no longer just handouts from people and writing a cheque. It's actually a much more sophisticated understanding of growth and development and what it takes to do that. How do you attract in private sector investment, how do you grow jobs, how do you support that entrepreneurship, including women entrepreneurs. This is a very different story to tell. I think from what I know, and I'm not living in the UK right now, so I don't watch it as closely as others, but I know Comic Relief has seen that and understood that, and has been reacting to that. But it's a big change in approach, and it's really having to take the public on a new journey and leave some of those stereotypes behind, and look at a really different understanding of development and what it takes to move economies forward.

A friend of mine runs a media campaigning organisation called One World Media, and they're trying to challenge these kind of stereotypes, they have an award scheme that they run every year called the Fairer Filming Standard, or the Fair Filming Standard. And one of the things they say is that they want Africa to be presented properly, as you've said. And they've heard tales of people, film crews filming in Africa, where young kids have been going about their business in shoes and going to school, and then when they've been filming, they've been told to take their shoes off so that they "look more African". Clearly there's an element of perpetuating this stereotype. And when the directors were challenged, say people don't believe it is Africa unless it conforms to their preconceived stereotype. They think we've just filmed

anywhere. But that's the reality, the prosperity in many parts of Africa now, of course.

Yes, in fact I think I remember seeing a skit with Ricky Gervais on Comic Relief, where he actually exposed some of the irony in that. And it was brilliantly done, and of course there are other organisations. I think it's the Radiators for Africa is one of the Norwegian things. I think there's even an award which is given for the most stereotyped white saviour-type coverage. So I think those ironies are seen. I'd like to be charitable and say that I can understand the motivation for some of that, because people hopefully are doing it for the right reasons, they think they're going to raise more money, they think it's going to be supportive, but it's clearly the wrong conclusion and the wrong approach. I think the right approach is for really deeply creative people, and people that really care, to start to understand what it takes to change those perceptions to tackle those stereotypes. There is still great need, there is still a really important reason to be supporting development in these countries, to be supporting the poorest, to be creating opportunities for the many people around the world that don't have it. But the way to do it is not simply by playing old stereotypes, but it's by really helping people to understand not just the need, but what they can do to address that in a sustainable way. There is incredible understanding now and sophistication around how you support sustainable development, how you help people lift themselves up, how you create those opportunities there, both through infrastructure, through education, through the right health programmes. And I think it's a harder story to tell. It's obviously easier just to put a picture of some starving child up on the screen and ask for money. But really, it's not telling the full story; it's not even telling half the story. So how do we really get creative about getting people engaged with the issue of development and what they can do, certainly within the richer economies, to help address some of those needs?

And I understand that you lost one of your team members in the recent Ethiopian crash.

Yes, unfortunately, yes. We did, a very sad... Max Thabiso Edkins was one of our climate young climate communicators. A lovely guy, very creative, very passionate guy, worked on our Connect for Climate initiative, and he was on the plane that crashed in Ethiopia, so dreadfully sad, along with actually many other members of the UN and many other NGOs and development workers, and of course with all the other victims as well. So yes, I pay tribute to him and all those others that died as well. It's very sad, but there a lot of people putting themselves out there and doing great work. And this was tragic for the team.

Now, you live and work in Washington DC, and I spend a lot of my working time in America, but we're both here in London, so Brexit's on my mind at the moment. Can I, on behalf of the British people, apply for a loan? I don't know whether you have any documents in your briefcase, application forms and such, do you think that Britain is going to have to come in cap in hand?

You're going to get me in huge trouble, because I'm not allowed to talk about Brexit at all, we're a non-political organisation! But I can say that we don't lend to our donor countries. We are very grateful that the UK is a strong and massive supporter of the World Bank. And it's one of our key and important shareholders, and we really

appreciate all the support we get from DFID. So Brexit is not something, unfortunately, that I can talk to you about.

I think I misled you really, because we said at the beginning that this would be more Parkinson than Paxman!

Yes, I feel like I'm in the spotlight, I'm being grilled.

I've been mischievously trying to put you in the spotlight. I apologise.

No, I will say whenever I come back to the UK, it's tough to get away from Brexit. It feels like the only issue. And from my perch in Washington and my perspective, there are so many important, pressing issues. Brexit is of course of key importance in the UK, and it will eventually be for the UK public and the UK politicians to sort out. But there are other huge challenges and issues over the horizon which every country really needs to start thinking about.

So you've been at the World Bank five years this summer now, what's been your greatest achievement so far? What's the thing you've done there of which you're most proud?

I wish you'd warned me of *that* question! As I've mentioned, I've got a fantastic team, and they do great work every day. I think probably to date, the thing of which I am proudest on behalf of the team was launching, at the end of last year, what we've called the Human Capital Index. This was all about how do we encourage and work with countries to invest in their people. Human capital being people. Investing in education, in health, in social safety nets. Last year, the end of last year, in Indonesia, we launched an index which ranks every single country in the world based on its investments in human capital, i.e. the health and education metrics. And we used new data looking at not just the number of kids in school, but the actual quality of the education, quality of the learning that they're getting. This was quite a controversial thing to do. Countries generally don't love being ranked, and they looked to see who's above them and who's below them. But it was a really important piece of work for the bank to do, because it is very clear to us, and we think countries are seeing this and understanding and working very closely with us on this, that those investments in people correlate with the growth of their countries and the success of their countries. And since we'd launched that, and we did a huge global launch, and we did a lot of work with big publications, including the FT and others, got a lot of coverage, media coverage, but also had some really great conversations with a lot of stakeholders, civil society, governments with whom we work, and we're seeing amazing progress already. Which is incredible. So we've seen countries like India sign up to PIZA, one of the educational measurements, big measurements in education. We've seen countries really start to think about how, within their ruling structures, their government structures, address human capital, investments in human capital needs. We're working closely now with more than 50 countries on human capital. And I like to think that part of the work we did in communications about telling that story, about explaining that link between investments in people and healthy economies really has started to make an impact. And I think that's one of the great things about working at the bank. It's a big, large, complex bureaucracy. It can

be hard to get things done, because you need huge amounts of consensus and agreement. But when you can get that, you can really move the needle and you can really have global impact in a really important, significant way. So I'm really pleased with that work. It's ongoing, it's not beginning and ending. Human capital is a big part of the bank's strategy right now and I'm pleased to still be very closely involved with it. We're doing a lot of work in education right now.

Now, before the bank, you ran external communications for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It must have been fascinating to have seen Bill Gates work up close.

Yes. He's an incredible guy. And I could talk about him for hours.

I've seen interviews with Melinda as well, and she's fantastic as well, in fairness.

She is amazing as well. I worked a lot more closely with Bill than Melinda, but I've had the pleasure working with her, and she's done incredible work. She's got a fantastic book out this year. And she does incredible work, particularly on gender and women's economic empowerment and health as well. But they're an incredible couple. And the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is an amazing organisation.

Bill was a hero to me at Microsoft as an entrepreneur, and he's become a double hero to me because of all the philanthropy that he's doing; he's literally giving away all his wealth and really trying to make a positive change in the world. It's incredible.

The foundation approaches philanthropy I think in a very different way, and sets a new bar for what philanthropy is and what it can do. And it's really based around very rigorous metrics and measurement and evaluation of impact. And that very much comes from Bill and Melinda's working life at Microsoft. They don't just do things to say they've done them. They really want to understand what's the change that they're delivering. And the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works strongly in areas like health and agriculture, polio eradication is another one of the major programmes I was lucky enough to work on at the Gates Foundation. I don't know what the quantifiable figure is, but I have absolutely no doubt that the work that the Foundation has done has saved millions of lives, which is an incredible feat and something that we can just all stand back and admire. But I think what they're also doing, which is as important, is they're leading the whole industry if you like of philanthropy, the whole approach to philanthropy, and really redefining that through something called the Giving Pledge.

Warren Buffet.

That Melinda and Warren Buffet set up. Correct. They're bringing many other billionaires and richest individuals into the fold to really understand what it takes to deliver great positive impact. And Bill particularly, he's an amazing guy to work closely with. It's daunting talking to him, in many ways it's intimidating.

He's so bright, he's so fast.

Yes, and by the time that you've said something, he's already three thoughts beyond you, and he's just got such an incredibly forensic mind. But he's also got incredible values, and he's a polymath. He really is able to span so many different fields. He gets science, he gets biology, he gets politics, he gets every field. And he constantly feeds himself with information. He constantly surrounds himself with the brightest people. He has formal learning sessions where if something he feels he really needs to understand better, he'll just gather all the smartest people in the world in a room and he'll have a day just learning and getting deep on that, so he can just keep feeding that huge mind of his. He's a voracious reader, and just hungry and curious for information, and is able to make linkages in a way that I've never seen anyone else do. So it was an incredible privilege. I never would've ever dreamed that I would get to work closely with someone like that. And I loved every minute of it.

He seems to have pioneered the path, as you said, for billionaires to balance their success with a social conscience.

Yes, and I think that's right. I think it's interesting how he... how the foundation started, the history of the start, and it was interesting, because it was all his father, Bill Gates Senior, who'd started making some small – relatively small obviously, not small, small, relatively small – acts of philanthropy and donations. And then piqued Bill and Melinda's curiosity at a certain point in their career when they were obviously starting to think what's next, and suddenly he just saw this, I think, as a huge intellectual challenge. He started to... and he and Melinda started to get their heads around the complexity of these problems and what could they do to tackle them. And they're ferociously difficult problems that they're taking on, because they're not just about writing a cheque. They're not solved by money alone. They're solved by a combination of resource and politics, and addressing cultural challenges, and 101 other barriers to really solving these problems. And it's that level of complexity, when you're taking on issues like that, that are so complex, that you really need the smartest minds and the right resources and the right thinking to do it. And that's what I loved about the foundation, it's the intellectual rigor that goes into taking on some of these incredibly thorny challenges.

And how much of a difference do you think the Foundation has made in terms of global health and education?

I don't know a number of figures, I think it's made an incalculable contribution, both in terms of actually the number of lives saved because of new types of vaccines and treatments developed, in the fields of agriculture and development of agricultural seeds and other areas. In getting close, and obviously not there yet, but are getting much closer to it, eradication of polio, now tackling malaria in a very big and substantial way. But also just in leading many others and setting that agenda for many others in the field, even those that aren't working in the same fields of agriculture and health and development, it's also just set a bar in terms of the way that you do philanthropy and how you can really measure the impact of philanthropy. When I was at the Foundation, I was amazed when I first arrived to see how many people were working on what they call MLE – measurement learning and evaluation

– because they take that so seriously. It's all about that accountability and showing the impact. It's not just about the outputs, it's about the outcomes, and that's a novel new way of thinking about philanthropy. It's not, "We've given this much money," it's, "This is what we've achieved in this way." And if things haven't worked, it's also about being honest about these failures, and saying, "Okay, that didn't work, why didn't it work? What do we need to do instead?" So I think being able to be honest about those failures, which is something in almost no fields, people aren't good at admitting failures and admitting mistakes. And if you don't do that, you can't progress in almost anything you do. And I think certainly in the development field, there is a real fear of being honest about things that haven't worked, the mistakes in the past. You never sense that at the Foundation. The Foundation was just hungry to understand what move things forward and what was holding them back. And if there are mistakes, then they would acknowledge them and quickly move on.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation strategically supported a lot of media organisations philanthropically, in terms of raising awareness of what they were doing. How do you see those partnerships working, and where do you think they're going to go in the future?

That's a very interesting question. Yes, that's right, the Gates Foundation had a multi-million, still does, portfolio, where it supported media, including here in the UK, the Guardian, but media around the world as well. And I think there's a really growing trend. There are a lot of philanthropies that are either specifically set up to support media, or big philanthropies that are supporting media as part of their broader portfolio. And there's a huge amount of money coming into media from social media companies – Facebook, Google News initiative. I know you've done interviews talking to people about that. I know you interviewed Madhav Chinnappa of Google a while ago.

I did.

So I think there are huge opportunities and challenges as well. What was very positive, I think, about the way that the Gates Foundation approached that media partnership work was an absolute respect for editorial independence and editorial decision-making. So the starting point at the Gates Foundation is just because they decided that this was the effective sustainable way to do it, it was that they would support coverage of the issues which the foundation cared about, coverage of development issues and health and agriculture and other areas, but they would not in any way, and never have, interfered editorially with that conduct. Now, the question is, is that always going to be true? You know, obviously money comes with a set of expectations. And anyone giving money to journalism comes with a certain set of expectations. So my experience of it through that lens has been good. But I think there is a question around truly, totally impartial independent journalism and how that gets funded and what the sustainable models are. And I think there are great models emerging, and I think we are probably in somewhat of a golden age, seeing incredibly strong journalism from many new players and lots of established players like the New York Times and others. So I feel very optimistic about journalism, and I think the philanthropic money that you ask about is by and large having a very positive impact right now. But I think the jury is still out on how this

develops, and the local news that Facebook is going to invest in, and the Google News initiatives, where are they ultimately going to end up and how sustainable are they and what do they end up producing, I think these are really crucial questions of which I think you and probably a lot of other people have a lot of deeper thinking than I do. But these are going to be crucial questions.

Do you know I think now that journalism is under physical threat as never before. You've got Marie Colvin deliberately murdered by the Assad regime, Khashoggi murdered by the Saudis in their embassy. You've got journalists that are taken prisoner and held hostage on the battlefield, whereas before they would be allowed to kind of cover the war, now they're put in orange jump suits, Guantanamo style, and held up for execution. Coupled with the fact there's fewer journalists than ever now, because the money seems to be in PR. Isn't that great what you're saying, but on the other hand there's some serious threats out there.

Yes. I think you're absolutely right, I wouldn't argue with that at all. I think I would be scared doing some of the things that I used to do, doing them now. I think journalists have much more become a target. There's much more of a readiness and willingness to target journalists around the world. If you look at any of the figures from the organisations that put these out, around journalists killed in the line of duty or targeted, in many, many autocratic countries. We've seen a huge increase in that. When I was working, you could be unlucky if you were covering a foreign story or war or earthquake or a disaster, you might be unlucky but generally apart from a couple examples, wouldn't be the target. That doesn't feel true anymore. Now, it feels that journalists in many different settings are seen as being legitimate targets. I take my hat off to a lot of my colleagues and former colleagues that are still doing that work and being incredibly brave in doing it. It's very tough. It's absolutely necessary, and god knows I'm grateful that they're out there doing it. But it's really tough.

Now, your background is in journalism, and you've had quite a lot of big jobs at the BBC, and we'll talk about that shortly if we can. But my question is how did you end up in global development? You're a journalist and now you're working for Bill & Melinda Gates, now the World Bank, how on earth did that happen?

Yes, it was serendipity really. I had never covered development and those issues particularly strongly as a journalist. I was in foreign news, I covered a lot of politics and business and technology. So it certainly wasn't an area that I was particularly steeped in before leaving the BBC. Really it's a very simple and slightly dull story. I got approached while I was doing my final job at the BBC about this job at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. I didn't know a lot about it, though I knew a little bit. And a conversation started, and it took quite a few months. There's a rigorous recruitment process at the Foundation. A number of interviews and a final trip out to Seattle, and then I was offered the job, and my wife and I thought, "It sounds good and it's the right time." I was sad to leave the BBC, I had an incredible career at the BBC, and I'm sure we'll talk a bit about that. But it was an opportunity that I just couldn't say no to, and I haven't looked back.

How long were you at the BBC for?

Seventeen years.

Long time.

Long time.

Did you start on the journalism training scheme?

I didn't actually. I started on... I had been working in local radio and LBC radio here in London. And I was working on the Breakfast Show there with a great character called Mike Carlton, Australian for anyone that remembers him. And 5 Live was launching at the time or about to launch. And in fact I think it's the 25th anniversary this month, maybe even this week actually, of Radio 5 Live. So I was recruited to join the breakfast programme. Obviously I had worked with a great team. Adrian Chiles was our business presenter, you may have heard of him.

He used to do Wake Up to Money back in the day.

Indeed, indeed. Jane Garvey, who's now Woman's Hour...

Jane Garvey is an amazing broadcaster.

Yes. So she was... the presenter was Peter Allan, the triumvirate is still working...

She did the first bulletin, didn't she? Morning Report at 5am.

She did. I was there. That was our first morning...

I listened to that.

That was terrific. So...

That really was a long time ago. That's what it feels like. We're knocking on, you and me.

Yes, yes.

As with many things, I didn't think it would work at the time, and I've been proven wrong countless times. I didn't think the move to Salford would work, it clearly has. But I thought, "Five live, rolling news on radio with sport, that's not going to work." It has.

Well, that's interesting. It was a very novel concept at the time. It's hard to imagine that now. But it was a very brave. This whole idea of sports news wasn't really a thing. Sports was sports and news was news...

You commentate on a match, and that's it.

So that was novel. Including this sort of... I think the real regional approach as well, 5 Live set up a whole group of regional journalists to really cover the UK in a different way that hadn't really been done before. Get out of the sort metropolitan city, get out of London. I think there was a lot of novel innovation at the time, and some real bravery on the part of the BBC leadership to set up 5 Live. There was certainly internal resistance at the time, I remember it was some of the more traditional set at the BBC were a little bit suspicious and wondered, "What's this new upstart going to be about?" But it really established itself pretty quickly. And if you look at some of the talent that's come out of you know that group and the station over the years, it's been incredible.

Now, we have a ton of listeners who are at the early stage of their career. And it's quite possible that someone listening to this might be a producer on Morning Report on 5 Live. So let's say that they want to be director of BBC World 17 years later, what advice would you give them to progress through the ranks as quickly as possible?

I was very lucky! I was often in the right place at the right time. And I think in a career, I think having the right mentors and people that look out for you was really important, and I've had a number of those in my career at the BBC. Some great managers, people like Bill Rogers, who was the first editor of the 5 Live Breakfast programme. Many others. The BBC is an incredible organisation. And like any career, it's a certain amount of luck, being in the right place at the right time. Are you on the right story, do you get noticed at this at this particular moment? So for me, my move to foreign news was a very serendipitous move, because this is a long time ago, before your time, but I was in one morning when the Japan earthquake happened, the Kobe earthquake. I think it was 1995, someone on the podcast would probably correct me, and I'd been lucky enough to have lived in Japan for a little while, spoke a little bit of Japanese, and was on the phone, bashing the phones trying to sort out some interviews using my Japanese. And one of the bosses, Phil Longman, who sadly died since, said, "Oh, he's speaking Japanese, we better send him to Kobe." And I couldn't quite believe it. I came in one morning to work, and the next thing I know I'm going home to grab my passport and on a plane to Japan. And I was so excited.

And with one of my biggest clients ever in the last 20 years, just because I happened to be walking past someone in a corridor that was discussing an opportunity. And it just shows you how serendipitous these things are.

Yes, yes. I think any career has a certain amount of luck. And I've been lucky to some incredible opportunities. I don't sort of... I don't take those for granted; the BBC was incredibly good to me, it's an amazing organisation and yes, I was lucky enough to do some amazing things and worked with some great people there.

How long were you at 5 Live for and what came next?

So I was at Five Live for a couple of years, and then it's getting hard to remember now. I did one of these slightly strange jobs where I was foreign radio producer, and I was basically the on-call foreign radio producer. You just got sent hither and thither. It was the job where you never actually got home to pay any bills or do your cleaning or anything. You'd just be from one country to the next, just answering the phone with trepidation. The foreign editor at the time was a lovely guy called Malcolm Downing, who knows if he listens to this. Hi Malcolm if you do. And you knew that deep booming voice of me under the phone, it means you're off somewhere else to wherever the next story was. When you're young and you've got no commitments, it was just incredible challenge, incredible fun...

Did you always have your passport with you?

Oh, you would always have your passport with you and a backpack, and often you wouldn't get home in between, you'd just go from one story to the other.

Nowadays, everyone has e-tickets, but I can remember one of my very first tours of the newsroom two decades ago, there was an in-office travel agent that could actually print the flight ticket there and then, because you might have to be sent to Japan, and they would give you your ticket there and then.

That's right.

In the office. That's incredible.

There was an amazing travel guy called Dave Bristow, who many in the BBC will remember, he was amazing. So he was a walking encyclopaedia of every single route connection and airline, and he would get you to the right place and without even seeming to have to tap on his keyboard. He was amazing and he was always the go-to guy.

So that foreign new radio, that was for all of the news program, was it? And all of the radio stations.

That job was. So yes, so that job I was working for Radio 5 Live and Radio Four, primarily.

What came next?

Again, this is where great mentors come in. I was pushed slightly towards doing a longer stint in one place, and I went to Washington where I'm living now. So that was the first time I lived in Washington DC, and I was there for '96 election campaign, Clinton's '96 election campaign, and then working on the whole Clinton impeachment for a few months with people like Brian Hanrahan, who came out. Gavin Esler, Bridget Kendall, they were all in bureau at the time, Bill Turnbull...

Amazing broadcasters. Bill is a legend.

So I got to work with all of these great... Chris Morris, who's doing the Brexit stuff now, was there at the time as well. So that was my first real taste of what it was like to work in a BBC foreign bureau. We had a great office on M Street in Washington. In fact, the office right now is just a few doors away from that now.

I'm a big fan of DC. It's an amazing town.

Great city and a very exciting time. You would always pinch yourself thinking, "I'm here and I'm representing the BBC, and I'm doing this incredibly interesting work." So that was a fantastic experience.

What was it like to see the brutality of American politics up close? You know the old adage is if you want a friend in Washington DC, get a dog?

Yes, I'd like to say that I had a great track and understanding of it. You know, honestly I was pretty young and inexperienced, and probably a lot of it went over my head at the time. I was a fairly new, green producer, so I didn't spend much time with the politicians myself. So I was watching a lot of output, I was trying to keep track of what a lot of the US networks were doing. I would have, in my flat in DC, I remember having four tape machines set up, so you're able to record simultaneously each of the US Sunday morning shows and take clips from those, from the politicians. So there was a learning curve for me, and really just trying to understand the complexity of American politics and how it worked.

I used to work many years ago with Bob Friend before he died, when he was the US correspondent for the BBC. His producer was Mark Thompson.

Yes, I've heard of him, what's he doing now?

Well, I don't know! Well, I do, he was sitting in that chair some time ago.

I heard that interview, it was great. He's in Oxford today giving a speech about the BBC.

Ah, excellent. Well, in fact let me ask you, talk about the BBC in terms of its role in society next, but what came after Washington DC? Let's kind of finish the career bit.

Yes. So that was another launch for me. That was News 24, but yes, I was on the breakfast programme then as well. I could never quite escape the overnight shifts for those first early years of my BBC career. But lots of overnight shifts, and the breakfast programme on News 24. I just remember we didn't really know what we were doing. It was hilarious. We were using new equipment that would work sometime and wouldn't work other times. It would put strange things up at odd moments, and maybe the right VT would run, maybe it wouldn't. We were really discovering and learning.

You're showing your age now.

It was terrific. It was great fun. It was a very young team as they always had at the BBC doing something new.

Was Tony Hall channel director then?

Yes, I think Tony Hall was head of news. That's right.

That's right.

Yes, I think he was.

Incredible. So how long were you at News 24?

News 24 for a couple of years, and then I made my big escape from the UK and moved abroad for quite a long time after that. So after News 24 I went to Asia, to Hong Kong first and then Singapore, working in the foreign bureau there.

For the BBC?

For the BBC. And that's when my kids were born. My daughter was born in Hong Kong. My son was then born in Singapore, and we didn't look back, and we were out of the UK for quite a long time at that point, again, all for the BBC.

Well, yes, because you've worked in Hong Kong, Singapore, Brussels, London, New York, and Washington DC. Do you get a bit restless staying in the same place from time to time or is it just been the way that your career has taken you?

No, definitely I do. My wife and I often talk about going on an adventure, and when we moved back to the UK after a few years, we said, "Oh, we need to go on our next adventure." And that led to the Seattle move and everything. So, no, I like to move around, and for us, from a family perspective, it's always been great moving, because I feel it's been... really binds together the family, you're going through this joint experience with the kids, and you're making new friends and you're setting up a new home, and I just love that whole challenge, and we've really enjoyed that each time we moved, which has been many times. My daughter complains that she's been to about 11 schools, 12 schools; she's now at college in the US, but I think secretly she quite enjoys it, and she's met people around the world in all the places we've lived. And my wife luckily has been able to work. She's in education, she was a teacher, she's now a principal at a school, so she's always been able to be the flexible one, which I'm quite grateful for as we've hopped around the world.

So let's just round off your time at the BBC. The last big job was doing business and economics, was it not?

That's right, yes. I was editor of the business and economics unit during the financial crisis of 2008. I was there for about three years, 2008-2011. I was working with Robert Peston. What's he doing now? Does anyone remember him?

Never heard of him.

No. And Stephanie Flanders...

Never heard of her either.

An incredible team. And a frantic time.

I was going to say you've had a huge amount of drama that you've had to cover in all of these roles. What an exciting time.

Yes, well, I think as I said before... I think yes, any career has got a fair amount of just luck and being in the right place at the right time, and I've always been lucky to be in places where things were really happening news-wise. And there was nothing like the news story around the banking crisis and the financial crisis from 2008. It was amazing. Really steep learning curve for me. Again, I had not been deeply into business and economics coverage before then. I was learning all the time from real experts that had spent their whole careers in business and economics, and the likes of Robert and Stephanie and all of the correspondents there at the time. But it was time that's reverberating even now. What happened in 2008 for the next couple of years has impacts which are still being felt. So it was a really defining part of my career. It's one which I look back on, and probably if I'm honest didn't really understand completely the significance of that time at the time. But I did see it as a huge editorial challenge; the drama, as you say, was palpable. Every day there was something seismic happening, and it was really on the precipice in terms of the global financial system and where it was going to go and what was going to happen. And what an amazing moment to be a journalist, and a journalist working in business and economics.

And as you learn all intricacies of the global financial system, did that help you explain it to the viewers and the listeners who themselves needed help to understand what the hell was going on?

I hadn't really thought about it like that, but I guess yes. If I can understand it, then I felt... I was asking the dumb questions...

On behalf of the viewers and listeners.

On behalf of the viewers! I wasn't just pretending. So yes, but I think we were also working with amazing communicators. So the whole there at the time was very good at translating difficult complicated concepts into language and visual journalism that the public really did understand. And I think business and economics journalism, financial journalism, just runs through everything. And again, I probably didn't appreciate that immediately at the time, but I quickly grew to understand that to understand almost anything in the world, including issues I work on now like climate change or health or agriculture, if you don't understand the economic underpinnings and the business and financial underpinnings, you don't really understand what's at stake and the issues and where the solutions lie. So my personal feeling is that

every journalist should at some point work in business and financial and economic journalism, because it's just key and crucial to understanding almost everything else there is. And certainly for me I think that trying to find ways to tell those stories in an accessible way, and very hard to translate some of that complexity, especially if you're thinking about six o'clock or the 10 o'clock news, you've got a tiny amount of time or maybe a short two-way interview to tell something very complicated...

In 75 seconds.

Yes, in a very short space of time. But I love the challenge, the creative challenge. One of the things I was really proud of at the time was, our old boss at the time, Peter Horrocks, was the head of the newsroom, very creative, huge intellect in news at the time. And he set a challenge for everyone to come up with innovative ideas in their area and put some money into supporting any innovative ideas. And our challenge at the time was how do you really talk about something like global trade, but make it tangible and make it something that people can understand and see. And so I had this idea, I'd read this book about the box, the shipping container. And I just had this idea, but what would it be like if we could follow a shipping container around the world. So luckily, I was well-supported by Peter and by others as well, and we...

Put a GPS tracker on it.

We put a GPS tracker on the BBC box, and we painted it, BBC box, and we branded the thing. And then we just tracked it all around the world with a map online and telling stories in each of the ports where it landed. I remember one of the first stories was Hugh Pym, as the box left Scotland with a big shipment of whisky headed to China, and then we followed it from there to Brazil, and I can't remember all the routes and stuff. But it was so gratifying, because a lot of unplanned things happened, where teachers started to follow this box, and started to teach global trade and geography to their students.

Via the box.

Via the box. And someone set their own website, and there was a Wikipedia page suddenly appeared. And there was all of this spontaneous latching on to this idea, and it was fantastic to work on. I worked with a great team. There were two producers. Carolyn and Joanna, who just absolutely took the project and just killed themselves making it all work. And I was really grateful to them.

And do you think the experience that you gained running the business and economics team as editor helped you do a better job in terms of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, or indeed now at the World Bank?

The transition from journalism to communications, I thought it would be much easier than it was. And I was quite naïve I think when leaving the BBC. I think what I'm starting to get some understanding of was managing a large team, and I don't think of myself as being a great natural manager of those people I work with that are just very naturally good at it, but I had some experience managing a team, and obviously when you leave and go into communications, you're taking a certain skillset with you,

some of which is very useful, that storytelling, the media understanding. But there was a lot about working in communications that I just didn't understand, and I really had to learn quickly, or try and learn quickly. That whole strategic thinking, and that much longer-term planning, was something I didn't really have much of. At the BBC I was very much day-to-day, week-to-week, and really changing your mindset around that was very difficult. The whole idea of going into an organisation... when you're at the BBC or a news organisation, there's very much a shared language, a shared culture, everybody is to some extent in content, and they're doing a similar thing, so you don't have to work hard to explain what you're doing to people. When you go to a different organisation like the Gates Foundation or the World Bank, actually the vast majority of people are not communicators, they're not from your field. And they understand the world in a very different way. So trying to pivot and change the way that you talk about your work and bring what you have to the table, but understand that you might be dealing with economists and scientists and people who just have a very different set of priorities and understanding of the way the world works than you do. That's probably the biggest challenge. You're suddenly one of a large number of very different people. Whereas at the BBC, you're one of a large number of very similar people with a similar mindset and a similar approach to the challenge. So I think that's probably the biggest difference. And I hadn't appreciated that when making the transition. So I found the first few months at the Gates Foundation really tough to understand what was expected of me, what my added value was to the organisation, about the things I really needed to work on and develop. And I felt I grew professionally a huge amount at the Gates Foundation where I probably again in hindsight had probably stopped growing in that way at the BBC, because I've been doing broadly a similar thing for quite a long time.

So last question. And I don't expect you to answer it, because no one ever does. But what's next for you?

Well, I was hoping you would offer me a job and I could come and work for you, Paul! Maybe I could start by editing interview, I'd shorten it substantially.

Or the questions! I think my questions were long and rambling, I agree.

So yes, listen, I never know, I'm really enjoying the job I'm doing right now. As I say, I've always been lucky and something great has always come along, and I just enjoy working on important issues and trying to do what I can.

Jeremy, it's been an absolutely fantastic conversation. I've learnt a lot. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you.