



CAREER LIFE STORIES

S1E2

Interview with

Matthew Jeffery

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Presented and Produced by Nick Price

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Interview with Matthew Jeffery, hosted by Nick Price

Nick: [00:00:00] On this episode of Career Life Stories I'm joined by Matthew Jeffery. Matthew is currently Global Head of Sourcing and Employment Brand for SAP. And has taken them on a radical and innovative journey to winning 136 awards in 2016 alone. He's also author of The breakthrough publication Recruitment 3.0 and a regular contributor to publications on sourcing and recruitment. Describing his passions in life as family, work success, politics and music, his loyalties and enthusiasm are clear - even when tackling the most difficult challenges in life. It's a pleasure to introduce: Matthew Jeffery.

Nick: [00:00:44] So Matthew let's start at the beginning. You were born and brought up in Kent in the south east of England. How would you describe your childhood?

Matthew: [00:00:52] I had a really happy, normal childhood. A great Mum and Dad. We lived in a council house which they then bought under the Thatcher regime and we had just a very normal family life, going out you know, going out for meals, having fun. Most of the time in the evening I would go down the local field. I love cricket. So in the summer I was playing cricket every night down there and then in the winter I'd be going on to the local hard tennis courts and we'd be playing football. Very fond memories and you know my parents were very much there for me. So that was a key thing and I was lucky for that.

Nick: [00:01:26] Your parents did they do anything that's kind of influenced your role later in life?

Matthew: [00:01:31] So my Dad worked in - he's always been in the same sort of trade - so he works in retail and my Mum's [job] was secretarial so she looked after me as a child and she was typing from home doing various jobs and then she went out and worked in estate agents and did that. I think one of the toughest times - my Dad was, and still is, a very proud man. He's a very strong man. It was a period where he was redundant for a time so he'd been there [with his company] I think 20-25 years paying in for a pension scheme and that was a company pension and he completely he lost it all. And so that sense of you put that money aside and he'd make those contributions and losing it and seeing him as an individual that going down and going for interviews and having to 'sign on' - it was tough seeing your Dad do that, just seeing a little part of him destroyed in many ways until he could get back to work. It wasn't easy. And I remember those times, and again, you know, the cheeky banter - making sure he felt happy and he had that loving family around him I think was key. But equally that wasn't the best time seeing him go through that.



Nick: [00:02:42] Has it affected the way you look at careers or life in any way.

Matthew: [00:02:46] I think it put a paranoia in my early career to make sure that my connections were strong, that if I was lost a job or it was the company went out of business, or there was redundancies or something like that, is that I can still fend for myself. So I put that that paranoia of self protection in the mind.

Nick: [00:03:03] What were your earliest memories?

Matthew: [00:03:05] I think the earliest ones were. It's really good going into into school and just coping with - just making sure - I could stand my ground. I love sport and - it doesn't show nowadays from the paunch - but I used to love playing football. I have fond memories of just simple things. We entered competitions and saving a penalty or something like that, where you get that sort of adulation from your peers. And that those are memories I really enjoyed.

Nick: [00:03:33] If you had an overriding description of school would it be?

Matthew: [00:03:37] I think there were times it was challenging and the key challenge is when you've got ginger hair, glasses, big chin, you do stand out at school and that led to some challenges in the class room with those people that have quite bullying tendencies at times that like to try and put you in a corner. But initially kids comments can cut right through and I think critically when I look at my career now, I think that's probably the initial sort of 'oomph' gave me the confidence to then start to be more extrovert and to then process and come out my skin. So I think had I not had that, probably I will still be quite introverted, because I was quite introverted at primary school to start with.

Nick: [00:04:18] Was there a moment then he would go right back to your school life where you could see a tipping point in how you developed and changed?

Matthew: [00:04:26] I'm one of those people that's quite contradictory. So in my career I've always been around people and recruitment is about people and I flip the switch and I go into that sort of the 'Matthew mode'- the presentation mode - the talking and the confident, exuberant person. But I like to be away from it, so when I'm back home in Kent, I just like switching off, being around my family. But I started from that introvert base that still is in me today that going to a conference in Las Vegas is that the intensity of being around people and around all that buzz, is that sometimes I like to shut myself away and just to have that charging zone where I just get away from things and I've never lost that.



Nick: [00:05:05] Were you someone that was quite academic?

Matthew: [00:05:08] I would say that I had quite a good photographic mind so I spent a lot of time studying and reading and making sure that I stored the data in there and that helped me with exams. And I think the creativity of the text and the way that I come across now I had to work at to really build those skills and so it didn't come natural - so rote learning and memorizing ready for those O' Levels was something I had to really apply myself to make sure that I could be in a good position to pass those exams.

Nick: [00:05:37] And how does that compare with your children? Do they have the same focus?

Matthew: [00:05:43] I've almost changed my view - recruitment has warped my mind! I see these students that have studied and they come out with those top marks the A* at GCSE. Then they're getting great A-levels and they're coming out with a 2:1 or 1. And then they're coming out with that debt and you know average debt now for a student is £50,000 if you go to university, and there's still not much to differentiate them and so it's almost made me rock back from saying to my kids, 'You must go to university that's the prescribed route to success.' Ultimately if you've got the personality and drive I think you can be successful. So yes I've got a masters degree but would that have got me where I am today? No, I think that what's got me where I am today is the personality and the drive.

Nick: [00:06:28] So let's just talk through.... You got your A-levels. What did you do at A-Level?

Matthew: [00:06:32] So I did Politics, History and Economics and then I went to City University and then LSE [London School of Economics] for the Masters.

Nick: [00:06:40] What drove your choices then?

Matthew: [00:06:41] Interesting thing when I look back at the A-Levels. Obviously I went into the social sciences field, so politics as a degree was something that was interesting. I was enjoying it as a young conservative and as a chairman of the local young conservatives. And so I thought, OK that could be something I'm going to enjoy. Did I think of it from a career point of view? Never, in a million years. It was a subject I enjoyed. It was a degree, it would set me off on that path of having a degree and hopefully doing well.

Nick: [00:07:06] Your interest in politics, that started when you were at school, just tell us a little bit about how you go into that.



Matthew: [00:07:13] When you start to study it the political awakening starts to come out and you start to form opinions. And I remember a time that there was a local large meeting in the local Angel Centre about the Community Charge or Poll Tax as it was back then. Absolutely hated. And I remember then one of the speakers then spotted me in the audience and said, "We've got a member of the young conservatives here." So I remember going up on stage and these people baying and shouting and chanting and and getting quite passionate. And then there were some people with tears saying I can't afford to pay this and it was getting quite emotional and it was like, "Wow I'm not quite ready for this," and then you get that button click in you and you say I'm not taking a pounding here. And then I started to get more persuasive and more argumentative and then more dominant. And then the crowd started to react to it. And that opposition interestingly started to back off a little bit and then I started to get some rounds of applause at some of the points I was making and that will always stay in me now that you've always got to overcome those initial fears.

Nick: [00:08:17] Because you do a lot of public speaking, you do a lot of conferences. Do you still get nervous before you do those?

Matthew: [00:08:23] It would be arrogant to say that I don't get nervous, but I managed to still manage those now. In a bizarre way, the way I compartmentalised it was, if I mess up this speech what is the worst that's going to happen? I'm going to return home to my family, my kids are going to stay there and say, "Never mind Dad." So then that makes me more confident to go on stage. And then after a while after you get to do a number of them then it just it comes naturally so I still get nervous because I thrive off that, but the nerves are relatively low compared to what they used to be.

Nick: [00:08:55] What was university like?

Matthew: [00:08:56] Wow. It was hard. It was quite intense the amount of subjects I had to study for politics and all the different areas American politics Chinese politics, so that was intense, but one of the great things about being in London was being able to do my dissertation and my dissertation was on the politics and government of Western Europe. As a kid I was writing away to the politicians saying would you help me with my dissertation, would you meet with me?... And there's just a couple of great memories there: I remember Tony Benn who wrote back to me saying, 'Sure' and he asked me to go to his house, so I went to his house in Holland Park. And I remember sitting there with him and he made this massive mug of tea as he loves tea and he said I'm not making you lots of tea, so he gave me this huge mug and we sat down and we just talked for two hours.



He's one of the politicians I was able to meet. And I most respected for his views. The other I met up and met with was Enoch Powell at the time and I remember knocking on his door, I think it was Belgravia in London. And we went through in this very sort of willowy man took me through into his study. And so he asked me to challenge him and ask his views and to focus things about Europe. And it was just the way that he would be fiercely focused on it and to challenge me back. It's like your students you're studying this you must be deeply knowledgeable about this. Come at me with questions. Give me your views and that was again another one of those memories that I'll take to the grave that I was able to sit there and have this discussion for about 90 minutes with a politician that was at the top of his game intellectually - and it was just a great experience to sign off university to have you know those sorts of interviews.

Nick: [00:10:41] Is it something about you as a person that you're not afraid to go and approach people like that?

Matthew: [00:10:45] No. Again you have to ask for things and you get yourself into those situations. One of the first meetings I remember is seeing Mrs Thatcher and seeing her in those sort of environments and the events I was able to go to, again made you think that here's a strong person they've got strong views and that's how she dominated the country. She had that philosophy and she was surrounded by those people who told her, "Do what you think is right not what you think is the best headline." and that is again a key learning I've always taken is, don't do what you think's going to get the easy headline or the managers say brilliant you've done a great job. Do what you think is right for the business overall.

Nick: [00:11:20] Let's just talk a little bit about your first job and how you got into recruitment. What was your first job after university?

Matthew: [00:11:26] I looked at the sort of careers in politics and I didn't know quite what to do. NatWest were offering this fast track graduate management scheme and they looked a great employer and I thought, well let's apply for it. Why not? And then they gave me an offer and it was just like, Okay I'm looking around as a career. This feels okay so it was almost against you know what I'd done as a degree in many ways, the degree just showed that I could think and I could react in a certain way, but it didn't give me a career path and going into NatWest was just what seemed right at the time, it wasn't a route that was heavily thought through.

Nick: [00:12:01] How did you get into recruitment?



Matthew: [00:12:04] So after going through the bank which I got frustrated with because of the bureaucracy, I wanted to go into a smaller environment and I went into more of a start-up in the collectibles field, so I did that for two or three years where I was able to have more autonomy. But being in a family company at the time, there's politics there and it got frustrating so I went into a recruitment agency and I started to talk about what careers are available for me and what can you do. And they said a lot of the things that you love doing - talking to people, relationships, marketing, you can use those in recruitment and build up your skills there. And so then they said 'Have you thought about going in-house and becoming a recruitment consultant?' And then they started to tempt me saying you can earn very good money with the commission and that sort of thing and the economy was doing well. So I fell into recruitment, never thought about it up until that point. Never part of that whole prescription and just literally fell into it and that's how I went into recruitment.

Nick: [00:12:58] Do you like working within a corporate structure?

Matthew: [00:13:03] It's an interesting one because I remember when I was at Electronic Arts and Autodesk which are... Electronic Arts was in a really fast start up mode and it was really developing and it was a really fun fluid environment. Autodesk again a growing company - visual effects and the software that produced. I remember people who when I went to presentations they were saying, 'It's great what you're doing. Some of the things that you've brought in, but you wouldn't survive in a corporate,' and it started again in a way that starts to trigger in my mind and people saying you wouldn't do well in a corporate, you'd get fed up you wouldn't be able to deliver. You have to be in a start-up mode and you have to have that sense of being able to innovate without getting people breathing down your neck, you would never survive in those corporates. So when I went in to interview with SAP all of this was ringing in my ears you know. So it's a huge corporation 80,000 [people]. It is known out in the marketplace for being bureaucratic in those early days when I first joined, and it was interesting some of my friends in recruitment and some people you'll probably interview on 'Life Stories' were saying, 'Don't do it. It's career suicide you're not going to survive and you're leave within a year or six months.' Again this was like the red rag to the bull! It was like, I'm going to go in there and I'm going to prove that I can deliver. I'm going to prove that I can innovate and I can do some of the things that I've been doing externally and that was again that voice of, 'I'm going to prove to you.'

Nick: [00:14:27] Is recognition important to you?

Matthew: [00:14:29] Recognition is not important for me, it's important for my team. To



innovate and to try different things people have to have that confidence. And if you make a mistake, so what? Go on and do something else so we learn from that mistake. And that's something that they do. And my current manager, Barbara, she's very good at making sure she calls out the praise of those people. And then suddenly they're liberated that they then feel happier to work harder to try different things and to make a difference.

Nick: [00:15:01] Is there a difference between a Matthew at work and Matthew home?

Matthew: [00:15:04] Yeah completely. So at home...I would say at work I'm very much a strong figure very, you know, dominant. I would say when I'm at home I think that my wife is stronger than I am. So I love the fact she's a very feisty individual. I hate that sort of limp, wet fish type characters and she's very feisty and she's strong and she's got opinions. And I love that about her and I think she's quite a strong character and I would say that I rock back into that introverted state a little bit when I'm at home.

Nick: [00:15:35] And how would your family describe you?

Matthew: [00:15:39] Maverick. Loopy. I like goofing around particularly with the kids, we just mess around the whole time and we have fun. So you know Halloween and my youngest, Katrina wanted to be Harlequin, so... my wife's brilliant at face painting so she did the face painting. I made sure we got the costumes and ordered them in and just seeing that sense of fun was brilliant.

Matthew: [00:16:03] I think, with my wife I think the thing that again is probably most surprising is going through stages..... so my wife has battled cancer twice in her life so far and early on in the relationship she had thyroid cancer. She had to have part of her thyroid removed. They tested that and that had cancer and then obviously from that then they had to take out the other part of her thyroid. So she's completely dependent on thyroxin and that that was tough, going through the initial stage of our relationship just seeing my wife go through that. I think what was tougher was that years later she also then found a lump in her breast and went through breast cancer. And again that was when we had kids and seeing.....[pause].. that was the hardest time I think I've had in my life. Because going through that with my wife - thankfully she didn't have to go through chemotherapy, but she went through radiotherapy and it's all the 'What if's..' in life. So seeing... and we had to go in over Christmas time and she went into hospital to have the surgery and thankfully they caught it and they were able then through radio therapy to contain and manage it and she's cancer free, but going through that twice and particularly when we had children, you know, she was strong. She was probably stronger than I was because she was going to battle through and whatever come what may, I was.. wow this is... we've got three young



children, you know, 'You are the rock of this family'. Yes I pulled the money in I do the career, but she is the centrepiece and pulling us all together. So seeing... seeing her go through that and me questioning you know, 'What if... what if that isn't caught?' 'What if...?', me with the three kids and all that... and being strong. And there was times - she didn't see me do it because I always had to be strong for her - I'd go off in the back room and, and the tears would come through and I couldn't do that in front of the kids because you can imagine is that you can't do that you have to be strong and I couldn't do that for her because that's not giving her strength. But I think that, that was [pause]...that was the toughest part of my whole life. But you know touch wood. Again, you sit down and she's always wondering and saying, 'I had thyroid cancer and I had breast cancer it's always going to come back Matthew, and it's like, 'No,' and if it does we're going to fight it. And you know, it's always the challenge and I think that - that was the hardest time. And even that to this day is the, 'What if?' and when she says and going out and getting checked, if she finds anything anywhere or something like that - that is the hardest point of what I've had to deal in in life. And not hard for me because I didn't go through [it]. It was hard observing and supporting and making sure that you know the family were okay. She went through it like a rock and she was strong, but, wow that was a horrible point. But all good now, touch wood, that it continues, but that was tough.

Nick: [00:19:09] That was a pretty dark time.

Matthew: [00:19:10] Dark, yeah.

Nick: [00:19:11] During that time, you have to go out and go to work and do all the normal stuff.

Matthew: [00:19:17] And you have to deal with it, and it's not escapism, but you have to go into that mindset you still got to be successful. You still got to focus. I didn't share a lot of the information of what was happening at work, apart from with my boss and close people I work with at the time and they'd be very very supportive, but again you have to deliver. A corporation is there to be able to do the business and to be able to move forward. I'm responsible at the end of the day for my team and that team has to be successful. You have to almost departmentalize in your own mind about what you're going to do and how you're going to react. And it's not easy. And I think that sometimes you bottle up so much that it becomes quite stressful in terms of those situations. Hence sometimes it's good to have an outlet and go off with live music or other things that you get to do.

Nick: [00:20:05] Has it affected the way you view life?



Matthew: [00:20:07] Just thankful and it just makes you enjoy the time and the moments you have together and makes you value life and it also makes you realize that there's more to life than work. You know the family is so important. Enjoy the times you get together and experiences that you have and yes sometimes work overtakes life. That's true it's always going to be true in my job and anybody's job particularly at a senior nature, but at least I have an internal compass that always brings me back to think, 'Family first, family first, family first.

Nick: [00:20:38] You're incredibly busy at work. How do you balance your home life and work?

Matthew: [00:20:44] I think you have to force yourself. So to be honest if I had a heart attack tomorrow and died, SAP would replace me. People will have fond memories for a limited period of time and then you just fade off into people obscurity as the new person comes in - which they naturally would do - make some changes, make their own mark and move on. So if you live your life for your career, that's not - unless you're gonna to make a real significant difference - that's not fulfilling. So you have to get that balance in there. For me I get more pleasure of going home and hearing from my daughters... I went to a school assembly and my youngest, [she's] nine years old, Katrina, she proudly won a certificate for drama. She was so proud to get called up in front of the school to walk up and get this certificate - the headmistress give her a little hand shake and she was beaming with pride. And I got more pride from that than many of the corporate achievements I get, so family for me provides that you know sense of seeing people develop and being part of it and the whole, you know, the whole love of what we're doing that's really inspiring for me. And then you have to have outlets of what you enjoy. So for me music is... I love live music. I love that escape into being able to listen to somebody at the top of their craft playing a searingly brilliant guitar solo and then take that experience in. So you've got to live life. If you live it completely for your job, particularly in a corporation and if I go tomorrow, then I haven't lived my life.

Nick: [00:22:12] Out of the list of people you've seen live. There's one artist that's probably your stand out favourite....

Matthew: [00:22:18] Yeah, that artist would be Prince. I love those people that push against the grain and almost want to do something creative for what they do. And I think, I've seen - I saw - Prince over 100 times live, it was an addiction and my wife was like, 'Wow it's crazy,' when I go to her and say, 'I want to see him in Dubai.' And it was like, 'Why? -you've seen him all the times,' and I said each gig is a different experience. He plays different songs he didn't have a set list and he would jam and so... it was obviously with him passing



away this year that was... he was the soundtrack to my life and each pivotal moments were those tracks and those albums were always quite an inspiration. So when I was low I would listen to some of the music - when I wanted to feel upbeat there were certain tracks I want to listen to. My last memory of him was when I went over to Paisley Park. By that stage he was quite frail and a lot of his fans who would go and see him regularly were talking saying there's something not quite right. He's not well, he's looking you know not himself. And he did these two back to back shows in his studios in Paisley Park and going there with probably about 200-250 people in that room. And it was just him and a piano. And there was times that he was so emotional it shone through and he was in tears at one point. And that's a memory I have of him now, not the hell fire guitar, Jimi Hendrix, Santana, guitar solo, it's that that night where he let down his guard and he showed the true him, and you know in April he unfortunately passed away, but that didn't come as a surprise to many of us because we felt that he was saying goodbye at that gig in January.

Nick: [00:23:59] What would you say is your finest achievement?

Matthew: [00:24:07] Clearly, for me, three children. Having three gorgeous young daughters, all daughters which is challenging! And being healthy and happy. Recruitment 3.0 great article elevated my brand. You know this year, at SAP we've won 36 awards for our recruitment team. That's a phenomenal amount of awards and I should feel proud of that. My daughters will always supplant that. Some of the innovations that we're bringing in we're talking about conferences with the assessments with the game, with the cartoon. The fact that we built our team up into being really seen as a high performing unit and one of the best in the industry... of course I'm proud of that. But I'll come back to my daughters and their happiness. Nothing will ever overtake that. Going to see Prince and seeing those final concerts and those emotional times and that was a pivotal moment in his career and will be seen for that, wouldn't replace that for the love and the growing up of my three daughters. So everything I've achieved just will always take second nature - having a great loving wife, a great loving family and three wonderful daughters.

Nick: [00:25:10] And what advice would you give to other people?

Matthew: [00:25:13] Don't just take a job and take the salary check. If you're going to do that then your life's going to pass it by. Do something with it. Challenge the status quo. People when you challenge the status quo will always oppose you. They'll always put up, 'Hasn't been done that way in the past. Can't do that. You don't have the budget for that. You don't have enough headcount. You can't do this etc.' Those siren views of people criticizing you - don't listen to them. Try and achieve. Experiment, learn and challenge the status quo. If you believe in something, go out there, challenge, stand up for what you



believe. Don't let people bully you. Bullies at the end of the day they just fade into obscurity because they don't achieve anything. You do what you want to do. You are only limited by the constraints you put on yourself in life.

Nick: [00:25:58] And finally what does the future hold for you now?

Matthew: [00:26:02] Exactly like I was when I left university. I don't know. People say What are you going to do next, is going to be another corporate is going to be a start-up? Are you going to become part of the consultants out there and set up your own agency? I just look at things on a year by year basis. I'm looking at SAP now. I'm enjoying what I'm doing. I'm looking at 2017 and thinking what can we do different? How can we add value? It's not about innovation for innovation's sake, it's about how can we innovate, do new things improve our brand as a return on investment, be that more candidates, be that better brand engagement, or whatever and then sitting there and brainstorming now - that for me is like a drug - sitting there with some of the team and we're sparking ideas off what we're talking about now. I want to deliver them. I want to see what the market thinks of them. I'm happy where I am for a year, after that I have no idea because I do it year by year.

Nick: [00:26:52] Matthew it's been a pleasure talking to you.

Matthew: [00:26:53] Thank you very much.



About Career Life Stories

Career Life Stories is a series about people, their lives and their work. The format was created and produced by Working Films Ltd, a UK company founded by the producer and host of the series, Nick Price.

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