



# CAREER LIFE STORIES

S2E4

Interview with

**Gerry Crispin**

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Presented and Produced by Nick Price

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## Interview with Gerry Crispin, hosted by Nick Price

**Nick:** [00:00:00] My guest in this episode is Gerry Crispin. Gerry is Principal and co-founder of CareerXroads which he began with his business partner Mark Mehler by publishing their first book in 1996. With a career spanning over 40 years, Gerry describes himself as a lifelong student of recruiting and has made a huge contribution globally to the industry of Talent Acquisition. A pioneer of the digital recruiting age, he continues to be instrumental in facilitating innovation and learning around the world in recruiting and hiring practices. It's a pleasure to introduce Gerry Crispin.

**Nick:** [00:00:33] Gerry you describe yourself as a lifelong student of recruiting. Does that sum up how you've approached your career?

**Gerry:** [00:00:41] Nick, I think it does. I've been a student really my entire life. But I think I became intentional about that about 10 years ago. I can't meet someone without being interested in what their story is and I really care about the learning that takes place, it becomes more important to me to to learn in an active way.

**Nick:** [00:01:05] So when you were a student in your younger years, in your formative years, what was it was growing up like?

**Gerry:** [00:01:11] Well growing up was an interesting set of issues because I went from school to school. My father was in the service and we, I literally went to a different school every year. The first time that I started and finished a grade was my sophomore year of high school. So every single year before that I started in a given school and finished in a different one; in a different state or in a different country. I lived in two places in Germany and probably about 12 different states in the United States.

**Nick:** [00:01:58] Did it have any long term impact moving around?

**Gerry:** [00:02:01] Yes, in hindsight. You know moving around a lot means that you're constantly coming into a new situation, a new school and some of the people in that school may have known each other for quite a while, so breaking in if you will, to the clique or other group of kids that you now have to meet is sometimes difficult. I never thought of it as as a very young person, but as I became a teenager, it had a little bit more of an impact. I remember going from a high school in the city in which your hair (and I had hair in those days!) was kind of slicked back if you can imagine the 1960's etc.. So a little bit more Elvis Presley and going to from there to a school in the suburbs where everybody was a little bit more of an athlete wearing letter sweaters and that sort of thing. And walking culturally



from one place to the other, was a big, big, adaption for me - or required a lot of adoption for me.

**Nick:** [00:03:24] So what kind of student were you then, were you academic, were you somebody that knuckled down, what were you like?

**Gerry:** [00:03:33] When I was in the city I went to a very strict Jesuit school with brothers who were extraordinarily difficult to work with as teachers and really required that you excel from an academic point of view and I did. I remember in my as my freshman and sophomore years, a part of my sophomore year I was number one or number two in the class and very competitive for that.

**Nick:** [00:04:06] Did that come naturally to you or did you have to work at it?

**Gerry:** [00:04:09] No, I had to work my ass off! And you know it was not an easy thing to want to do either. So it wasn't my interest in working really hard. I was kind of beaten into submission in a way. However when I got to this public school that I went to after that, this is hard to admit, but I literally cut classes every day for an entire year. And I was able to disappear from the school, as a truant, if you will, without being caught. I would be conveniently home and be able to imitate my father's or my mother's voice when they would call and I was able to go to school just enough to barely, barely, pass.

**Nick:** [00:05:02] So was there an element of rebelling against the authority that you'd had?.

**Gerry:** [00:05:07] Without a doubt. Oh without a doubt. I mean you know most kids go through some form of rebellion, it depends on where they are and what they're doing.

**Nick:** [00:05:18] You went on then to study engineering. Is that right?

**Gerry:** [00:05:22] Yes.

**Nick:** [00:05:22] So why did you do that?

**Gerry:** [00:05:24] Four years of engineering. It was fascinating. When you are a young person and you have no particular point of view about where you want to go. I mean I was not enamoured with the military so it wasn't like I really wanted to be in the military. So I went to engineering school for four years and the reason engineering was of interest is because my highest scores in literally everything were in math and looking at the different schools, I realized that I was very comfortable in the college that I chose. It was a smaller



college much more focused in right around New York City, right across the water there from the Hudson River, Stevens Institute of Technology. And I truly made a great decision in going there. The relationships that I built with my fellow students have lasted all of my life. I've been very active with my college, not only as a student, but ever since as an alumnus and over the last 40 some odd years, so it's actually been 46 years since I graduated. And I probably am in that college once a month, advising alumni, or working with students, or working with professors. I was on the board of my college; I was [on] their board of trustees; I was president of the alumni association, so I've devoted a great deal of time in my adult life to supporting and helping to move that institution further.

**Nick:** [00:07:19] It's something quite interesting there, when you talk about the connections, the alumni, the network you're still in touch with from engineering college. It strikes me that that's been quite a pattern in the life that you've got strong networks. You've got strong family you've got over 100 cousins. Is that something you consciously work hard at?

**Gerry:** [00:07:42] Well Nick it's an interesting affect really and probably the affect is to the all of the moves that I made as a young person. So if you think how many different places I went, how many people I got to know in a school. But then within the same year I give that entire group up and I go to another school, I have to start all over. And so probably as a result of that starting with college which I felt was the first place, first school if you will, that I came to that was where I started equal to everyone else. I think with some intention, building relationships was important to me. And I think as I got older, I recognized the value in those relationships and much of the work and the thinking that I've done over the course of my life has kind of cemented that. And there's a variety of very specific instances in which this whole issue about the strength of your relationships, becomes part of how you're grounded, as a person, as a human being. And some of the legacy of what you leave behind as well.

**Nick:** [00:09:11] Talking about your college phase then, so engineering...?

**Gerry:** [00:09:14] So engineering was what I got into. And yet I disliked the curriculum. So it was hard. It was extraordinarily difficult to do well and I couldn't think of anything more boring than working as an engineer. This after four years of studying engineering. What I loved most about engineering was the critical thinking. What I loved most about the engineering, was this attention on digging into the measurement of what you were doing. For the first time in my life I was confronted with the issue of what do I want to do with my life, you know, at least for the next few years? One of the professors in the graduate school who had gotten to know me, came to me and he said, 'I really would love for you to think



about this graduate program in organizational behavior'. And I said What is organizational behavior? And he basically said, 'Well industrial psychology, organizational behavior, is really looking at corporations and organizations and companies and trying to figure out how work takes place there, how people are motivated, what motivates them, how do people become capable of performing at very very high levels'. And I go, 'OK, well that sounds interesting'... I said, 'What would you have me do. Because I can't pay for this?' And he goes 'Well, I'll give you an assistantship, teaching two or three classes of 30 students who are juniors, so 2 years younger than you, Psychology. And I said, 'Well, you know, I have never taken a psychology course' and he said, 'Well not a problem. You could take one this summer'. And that's that's kind of how I fell in love with this whole area of how we study work.

**Nick:** [00:11:32] And your first job was in Career Planning and Placements. Was that around about this time?

**Gerry:** [00:11:38] That was the next three years to get to get through college.

**Nick:** [00:11:41] As a career adviser, you must have been, what 21, 22 when you were doing that.

**Gerry:** [00:11:45] So yeah, I took on the job, I got this offer to be a career advisor and I was three years into my graduate work - and now I'm in a position where I am now going to help every single kid who graduates from college get a job.

**Nick:** [00:12:05] And what kind of advice were you giving?

**Gerry:** [00:12:07] I was giving terrible advice! I mean, unbelievably, terrible advice. What what do I know? I haven't actually worked. I'm still going to graduate school and I'm trying to help people decide whether they should go to graduate school or go to work. And this whole idea of a career path thing and really understanding your life's work and your career and job within that framework and having some context, some model for working on that was very pretty... it was very early in what was out there. There was a guy named who had written a couple books on the subject and then there was a fellow named.. 'What color is your parachute', Richard Bolles, who in 1968-9, left the ministry and began writing about careers. And I picked up that book. I saw that he was going to give a course not far from Stevens. I went to my boss and I said you have to let me go to this. And I had the opportunity to go and meet Richard Bolles who's a young man at the time. We've actually spoken to major conferences on career pathing together. So he's been a mentor to some degree.



**Nick:** [00:13:38] Tell me about the time asked to write your own obituary?

**Gerry:** [00:13:43] That really came out of our discussion, or that really came out of when I went to this course that Richard Bolles gave. I show up at the course. I'm the certainly the youngest person in the room. Most are Directors of Career Services in various different kinds of colleges and a few career coaches. There weren't many in those days.. and so I'm this young kid who is just trying to figure it out and about halfway through the first day, Bowles said, 'Ok, we have a just a quick exercise, I want you all to write your obituary. And I went, 'OK well this can't be too hard. How hard could that be?' So I quickly dashed off a few notes put them into order and figured I was done. I looked at it and I went 'Oh, how ugly would that be if people said that about me!' For the first time I'm reflecting in a sense, about what that means. So if I'm dead and people were to say this about me: 'He was a bright, smart person that we liked..' and you know, that kind of stuff - I'm going how shallow was this? So I really, I ripped it up and tried a different tactic that I accomplished a lot of things and wrote that all up and looked at that and said 'Oh, how pretentious!' You know it was. And I went through a series of three or four of these getting increasingly upset really, I had to turn something in, which I did that was totally inadequate from my perspective. But I kept doing it for the rest of the week. So even after I left this course that stuck with me and I kept doing this over and over and I had to have spent 15-20 hours just reflecting on that issue and I'd never really understood why that was so important to me at the time. But it was and I'm very grateful that it was because I finally found a satisfying resolution to it and it had nothing to do with accomplishments or anything else. It reflects back on that issue that we talked about earlier about relationships and the impact that you have on the lives of other people around you and particularly family, friends, you know career etc. There's I think a consistency around how you walk the talk of your life. And I captured pieces of that in maybe three or four different paragraphs that satisfied me. So I put it in my wallet and every time for the next 30 years that I had a job or a new opportunity to do something, I pulled it out and looked at it and asked myself essentially whether or not that would contribute to a life that would be seen this way. And I will tell you that it was it was 17 years ago when I was 52 years old that I pulled it out and I realized I was that person and threw it away.

**Nick:** [00:17:26] What was it about that particular moment in your life?

**Nick:** [00:17:28] When I was 52 you mean?

**Nick:** [00:17:29] Yes. What made you throw it away?



**Gerry:** [00:17:32] It was it was just a recognition that if I passed at that point, that a number of people would would say that about me and that you know, that was just a comfort, it's a level of satisfaction, it's a comfort with yourself. Remember you know, I mean we are told over and over again that in the back of your mind you hear that that phrase from your parents, or what have you to be comfortable with who you are, to learn to be OK in your skin kind of thing and then you become a lot more relaxed around others, because it is what you are, you're comfortable with that. I don't think you get there easily. I think it's something that is, is something that's intentional.

**Nick:** [00:18:28] And during that 30 years when you had that bit of paper and you said you referenced it when you were going for jobs or circumstances in your life were changing, were the times when you felt you had to bring yourself back on track.

**Gerry:** [00:18:42] Oh without a doubt, without a doubt. Over the course of your life, there are many times when you are either encouraged or rewarded for doing things that get you way off track and I think it's important to constantly (maybe not constantly) but periodically, be able to understand and reflect on what your important values are. Because otherwise you can get easily swayed by any number of things, whether it be money or accolades, or any number of other issues, as well as disappointed - you know the disappointments that come in life are minuscule in many respects to whether or not you have a set of values that you've ascribed to.

**Nick:** [00:19:41] You spent 10 years working at Johnson & Johnson.

**Gerry:** [00:19:44] I did.

**Nick:** [00:19:44] How much has that shaped your career and your life?

**Gerry:** [00:19:49] Huge. Johnson & Johnson when I first had the opportunity to interview with them and was made an offer to go with them, was one of the largest companies in the world and still is.

**Nick:** [00:20:06] And this is at the time and you said you had just got married?

**Gerry:** [00:20:09] I did. You know I had been married a couple of years. I had been in graduate school for six years and made the decision that I did not want to become an academic. So Johnson & Johnson was my opportunity and they offered me an extraordinary job working in training and development and organizational change. And I remember that I wrote back to them, because in those days you'd get a letter in an



envelope and I wrote back to them thanking them for the opportunity and saying that I would be thrilled to be able to join J&J. But there was one thing that I wanted in my role and that is my opportunity to access the computer. And you have to put this into context: There was only one computer at J&J! I immediately got a call back from hiring manager, Ken Stewart was my first boss and so he calls me up and he says, 'Gerry got your letter. We want to set a date for when you start. But this thing about you having access to the computer.. Why would you want access to the computer?' He said, 'We have we have an account person in the computer area who will come to us and listen to what we want. And in a week, two weeks, they'll produce someone's, any report you want. So you really don't need to have access to the computer'. I said, 'Well, I really want to have access to the computer because of the way I want to be able to think about the data that's there. And I don't want to iterate with this account person over and over and over. I want to be able to do it myself and do it faster.' So he goes, finally he says, 'Gerry, let me tell you what the real problems is', he said, 'the computer you is vulnerable if people have access to it. And to get access, means I have to go to my boss who has to go to his boss who's the Vice President of Personnel and he's got to go to the President the company to grant you access, because he has to override the Head of the Computer who will never give you access. I said, 'Oh, yes, I understand but I'm still disappointed.' So he says 'Let me see what I can do.' So it turns out that he did go to his boss, who went to his boss, who went to the President and the President of J&J said, 'Give him access. I just want to know what he does with it.' I did not know this for almost two years that they went through this whole rigmarole. But I did have access, but I did know that for the 10 years I spent with J&J, I had the most extraordinary opportunities to go and do almost anything that I wanted to do. And I even was Director of Human Resources, Personnel, for one of the major divisions of Johnson & Johnson for about a year and a half, two years, hated it. I had 20 some odd people working for me and I constantly wanted to mess things up, I wanted to change stuff. And if you're in that kind of a role, it's really a maintenance kind of role of, you need to be a good manager, or a good director, you need to pay attention to how all of your people are doing things and I found that I was not. I'd like to tell people who were leaders how to lead better. But I didn't want to do it myself. I had no interest in being the one in charge.

**Nick:** [00:24:27] So when did you leave Johnson & Johnson?

**Gerry:** [00:24:29] I left J&J in 1984/5 so I was basically there for 10 years. But there was this values that underlay the mission of the corporation, the strategy of the corporation and then the tactics of how we were were organized within that framework and that really was what we pinned everything on in terms of a decision point of view. So that was huge. The negative was that because the corporation was somewhat conservative around



making sure that all of this existed. We chose consciously not to do anything new, not to innovate until 25 percent of the firms that we admired the most were doing it. But I was getting to the point where I'm going, 'Wait a second. I love doing new stuff. And I need to, I need to move on.' And so after 10 years I really went to my leaders and basically said I need to leave.

**Nick:** [00:25:45] And did you have something to go to?

**Gerry:** [00:25:46] No, I had nothing to go to. I said I need to leave. I'm going to go.

**Nick:** [00:25:52] The next job you did.. How did that go?

**Gerry:** [00:25:55] Not so good! Almost, it was sort of like an area of my life where I started bumming around a little bit and had opportunities to work for a boutique search firm. And I clearly knew within that year, year and a half, this was not going to be what I'm going to be doing for the rest of my life and just before that, actually I had I worked for Olin Hunt chemical corporation and I worked for them for a year and a half - two years and I was head, I was number two in personnel human resources and responsible for all of the recruiting that was going on as well. The company was very old line, the leaders of the company were not really great leaders. After about a year and a half of doing the work as best I could, push came to shove when I was asked to lay off some people who should not be laid off. There was just no rationale, there was no discussion with human resources, with my boss or with me. So I refused to do it unless we had a conversation about why we're doing this. So I was brought in to see the president who explained that there was no problem, I should just do what was told and to make a long story short I didn't do that. We were laying off people that I think would be inappropriate and it would send a message to strong performers within the company that they should be getting themselves out. So the next day I was laid off as the last one in.

**Nick:** [00:27:55] You go home...?

**Gerry:** [00:27:57] I go home and I tell my wife I said you know I always wondered what would happen when push came to shove and now I know. And so it was after that that I did the contract recruiting for about six months and then and then became another a fairly intensive phase of my life when I had the opportunity to join Shaker advertising.

**Nick:** [00:28:26] So this is quite a significant next phase in your career, isn't it? It's when you enter recruitment advertising leading up to the Internet era really.



**Gerry:** [00:28:36] Yes, you can see that I've really been involved in some way shape or form with how people get jobs or how employers get people, throughout my career. And so getting into Shaker advertising was a pretty natural approach. Shaker is one of the older recruitment advertising firms in the world the 1950s is when recruitment advertising really started companies really formed around the ability to hire people and to engage corporations in putting ads together focused specifically on hiring. So in the United States Hodes and Shaker and three or four other companies really emerged out of the 1950s and it turns out that one of the Shakers, the son of the founder, married my sister and he was basically getting into a position in which he was going to be taking over this advertising firm which was doing about, I don't know, 20 to 40 million dollars a year at the time. He and his father basically offered me an opportunity to join Shaker. And how was I going to learn this business? That was kind of interesting I live in New Jersey, they live in Chicago. That's about an hour and a half flight and so every Monday morning I would get on a plane early in the morning 6:00 o'clock and I'd be coming home on Friday afternoon and I basically spent my time as an assistant to Joe Shaker and listening to their sales people talk about their products and eventually started started learning how to do that myself and really kind of get engaged in that. So I'd be writing ads, I did most of the different types of jobs. After about six months Mr. Shaker Joe's father basically gave me keys to a car said drive back to New Jersey and start to sell. And when you have at least a million dollars or more annual business, I'll come out and help build an office for you. Ok, so I went back, took the car went back to New Jersey and started to call on my friends, people that I knew at Johnson & Johnson. And a few that had left J&J and went to other companies and most of them told me pretty much the same thing.. They said..You know Gerry, we liked you as an HR person and you know working inside the company, we don't know how long you're going to be as a sales person, you know working outside of the company in this recruitment advertising thing. We don't even know if you can get this thing done. So my friends were not giving me much support in relation to that. They basically said come back in a year if you're still doing this and then we can talk, that kind of thing. And eventually I found somebody who gave me a shot. His name is Jerome [00:31:55] **lidé.** [0.7] He was working for a financial services company at the time and he was frustrated with his current recruitment advertising firm and said you know what, this Sunday I have an ad I'm going to give you a try if you can get it done, you have my business and I won his business. And and from there I think, over the next ten years, every third person that I sat down with was my client within 90 days. And Mr. Shaker came out he built helped to build offices for recruitment advertising for Shaker in New Jersey. We grew to, we were doing many millions of dollars. I think the company when I left in the late 90's - '98,'99, was doing almost 200 million in recruitment advertising.

**Nick:** [00:32:53] Did you enjoy the whole creative element of that?



**Gerry:** [00:32:56] I did. I loved the creative. I loved, I loved the complexity of dealing with and you become addicted to the clients that you have and serving them on typically, Wednesday and Thursday for the most part, because most ads are going to go into a Sunday newspaper, the deadlines are Thursday night, typically Friday morning at the very latest. And you had a shift in technology that's going on in the 90's in which the Internet is becoming real. We now have communication capabilities to take advertising, digitize the actual ads, not just the copy, but also the ads themselves and be able to get them to a newspaper without using FedEx. That kind of thing. And technology was beginning to change everything. And that was.. just an extraordinary pioneering time and for all of us.

**Nick:** [00:34:04] And you picked up that quite early on didn't you because it was 1995 you gave your first talk on the impact of the internet?

**Gerry:** [00:34:10] Yes. But even before that Nick, the 10 years that I was engaged with Shaker was an opportunity to see the world shifting and make use of it in a way that I could see what was changing. Realized that it was changing very rapidly. And so around 1995 was the first time I gave a talk in to a local chapter of 'Society for Human Resource Management' [SHRM] and in 1996 I was invited to give a talk to SHRM's national conference on the subject of HR and the Internet.

**Nick:** [00:34:54] And this is where you wrote your first book.

**Gerry:** [00:34:57] Yes. SHRM never had a session on the Internet and in June of 1996 I believe my session was the first one at their national conference that attempted to talk about what was going to happen or what was happening already in relation to how the Internet was taking place. So I got this note from SHRM that said if you have a book, we'll promote it. And by this time I had met Mark Mehler who became my partner and I showed him the letter and I said, 'A book? We've been looking for something that we could do together. What if we could take the information that we're putting together?' Mark and I were putting together information about all the different job boards that were on the the web and these new things called 'applicant tracking systems'. He and I were trying to organize all that information in an interesting way. We felt that we could we could pull it out and give it to a publisher. And so we wrote to a couple of publishers about doing that and creating a directory of all of the technology tools that were emerging in recruiting and how employers as well as job seekers could use them to find each other. And so that's how we came up with the term 'Career X Roads' sort of the crossroads where these two things meet and the publishers thought it was a great idea but they didn't want to give us any money. They basically said, we'd like to partner but we own 95 percent. You get 5



percent and that's after we decide how much it cost us to make a profit, which sounded like I wasn't going to get anything. So we said, well maybe we could do this ourselves. So we said, how hard could it be? So we did actually produce our first book in about eight weeks. We went like this and picked out of the air how much we would charge, so we charged \$14.95 for the book, we put that on the book. And I did one other thing, I promised in the front page of the book the 1996 Career X Roads that if you buy the book and give me your e-mail address, that I will send you my opinion about changes in how the Internet impacts recruiting for the rest of my life.

**Nick:** [00:37:46] Some commitment!

**Gerry:** [00:37:48] Which is kind of interesting, but telling. So we put this book together we got the book. We bought 5000 copies. I think we paid a buck and a quarter per copy. So we invested a little over six grand or around six thousand in doing that. And I called with all kinds of excitement SHRM and said to the bookstore, 'How many copies do you want me to send you, we've got a book? I'm coming to give my talk. Let's do this.' And they said, 'Oh well, 50 copies will be fine'. So Mark and I were totally distressed about this whole thing. So we shipped another two cases so another 100 books to Chicago, just in case we could sell them, we figured we could hawk them. So this was a lot of fun. We were very proud of this first effort on our part. And I went to Chicago. I went to give my presentation. There were a thousand people in the room. So I mean the scale is unbelievable, you know up to this time I doubt I'd ever spoken in front of more than 100 people. So I asked the room how many people have an email address? This is June of 1996 and a quarter of the people in the room had an email address. Not bad. I said, how many of you have ever seen a page on the Internet? One in ten. I basically made the comment that if you come out of this session and you still feel that the Internet is not something you should be spending any time energy or effort in learning more about, I think you will find within the next couple of years that you will need another career. I said because everything is about to change and at the end of the session there was pretty much a stunned silence. It was like Deer's you know, whatever. I felt it was successful, it was fine. But the real proof of the pudding was that all 5000 copies were sold within the next hour. Mark and I looked at each other and said something's happening here. So we produced '97, '98, '99, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003. That was our last book. By '99, I had 40 to 50000 e-mails in my database. Of people who had done the promise. Right? And each month I'm sending an e-mail newsletter out to everybody who gave me their email. Today this is like, 'Oh of course'. But it was not quite that obvious then. So we were a bookseller and that was creating opportunity for consulting roles and our price for consulting was very high. So we're doing just fine. So there weren't too many things that could replace what we were doing up until Google came around. So this is kind of neat. It was fun. It was an interesting time and great



learning, just a great learning to immerse yourself in all of the shift and the changes that were taking place in the early days of the Internet move.

**Nick:** [00:41:42] Really since then, you haven't really looked back, have you? That's what took you on the journey into Career X Roads, your consultancy business, the Colloquium aspect of that.

**Gerry:** [00:41:52] But we pivoted. I mean the last phase that I'm in now really started as we knew that Google and other tools that were out there prevented us from being able to write an honest book. We were still getting hundreds of orders a week. But I did not want to write the next book because I could no longer tell good stuff from bad stuff. So we knew we had to pivot. We knew we had to change and we had built on an awful lot of relationships with people over time. I felt that it was kind of important to find a way to teach each other. And so in 2002 we had our first meeting. I tried to figure out what should we call this. I don't want to call it a conference, I don't want to call it a symposium. I wanted to be peers engaging each other and the closest thing word that I could come up with was 'Colloquium' which still is a little too academic. But it does reflect a model that's peer to peer, where people who are colleagues are engaging each other on some subject. And so we invited 40 people they came and that was the first Colloquium. And this year 2017 in October will be our hundredth meeting and there's an intensity in the room and a real thirst for helping each other figure out what's going on today, now, what they're working on now, what they just completed now, what results they've just achieved now. And so rather than focusing on the future, they're focusing in on how they achieve performance today, with the tools, the solution, the solutions stock that they have, the practices they have, the systems that they have. I find that exhilarating and I will tell you it's primarily why I'm still in the game.

**Nick:** [00:44:21] So, your hat..?

**Gerry:** [00:44:26] My hat.

**Nick:** [00:44:27] That's quite a big part of your personality, your brand if you like. Was that intentional?

**Gerry:** [00:44:33] intentional? No not initially. It really just happened. It was one of the first times that I spoke. And in 1998, I believe it was 1998, the conference was in New Orleans and I got there a day or so early and was wandering around I went into a hat store and I fell in love with a little hat that was there, it was a Panama hat and I was shocked at how much it cost, it was like 250 dollars and I'm going 'TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY DOLLARS? How



would anybody spend money like that on a hat!' But after I got over all of that, I coughed up the money and put the hat on, I loved it. I loved the way I felt with it. I enjoyed that. So I wore the hat in the conference. There's 15,000 people at this conference. OK? So what was happening is that I didn't know at the time, but then learnt quickly was there was somebody looking for me and someone else, or someone else to give them a contract for a substantial sum, from a consulting point of view. And they were they went to someone who I knew and said, 'I'm looking for Gerry Crispin or the other person, I have a contract that I'd like to talk to them about. Have you seen them?' and this person said, 'Oh I've seen both of them. I know they're here. They're around somewhere in this large room with 15,000 people milling around or wandering. Oh there's Gerry with the hat. Yeah he's wearing a hat.' So when I learned that, I'm going 'cost of doing business'. So I started looking at hats. I became fascinated by hat manufacture. I've learned that there's only 50 hat makers for men left in the United States. I've tracked down probably about a dozen of them and three of them I buy hats from and I now have a hat made for me every single year.

**Nick:** [00:46:49] How would your family and friends describe you?

**Gerry:** [00:46:53] Totally committed to them in some ways. And to the family, to the cousins. So we call ourselves 'the cousins'. There are now about 120 of us on my mother's side and these are my first cousins, 19 of them, their spouses, their children, the children's spouses and their children and we since 1978 go camping each year together for a week. This year will be the 40th year doing that. Our goal, honestly our goal when my cousins and I first spoke about it and started doing it was, is there something that we can do, we care about each other, what could we do that we could afford? And the only thing we could afford in 1978 was camping. But we had a goal and the goal was that our children would be connected to each other.

**Nick:** [00:47:57] What qualities do you admire in people?

**Gerry:** [00:48:01] Commitment to their values. You know I'm attracted to people who have relationships that they put first and foremost. I'm interested in people who are committed to paying it forward. That probably is one of the key things for me is I tend to react most when I see people doing something for others and I think that if you truly engage others to be helpful to them, you find your own niche. You find what you do well. You find that maybe you're not the best in the world doing something but if you if you hang out and help the people who are the best you're going to be part of their crew. You know and that's great. Nothing wrong with that.

**Nick:** [00:48:57] Looking back on your career is there anything you would do differently?



**Gerry:** [00:49:02] Not a thing. There's not, I mean there are things that I would probably not knowing what I know now, do a little bit differently. Leaving J&J without really having an idea where I'm going next, when I'm married for 10 years and have couple kids growing up and all of those kinds of things. But I was clueless about networking. I was well networked inside my company, but not networked externally, so I was clueless about what it really would take for me to get another job and especially a job that was a good job. That I wanted, you know, as opposed to somebody who's willing to pay me. And so I made a few errors along the way in terms of that. But I don't regret them at all because it reminded me of my need to ask the right questions, of my need to be able to be consistent to my values etc. I kept on I you know I crossed the edge a number of times. And I think it was good to do those things. So I have no regrets.

**Nick:** [00:50:22] What advice would you give to anyone starting their career now?

**Gerry:** [00:50:26] You know, it's a great question and it's a very, it's a very key question I think, when you're when you're looking at it from where I sit. Having had a long career, having done a number of things so not a particular path. I think people worry way too much about planning too far in the future. I think plans need to be reasonable and I think you have, most of us have, a horizon of maybe a year to two years out but you can't possibly know the situation that will change in your family with your spouse, with your children, with your friends with other parts of your family, with your interest in certain types of jobs. All of that can shift and change. And so if you don't have a clear view beyond a year or two years I wouldn't be worried about it. But I do think that in terms of the life that you want to have I think it's important for people to think about how you're giving back what you're doing for you know, the long term and in the long term it's not so much about what you get it's about what you give. So I encourage young people particularly to start thinking about that, either the charities, or the the things that they can do to pay forward in their career and in their life and they should be finding those things, they should be doing that as early as possible.

**Nick:** [00:52:14] What do you think is the key to being successful?

**Gerry:** [00:52:18] Defining success is the most important thing to being successful. It isn't a word that can be defined by anything but you personally. And if it's important for you to have a lot of money, it's not up to me to judge that. I think success is a critical issue for people to define early and often and revise often.

**Nick:** [00:52:52] What's really important to you in life now and has that changed?



**Gerry:** [00:52:58] Nothing has changed for me. I'm blessed in that I was able to define for myself the things that are really important. And I have been relatively true to those over an extended period of time. I have a great set of relationships that are not only family, but professional in my profession and in my business itself. I feel very comfortable that many of my clients are friends. And if they did not become if they were not able to be clients tomorrow they would still be friends. So I'm at a stage that I'm very comfortable and it's a matter of when I stop and my decision is from a financial point of view, I could do that tomorrow. But I still find myself excited and fully engaged in driving a number of these key issues that have been important to me and I still find every day that I'm learning something new. So I tend to be surprised on a regular basis about something that's going on. So I'm not tired yet of learning. I find every place that I go, recruiting is a different way, I can look at recruiting differently. And when I do when I step outside the box and look at it this way, I can come back inside the box and go, "oh there's something we haven't done yet.

**Nick:** [00:54:48] Your energy and drive for talent acquisition and the profession is something that's evident, but also something you're really proud of I sense?

**Gerry:** [00:54:59] I think we should be proud of what we do in talent acquisition. My career is ending with me creating I think a community of talent acquisition professionals, who care about each other, who help each other, who operate and view themselves as part of a community. And so I've been particularly in the last five years, been very much interested in seeing a new professional association arise that can focus in on the body of knowledge help define it, help define and build standards. That to me is one of the two things that I think is critical. If I'm going to have any kind of influence and I think we have a responsibility as recruiters if we really are world class to be able to help not only our employer make a great decision, but but the candidate to make a great decision as well. And so 'Talent Board' was launched six years ago with myself, Ed Newman and Elaine Orlor and the three of us had the same vision about creating a non profit that would learn, would research how employers treat candidates and connect that back to the business from an ROI point of view and so that the employers could better understand what the real value is of creating a great candidate experience. And over the last six years that's grown, until this year it is now is very active in EMEA, in APAC and in North America.

**Nick:** [00:57:00] You're 70 this year. But no thoughts of retiring?

**Gerry:** [00:57:05] I don't - no. I have no thoughts of retiring. I realize that someone who's 70 years old is only going to be going on in terms of health, in terms of not only my health



but my family's health. Those kinds of things are going to be kind of critical to how long you stay in terms of what you do and right now everything's fine. But realistically I think most people would be retired in three to five years. And I probably said the same thing three to five years ago. And I'll probably say the same thing, I may say the same thing in three to five years. I don't know. So I don't know when the answer is, but I don't have a horizon that's more than three years.

**Nick:** [00:58:05] What do you want your legacy to be?

**Gerry:** [00:58:09] That's a great, that's a great question, I guess. I don't need a legacy. I mean we're not remembered for very long. The reality is once people are gone, they're gone. Somebody goes, 'What the hell happened to that guy with the hat? Who was he anyway?' You know let's not, I don't see honestly much after after I'm gone. Let's quote a legacy, you know it's a Gerry Crispin thing. I would love to be able to see if I leave the stage if you will and I'm still around ten years hence. I would love to check back in and see that there's a professional association that is admired by the people who are members. My true legacy really, is within the family. So they're the people who are my grandchildren. That's kind of, that is my legacy from that point of view. If I'm satisfied that they've gotten everything they can get from me, or that they want to get from me whatever. That's kind of cool. That's how I think about legacy, is the relationship I have with the next generation, if you will.

**Nick:** [00:59:45] Gerry It's been a pleasure talking to you.

**Gerry:** [00:59:47] Nick, pleasure talking to you.

**Nick:** [00:59:48] Thank you.

**Gerry:** [00:59:49] Thank you.



## **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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