

**SALES STAR**


## David Parks: Bluepoint's Sales Development Leader

[By Akbar Ali]

As vice president of business development at Bluepoint Leadership Development, David Parks is spearheading a new way forward in the quest for optimum business performance. Having spent many years in a variety of managerial and leadership positions in a multitude of industries, he describes his current professional duty as “oiling the wheels of business and helping organizations realize their strategic goals” — no small feat when one considers that his client roster includes corporations such as Nike, Microsoft, and General Electric.

Parks's decision to pursue a career as a business developer was born out of a necessity he came to understand in the early part of his career. Though he had held managerial posts at companies like Marks & Spencer, Brooklowe Consulting, and Omnicom, he found his true calling to be collaborating with others to realize their business goals.

“I am always looking for smarter, better, and faster ways to achieve business and organizational goals,” he says. “Early in my career I had some great training experiences, and [I] have a passion for learning and personal growth. The field of leadership development affords me the opportunity to work with world-class organizations, addressing some of their most pressing leadership challenges.”

He found his way into the industry by working with quality professionals, many of whom demonstrated the very attributes he now tries to develop in his clients and which offered clarity for his professional ambitions.

“A combination of having some really good bosses and some really bad bosses shaped my decision to go into leadership development. Experiencing the extremes helps you get really clear on your own standards — what you want to be and what you do not want to be.

“I've had great development experiences in my career, such as my very first job after university with Marks & Spencer. They are reputed to have one of the best management development programs in Europe and set a benchmark standard for excellent training.”

Born and raised in Ireland, Parks completed all of his formal education in Ireland and England. He attended the Royal School

Armagh, the University of Northumbria, and Teesside Business School. He professes that his time at the Royal School Armagh helped shape his individual character by allowing him to excel in a variety of academic and athletic pursuits.

“It is one of the oldest schools in Ireland, dating back to 1608. Rich in history and heritage, it is strong in sports and academics. I was captain of the 1st XV rugby team and was also head prefect in my final year. Rugby was the mainstay of extracurricular activity, but I also was involved in the Army Cadets and the amateur dramatic society.

“I played rugby at the University of Northumbria, but after an injury switched my attention to the Officer Training Corps (OTC), one of the greatest highlights was an attachment to the Royal Irish Regiment (British Army) in West Berlin. This was before the wall came down, so it was all very real and exciting to do border patrols and work with other NATO forces such as the French, Americans, and Germans.”

After graduating from the University of Northumbria, Parks took the unusual step of electing to go to the other side of the world to test his mettle and see how his personal strengths could help him survive the unknown.

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** Run, bike, swim, ski, and play with my energetic three- and five-year-old children.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** U2 — *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** *Business Week* and *Dwell*.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** Any of BBC America's drama series, such as *Murphy's Law* or *The Canterbury Tales*.

**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** Warren Buffett.

**Q. What makes you laugh?**

**A.** Full-tilt family humor with my wife and two children.

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"I asked my parents to buy me a one-way ticket to Australia for my 21st birthday present. I have always had wanderlust and desire for adventure in faraway places. I stipulated a one-way ticket. I wanted to prove self-sufficiency and pay my own way back.

"Working for a construction firm in Perth, Western Australia, I did double duty as a laborer and as the accounts administrator. I particularly wanted to have some business experience to show from my year away. I also trained as a surf lifesaver and did voluntary beach patrols on the weekend, which was my way of physically challenging myself and contributing something back to the community.

"After a year in Australia, I traveled back via Indonesia, Malaysia, and Hong Kong to go to Teesside Business School in the north of England. During my year at Teesside, I was professionally accredited by the British Institute of Management and the Chartered Institute of Marketing. This was before MBAs were even heard of in Europe. My first real job after Teesside was with Marks & Spencer as part of their management intake. This launched me into my business career proper."

From Marks & Spencer he transitioned to an agency which was part of the Omnicom global conglomerate of marketing and advertising agencies, a move which helped him bolster both his leadership and "secret" affinity for design.

"As an account manager I played a pivotal role between a creative team of graphic designers/copywriters and the client base. I am a self-confessed 'closet creative' and appreciate great design and writing. This period was a tremendous education in marketing for me.

"Another passion of mine is keeping physically fit, and an opportunity arose to combine the fitness world with the marketing world. I joined FFI in London as director of sales and marketing. FFI contract-managed 50 hotel fitness centers, and I was charged with growing the corporate-contract side of the business.

"In a four-year time frame, I doubled the number of corporate contracts, adding trophy clients such as the BBC, Texaco, and Prudential. Selling and marketing largely to HR executives, I found myself linking the rationale for an in-house health and wellness center back to organizational objectives such as attracting top talent, retaining talent, and creating a very special place to work. The in-house corporate fitness centers became much more of a resource center and were often called upon for team-building activities. This really was my segue into the other world of corporate leadership and management training (versus the other health and fitness training)."

Parks then took an extraordinary gamble and decided to take his skills and ambitions abroad, entering the U.S. Green Card Lottery Program, the first step on the path to executing some very notable career accomplishments.

"I arrived in the United States 12 years ago after winning the lottery visa — the luck of the Irish! It was a big risk leaving a good job in London with all the things that keep you in a job, such as a company car, pension, etc. Starting from scratch, I am most proud of the stellar clients that I have won for my company. Big-name accounts such as GE, Microsoft, DHL, Starbucks, and Nike where we have done legacy-building leadership development are some of my proudest accomplishments. I reflect on this work and think of the value to our clients

and the opportunities I have created for my colleagues.

"Another notable career achievement was the launch of Bluepoint Leadership Development, spinning off from the Tom Peters Company in 2004. This was a strategic shift that required a lot of intestinal fortitude. Going from having the name of a bestselling business author over the door and rebranding to Bluepoint was one of the scariest and best things that we ever did. My role in the organization significantly expanded at that point, taking on a much bigger leadership role beyond sales and marketing. Some of the themes and lessons I would draw from my experiences include going for big goals, taking risks, persistence to win through, belief in yourself, and never, ever giving up."

Parks also identifies several individuals as having served as mentors throughout his career, challenging him not only professionally but personally as well, which has refined his approach to working with both businesses and individuals.

"The first was Dr. Terry Eaves, the executive vice president of research and development at GlaxoSmithKline. Terry was a best friend and personal mentor. He provided a lot of support, encouragement, and insight in my formative business career. At a time when you are figuring a lot of things out, he was my go-to person, sounding board, and number-one supporter.

"My CEO at FFI in London was also a great mentor in a different way. Jack Thorpe was formerly the commanding officer of the Parachute Regiment, one of the top British Army regiments. He set very exacting standards and would hold you highly accountable for your commitments. If you said you were going to do something, you had

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better deliver on your promise. Beyond his exacting military standards, I knew that Jack Thorpe really cared about me as a person and would invest a lot of time in growing, stretching, and challenging me.

“At Tom Peters Company and Bluepoint, my mentor was Boyd Clarke, the former CEO who sadly passed away from cancer in 2005. Boyd exhibited extreme warmth and caring and was a tremendous businessman and entrepreneur. Boyd had great faith and confidence and encouraged innovation and experimentation. He gave me lots of license to experiment and push the envelope of innovation.”

For the sales or business professional endeavoring toward career success,

Parks champions an approach which asks aspirants to not only search for professional challenges but to view themselves in roles other than “the salesperson.”

“I am a great believer in putting in a strong foundation of competence in whatever you do. Metaphorically speaking, ‘first learn the sheet music, and this will liberate you to play masterful jazz.’

“For somebody entering the sales arena, it’s vital to have a passion for what you are selling. When it is all about a commission check, you are a mercenary; when it’s a passion, you are a missionary. Think ‘missionary’: make a real difference. The money should follow, and you’ll be a happier and more fulfilled person.

“Seek out interesting challenges and development experiences. Volunteer for that special project that will take you outside of your comfort zone and stretch and grow you. If you get a chance to work internationally, go for it. It could be the most significant development experience of your career.

“In sales, recognize the fact that there will be lots of rejection, and this demands resilience and persistence. Staying the course and not giving up is a vital component of winning in the sales arena. It is an endurance event versus a sprint. Pace yourself and never give up.”

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