

April 2011

# Update



**We have been operating as Thewlis Graham Associates for six months and thought it was time to update you on how business is progressing and to let you know a little bit more about us.**

There's no doubt it's a tough market at the moment, but we are successfully winning and delivering assignments, making useful contacts and the team are still talking to each other! We have been pleasantly surprised at the amount of good will towards our enterprise, which is a great feeling, so "thank you" to you all.

Robert and I were conscious that as we had not directly worked on any assignments together, our respective clients would not know "the other half" and so to remedy that, we allowed ourselves to be interviewed with the following results:

Sarah Thewlis and Robert Graham spend a large proportion of their time extracting information from potential candidates... but now it's their turn to be interviewed...

The pair come from different business backgrounds and have a diverse range of experience to draw on.

Robert has been an Executive Search Consultant for 22 years, whilst Sarah has spent over a decade as Chief Executive of several organisations, turning formally to Executive Search relatively recently.

*"I've sat on the other side of the table, which helps me to understand what clients really need from us,"* explains Sarah, who is confident that the new company has something special to offer.

*"Executive Search is about providing a personal service, but with us it genuinely is. We are both experienced professionals, with high integrity and a broad range of perspectives, and as such can also offer specialist consulting and research services."*

*"Robert has been building and maintaining client and candidate relationships for more than twenty years and I have been managing organisations for a similar length of time. The essence of what we do is about relationships - and we work hard to develop and sustain them."*

For Robert, the company is *"...small enough to be flexible and deliver a personalised service, but we have the experience and international reach to punch above our weight"*.

*"We also pride ourselves on offering value for money and our fees are normally tailored to the complexity of the role."*

An economics graduate from St Andrews (*"before it was fashionable"*, he says), Robert began his career in Sales and Marketing with Gillette, before completing an MBA at Cranfield, which included a semester in Seattle. He made the switch to Executive Search in 1988 and has been working in the industry ever since.

For Sarah, the move came relatively late, although she has always enjoyed working with people and putting together high performing teams. After university, she joined the Marks and Spencer Graduate scheme and stayed with the company in a variety of roles for 13 years. She subsequently worked as Deputy Chief Executive of the Royal College of Physicians, and then Chief Executive of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

*"I was young to apply, but got the job,"* says Sarah. *"A lot was happening in healthcare at the time and I learnt a great deal about building teams."*

She then moved across to the Nursing and Midwifery Council as Chief Executive, and whilst considering her next career move, she met an Executive Search Consultant, who phoned back to ask if she would ever consider Executive Search. *"It was something a bit different and I found it intriguing - that's how I ended up in this business"*.



## So what made the pair decide to set up their own business?

Sarah and Robert were previously colleagues in the London office of an American Executive Search firm, which last year decided to withdraw from the European market.

They had several options on the table; to move to another large consultancy, to join a smaller company, or to strike out on their own.



Robert says he was tired of working in a corporate environment and being managed remotely from the other side of the Atlantic. *"We wanted to be masters of our own destinies and offer a more tailored service to our clients. We decided that working for ourselves would be the best way to achieve this."*

They obviously get on very well. Robert says, *"Sarah is one of a kind, she really breaks the mould. She is an absolute natural, with an innate understanding of the business. She's done the senior roles herself and has first-hand knowledge of the challenges."*

Sarah says of Robert. *"He was very gracious and gentlemanly when we met and he always had time to help. He is also extremely funny; we spend a lot of time laughing. We both care a great deal about our work and his clients always comment on what a consistently great job he does."*

The best thing about Executive Search, according to Sarah, is finding the perfect match for a position. *"Our satisfaction comes from the hard work paying off – when the time spent finding the perfect candidate results in adding value to someone's career, and to our client's business."*

*"The hardest part is dealing with disappointed candidates. It's a tough market out there and you have to manage feedback carefully, so that people don't become de-motivated."*

And what is their top advice to candidates? *"Always take a call from a Search Consultant!"* says Robert.

*"You can never be too networked, and should always have your CV up-to-date."*

For Sarah, *"People should only take the roles which will broaden their experience, rather than just going for the biggest financial package. It also pays to be professional at all times. As you work up the corporate ladder it's very easy for circumstances to change, so be kind to people on the way up – you may need their help one day."*

## So what about the future of the Executive Search industry?

Despite all the buzz surrounding social networking, Sarah certainly doesn't think it spells the end of executive search companies. *"Advertising jobs on sites like Facebook and LinkedIn is fairly limited. Executive Search is about managing the interface between potential clients and potential candidates. More often than not we're searching for people who aren't actively looking for jobs, people who wouldn't be tempted without a prompt from us."*

*"But social networking does open things up. You can discover all sorts of things about people. However, we're normally recruiting for senior roles, and the candidates we're looking for aren't usually found on Facebook."*

Outside of work, Sarah is very keen on riding. *"I'm fortunate to have a horse, although he's getting a little elderly now. Hacking across the countryside really allows me the time to think and is when I develop some of my best ideas."*

Sarah is married to a Church of England priest, and is involved in many activities through the church.

*"I'm also a great cook and love entertaining. I like reading, but I don't watch much TV – apart from Spooks. That's everything about me, that's printable anyway..!"*

Robert is married to an American and enjoys socialising with friends and family, as well as the theatre, opera and the arts. He is also a keen sailor, when he gets the chance.

In addition to Sarah and Robert, there is a great support team, who will be introduced in later newsletters. In the meantime we would both like to thank you for your support in getting the business launched and established.



*Sarah and Robert*

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