

I trained as a Chartered Certified accountant with KPMG and qualified in 1990. Since then, I've worked as a financial controller, finance director, general manager and chief executive in Ireland, the UK, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. I have 20 years experience in public and private sector acute hospital systems, as well as light and heavy engineering, timber & builders merchants, restaurant & food service sectors.

Since 2002, as well as working full time, I have run my own consulting business, offering financial, operations, marketing and business development consulting services to SME's in a wide variety of industries and professions.

I have a Master's degree in Operations Management and am currently doing a research PhD in Lean Six Sigma.

I grew up in a small Midland town in Ireland in the 60's and 70's. My father had died when I was 6 and my mother remarried when I was 13. I was the only boy and have 2 sisters.

My first paid job was when I was 14, cleaning windows for £3 a day (a lot of money for a 14 year old) in the local convent school. The nuns fed us well and we worked 6 days a week and the job lasted for 6 weeks. Did the same again the following year.

After that I worked holiday jobs when I could get them - picking potatoes, saving hay, kitchen porter in restaurants, junior barman, petrol pump attendant (yeah, they had those in the '70s).

My stepfather was a farmer and it always annoyed me that he'd get my friends to come and work during harvest time and pay them £5 a day while I worked for him everyday I was off school but didn't get paid. He'd buy me 10 cigarettes every morning and that was that. Still, I learned how to sow potatoes, cut and save hay, tend cattle, deliver calves, drive (and crash) a tractor and trailer, and drink pints of Guinness.

When I was 16, the matron of the local hospital, who was a friend on my mother's, asked her if I was home for Christmas and would I be able to work in the hospital the next day, Christmas Eve. Turns out they had a patient from the psychiatric hospital transferred in and he had to have someone with him all the time. It being Christmas, they were short of staff and didn't want to call in an extra nurse. So I sat with Patrick all day. The head nurse warned me that he was dying, I suppose so I wouldn't be shocked. He died about 5 pm that evening, peacefully. She asked me to come the next day to help out. She said it was because they were short staffed, but I suspect she felt sorry for me. From then on, I worked in the hospital during my school holidays and for a year after I finished school.

It was a great job - I loved meeting and talking to people. And it's very easy to make a difference in a place where people are ill and worried and lonely and bored. All you have to do is be friendly, cheerful, patient and listen. I learned so much - working as a general porter, mortuary attendant, operating room attendant, going on ambulance calls to help out when a nurse wasn't needed. After I left there, I worked as a barman which was ok, but I drank too much so that didn't help and I didn't save any money.

In 1981 I went to London, UK for a weekend and decided to stay. For the next 18 months I travelled between Ireland and the UK and eventually moved back to Dublin in late 1982. The '80's were grim in London and twice as grim in Dublin. There was nothing happening, no one had money and 100,000 a year were leaving for the UK, USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. The next few years were tough in every way - mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. In late 1984 I came face to face with the reality of where I was heading if I didn't wise up and start looking after myself. Over the following 12 months I got myself together, with a lot of help from family and friends and I started college, doing bookkeeping and computer studies.

I thought I'd missed the computer wave and was too old to learn - imagine my surprise in 1986 when I started working in the largest accounting firm in Ireland and saw they were still doing nearly everything on paper. Because I actually knew how to use a computer, I was way

ahead of most people. I remember trying to convince an audit manager that he didn't have to manually tot up all the figures on the spreadsheet – he wasn't having any of it!

I worked there for the next 5 years, qualified as an accountant and really loved it. Again, I was in a job where I was out and about meeting people a lot of the time and that fitted well with me. My last 6 months with them I worked in tax. While I love tax because it's complex and there is a huge amount to learn, the job was mostly sitting at a desk and talking to people on the phone. That didn't appeal and so I moved on....