

**CAROLINE:**

Hi, and welcome to Mind Your Ps: The Purposeful Leader's Guide we believe in all the Ps, people, purpose, planet, even pizza and prosecco. This week, we're speaking to Gavin Mitchell, the Global Companion Animal Director at IMV Imaging, a worldwide veterinary imaging company who cares as much about people as they do about the animals they help. They've supported many community events through there not one but two charitable associations, BCF Foundation and the Vet Charity Challenge. Most recently, they've achieved Investors and People Platinum accreditation. Welcome, Gav Mitchell.

**GAVIN:**

Hello, Caroline and thank you very much for inviting me to this wonderful event.

**CAROLINE:**

No, it's a pleasure to have you, Gav. Listen, start by telling us about IMV Imaging, what you do? For those that are not au fait with animal diagnostic scanners, give us a layman's tour.

**GAVIN:**

Yes, okay. Well, for anybody who hasn't heard by IMV Imaging, then this is the organization you want to come and work for. We are quite frankly the best organization in the world. We get to do some fantastic things from helping polar bears in the Highland Wildlife Park and their toothache. To dealing with lions and tigers and giraffes in Africa to dealing with problems with rhinos in Africa. Our business basically we do two things. We design and develop ultrasound equipment which is used on farm, particularly for cattle to help a vet and laypeople identify pregnancy and fertility in cattle. Then, the second part of our business is then what we call a systems integrator business. Where we're bringing technologies, ultrasound, and X-ray, CT, MRI technologies, from some of the global players in the medical device market into veterinary clinics around the world to help a vet diagnose what's wrong with an animal.

**CAROLINE:**

Brilliant, and your title Global Companion Animal Director. Tell us a bit about that. What led you there?

**GAVIN:**

Yes, it's an amazing title, Carol, isn't it? I actually carry around an A4 piece of paper because you just can't fit it on a wee business card. It's just great, isn't it? It's one of these wonderful titles. What does it mean? Well, it means I get the pleasure of working with an outstanding team of people who go out on a daily basis and deliver [unintelligible 00:49:04] for our veterinary customers or animal contracting customers around the world. We have two fairly mature businesses, one in the UK, and one in Ireland. Then we have a developing business in South Africa. Then we have a number of other businesses around the world in the US, in India, in Brazil, in the Middle East where the businesses aren't quite as established as some of our mature businesses. My role is to basically look at opportunities to grow those businesses to work with our partner organizations like General Electric, big GE, [unintelligible 00:49:41] all those types of large medical device companies. Working with them to try and bring their technologies into vet clinics around the world.

Looking to grow our business constantly and looking to try and find acquisitions that we can bring into the fold and trying to lead a team of-- within my

direct team, I've got about 60 people. I try to lead them in the right ways and in the right ethos to deliver for our customers.

**CAROLINE:**

You recently achieved Investors and People Platinum Accreditation. Congratulations. Tell us about that?

**GAVIN:**

It's really, really exciting. We've been an investor in people company for many years. I really believed in the foundation blocks of what investors and people has delivered. We've been gold for, as I say, a number of years. To be awarded Platinum is just testament to the hard work and the dedication of our team. We can lead this from the top, but ultimately, having the team of individuals who are really motivated to do good for the world, and also for themselves and their colleagues is absolutely key.

To be awarded a Platinum award is great, but it is only a starting point. There's an awful lot more that we can do. When we sit and look at our business, there's just so much more we could be doing than we're doing today. It's a great recognition, but we're far from stopping. What comes after Platinum? Is it the moon? I don't know. We're going higher, and we'll take the business with us.

That was only announced a few weeks ago, and we actually have a company celebration, albeit virtually, tomorrow to celebrate IIP Platinum.

**CAROLINE:**

Fantastic. That sounds great. Well done. I can't wait to see investors and people, the moon version from IMV. Gav, I know that aside from your great work with IMV, you also sit on the board of two not-for-profits, Veterinary Management Group and AAI. Tell us about that and your experience there.

**GAVIN:**

Absolutely. Let's deal with AAI, Adopt An Intern first. Great organization, not-for-profit organization based in Edinburgh, basically helping people get on the jobs ladder through internships. Graduates are leaving university, leaving college, very, very difficult to find the first role. AAI have helped over 1,500 people through internships into full-time employment.

There's a lot of challenges in this area of trying to bring the Black minority groups through, women returners back into the business as well. AAI is set up to try and facilitate bringing people back into employment through an internship scheme. I was asked to join the board to help with strategy to help with the sales and marketing of that organization and jumped at it. It was a huge opportunity. I've been working with them now for about five years.

VMG is a totally different organization. That's within my business sphere of-- VMG stands for Veterinary Management Group. What we do there is run an organization that helps develop management skills, in particular with practice managers in vet clinics, but also with vets, vet nurses. It's about how do we go out, grow, share and learn in that environment.

Traditionally, a vet clinic would have been run by a vet, maybe with enough sort of practice manager on the side, but there was no professional skills in that business or very limited professional skills. VMG is a rollout to the VPMA and designed and developed to try and take forward good management and leadership practice in veterinary clinics.

**CAROLINE:**

Well, it's great to hear that Gav, and we're delighted to have Joy. Actually, I'm interviewing Joy on one of the podcasts as well, from AAI. We'll hear more from-

**GAVIN:**

Joy is just wonderful. What she's brought to the population of Scotland through this internship scheme is wonderful. You're very fortunate to have Joy. She's a hoot as well. She's far funnier than I will ever be.

**CAROLINE:**

[laughs] No, it's great. It's brilliant. Listen, IMV imaging is a global company, there's over 500 employees. How do you maintain a positive company culture? I know you personally talked about looking after 60, but how do you maintain that, particularly given the last year and all the challenges that's brought?

**GAVIN:**

IMV imaging is part of IMV Technologies. There's 500 people, just over 500 people in our group, within the imaging business with over 125 people spread around six countries around the world. For us, I believe it's really about setting a vision, setting a clear strategy of where you're going. Then making sure that you're communicating on a regular and detailed basis.

We give our teams, the nuts and the bolts of what's going on within the business. They have clear clarity around what's expected of them. Then we're checking in on a monthly and quarterly basis with them to let them know what's actually going on in the way the organization. I believe in, especially in these times, having confidence in your leaders is pretty key. Trusting them and trusting some of the tough decisions that we're all having to make today in COVID times, and how do we run our businesses.

I think a strong vision as to where you're going, strong values linked to really, really good regular communication. People knowing what they're doing through having good delegated responsibility. Then there's one other mechanism that we've put in place as well, and it's an online tool called Peakon, which is this staff survey mechanism that allows us to survey our staff in a totally blind way, on a regular basis so that we're getting feedback from them, and that we can then act upon.

**CAROLINE:**

Your company values, Gav, you talked about they're, I suppose, surprisingly, people-orientated for an animal-focused organization. Partnership learning and innovation, tell us about those core values. Why is it so important to you and the team? How would you bring them to life?

**GAVIN:**

Yes. We try and bring them to life every single day. Innovation really is about not just product, and we really have innovated from a product perspective. If you look on our YouTube channel, you'll see that we developed a technology that could go and scan a manta ray in its native environment. It was just amazing when we got the first known images of a pregnant manta ray in its own environment in the Maldives.

That was technology that our team developed to take ultrasound underwater. We're taking electronics to a reasonable depth. That's a pretty big challenge. That's an example of innovation and

bringing the team together. When that opportunity crossed our table, we scratched our heads, "How can we do this?" We've got a team of people together, and they worked it out. There's stuff in one great example.

We innovate in our service offerings all the time, and we're trying to develop new innovative ideas to really make the life of a vet easier. Vets are stressed. They're dealing with animals that can't tell them what's wrong. If you or I going to the hospital, we can at least tell the physician what's wrong. Whereas with the animal, they can't. Vets are stressed. They're busy, there's too much going on.

Our job, or how we see our job is to try and help them with either innovative products or indeed innovative solutions. That can be service solutions, it can be fact guides, it can be any number of different things to make their life easier. From an innovation perspective, that's key.

Partnership is our second value. That really comes around we want a long-term partnership with our vet customers, with our suppliers. As I said earlier, GE is one of our biggest suppliers, and we've worked with them for over 20 years, key organization for us. There's a very strong mutual respect for what we bring to the party and what they bring to the party. You've got to have a partnership with your customers. Otherwise, there's not a lot to do, not a lot of point getting out of bed in the morning.

Then through all of that learning is that our final value, and we all have to learn every day. We actively encourage all our team members to follow additional education. We will pay for some of that as well. We've got a number of people that's done MBAs and going through a variety of other coaching and mentoring schemes. As we learn and grow, that brings more opportunity for everyone.

Ultrasound and x-ray is an acquired skill, but you have to learn that and people get better through practice. It's all very well as I get selling an ultrasound machine or an x-ray machine but it's just a box of electronics unless somebody knows how to use it. We see our part in this journey really helping our customers and our prospective customers to get the very most out of their equipment.

We've got some fantastic active Facebook communities that have turned into forums now effectively with thousands of members who post interesting ultrasound pictures or x-ray pictures of their animals. The forum will then help those individuals identify what's wrong with that animal. Again, that's all effectively retailing medicine for the members of those groups. We see our part in that through helping grow the use of the technology and the understanding of the technology.

**CAROLINE:**

I love it. Love it. Just those real tangible examples will really help others about living those values and I can't wait to see this Montre video. We'll definitely put that in the resources. Gav, we talk about people, purpose, and profit and I ask every guest, which one comes first. What would be your answer to that and why?

**GAVIN:**

For me personally, I think I would start with people. The people lead to the purpose and the purpose will then lead to the profit. To have an engaged team of people you can achieve so much more than you can achieve yourself. I think it's then fear for that team of people to identify what the purpose really needs to be. We've set ourselves out to try and make it as simple and as easy for vets around the world to identify what's wrong with your animals when you take them into a vet clinic.

Through COVID, the one thing that we've seen is obviously a growth in puppies and everybody that you bump into now has a puppy that's probably costing two and a half thousand pounds. They're becoming key component parts of families that are very, very important element on helping people with their mental health. Therefore they become a family extension and people will spend any amount of money on that family extension to make sure that they're fitting well.

Our purpose is to make sure when that animal is ill, that you're going into a vet clinic and the staff are well-trained, they've got the right equipment, they know what they're doing, and they can minimize that stress caused to you and the family and the children about this sick animal. It's a fairly strong purpose and it's much more beyond than just selling an ultrasound or x-ray machine. That's what really drives us and our people are really engaged in that whole purpose. Right to the point where we're only recruiting people who believe in that type of purpose and that's it.

**CAROLINE:**

When people talk about purpose-led business veterinary diagnostic imaging companies, probably not the first thing that springs to mind. It's so clear from the way you've described it, your values, the team commitment, the customers, you talk about being the vets and of course the animals that that's exactly what you're all about. Do you think that's why you've been successful as an organization that you've got that clarity on doing something that's more than profit? Of course, profit is important.

**GAVIN:**

Caroline, I think it's awesome. I think we're just awesome.

**CAROLINE:**

[laughs]

Gavin: No, I think I stopped being facetious. I think an engaged group of individuals can achieve so much more and that for me is absolutely key. It does deliver through and we have been successful. We have grown. I've been in the business for 21 years now and we're now 10 times the size that we were back then. The next 5 to 10 years, we'll be 10 times the size again. That's the type of growth that we believe that we can achieve and it's about having the right people on the bus, Caroline. Absolutely. One of those management speaks rubbish things. Get it. It's about having people who get it, who want to deliver on that purpose, who believe in the values and want to make a difference in life.

**CAROLINE:**

It's just so critical. If you have engaged people and your purpose is-- People come to you, don't they? They'll come to your organization because they love what you do and they want to be part of that. I suppose it's helping them continue that journey really. What gives you the biggest sense of purpose Gav? You said you've been in the company for 21 years and I'm sure you've not changed a bit since then. What gives you biggest sense of purpose and has it changed since you started 21 years ago?

**GAVIN:**

The one thing that has happened Caroline is I have lost a fair amount of hair.

[laughter]

**GAVIN:**

Some things obviously change and that's probably been the stress of helping grow a business tenfold in that period of time. I think if I look back I was very naive 20 years ago. The business at that point was a relatively small business where we were literally about 15 people. It was around about-- We used to get excited about selling things. If we've had a good week and we'd sold £10,000 worth of stuff, we would've got excited and we would have celebrated as well.

We do still get excited about selling things. That's key, but the difference I'm seeing now is that's a means to an end. It's the purpose that I've described already that is a real satisfaction. When I see and I hear the stories coming in from our team of someone who has delivered for one of our customers or the customer has been able to diagnose a really difficult condition or that a transplant that has taken place in our equipment's being used in that transplant, or that stent has been put into an animal, who would have thought that you would have put a stent into an animal. These types of things are happening every single day. That's what I get a real buzz and a real satisfaction out of now.

The sales all come into it but the output of what I see has changed. I think that for me, is a real recognition that we've grown to size, now that we've got a momentum and a mass that keeps us going and therefore it's about how do we change the main set of the market rather than necessarily the main set of the company?

**CAROLINE:**

I love that. You're a large-scale company now that clearly does culture really well. What advice would you give for someone who's in an organization that's already established but until now, they've not really had any I suppose people are purpose-focused. Where should they start with changing that culture?

**GAVIN:**

The first thing that I would definitely say is this doesn't happen overnight. This is not like a light switch. You can't just decide one day that you want to be a purpose-driven business. You do need to step back from that. As a naive lad myself and co-directors, we used to get a lot of help from Scottish Enterprise. We had a fantastic advisor from Scottish Enterprise called Ute Beck who used to come in and talk to us on a regular basis every week, every two weeks and tell us about all these things. We were young, naive, we were working very hard and we didn't really believe everything that she told us.

Over time, having lost a bit of hair and everything else, you start to realize that listening to some wisdom around you is actually really important. The growth that's taken us 20 years to achieve, I think now, had we listened to Ute and some of our colleagues, we could have probably done it in half the time and probably with a lot less stress.

**CAROLINE:**

Is there anything you'd like to say to Ute now, Gav?

**GAVIN:**

Thanks, Ute, and I'm sorry. We're all sorry. The first thing is, it isn't a light switch moment. You've got to go into this with the right views and the right opinions. My thinking here is that you've got to actually think about the marketplace differently. We all spend far too much time thinking about how you compete with a competitor. How you get a few more percent market share from someone else. That's wrong. We should be thinking about how do you grow the market? How do you get the

change the perspective of the market? Through the work that you're doing, you will then get a bigger market share through growing the marketplace. That's one, think about the market. You've got to think about it differently and you've got to take a longer-term view on it.

Understand your customers is key to this as well, understand your customers' problems, what's their issues? Looking at innovative ways to help them solve them is also actually part of this journey about being purposeful. It's easier to be purposeful, to begin with, in your own sphere. Then once you've got a real good handle on that one sphere, you can then spread that to the wider bigger community. If you try and go to everywhere, to begin with, you'll get lost.

Think about your market, growing your market. Think about your customers and the problems that they face and address into them. Then opportunities present themselves, they'll come at you more quickly than you could actually deal with them all, and I would grab them all with both hands. Look at those opportunities, delve them out around the team, make sure everybody has something to do beyond their main job.

Then the final part of I guess my formula, I think would be that with the Generation Zs coming into the marketplace today, these are the people born 1997 through 2009. Those guys have a whole different perspective to us old fogies. Caroline, you're even older than me so you understand-

**CAROLINE:**

[laughs]

**GAVIN:**

-and you work with a group of innovative and amazing young people. We need to learn and we need to listen to that generation because if we don't, we'll be left behind. Those are just some of the keys to me is, think about your marketplace. Think about what your customers' problems are, and think a little bit longer-term about life and embrace the younger generations.

**CAROLINE:**

That's great advice Gav. Just let me dive a little bit deeper into giving the employees something to do beyond their main job, what would that look like?

**GAVIN:**

We do a number of things at IMV, in this space, we run what we call the sim meetings, and it's a continuous improvement culture. We meet monthly and there's a whole raft of business improvement that we do. That's generally across departments, across business and therefore to try and deal with it in our silo or in a small group is not really practical so it does involve the general wider business.

Everybody's busy doing their day job but continuous improvement is absolutely key for is evolving and growing as a business. Therefore what we look for is we look for volunteers to get involved in those continuous improvement projects. Some that could maybe only last two or three weeks, some that are much bigger, and will last much longer periods of time so that's one element.

Another element you mentioned right at the very start of this the BCF Foundation. Just to put a context around this, BCF technology was an organization that we grew. In December 17th, we sold that organization to IMV Technologies. That's when we then rebranded ourselves as IMV Imaging. The BCF Foundation, an OSCAR-registered charity was a mechanism for BCF to channel some of our profits, some of our energy into social good projects.

I'm definitely going to put my hands up here and say that over the last three years in our IMV world, we've dropped the ball in that space, 100% drop the ball. We've now recognized that and we're building on that again and bringing this, the CSR policy stuff back into the fold, back into the heart of what we do. Actually, our staff would tell you that, yes, we've gained IIP platinum. As I said, I only see that as a baseline, it needs to grow beyond there and we're not nearly as good in this space as we used to be and we can be again.

The foundation we've done all sorts of charitable stuff. We've been into schools, and we've transformed playgrounds of schools, gardens of schools, we've done triathlons for our team. We've done lots of other outreach-type projects. This is one of the great things, one of the challenges that we had with all of that was actually finding some of those projects. Why I'm excited about Social Good Connect, and what you bring into this marketplace for businesses like ours because I think it should actually open up the opportunities much better for organizations like us.

**CAROLINE:**

Listen, thanks for being so honest about that, because it's not easy to keep all these balls going and all the balls juggling and making it all happen. I suppose just understanding that there is real value in it, and as you say it's just seeing what you can do now.

**GAVIN:**

I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve. What I believe we did was we effectively sold our business to another organization. That integration process was actually fairly complicated. We went through a number of chief execs in the parent company, and AFDs in the parent company, so every time there was a change, there was a change in direction. It was so time-consuming that a lot of the 'nice stuff' that we really need to do as core of our business were forgotten about. We just didn't have the time and the energy to do that and that's wrong. I know that we feel that we're fully integrated and that we have now a real understanding of what our private equity our backed owners want from us, we can now deliver back into this space.

If you came and spoke to any member of the team who's been with us for 5 to 10 years, they would say, BCF used to be a more innovative place to work, than IMV is today. We've recognized that as a group of directors and we're actively putting in roots to get us back to where we were previously. This never stops, putting in a CSR policy, doing all the outreach, you cannot stop it once you start it, and if you do, you definitely go backward. There's a lot of time and energy that needs to do it, but it does gain a momentum and as you get more and more people in the organization involved and energized by it, the momentum gets very, very quick and it's actually always the other problem of slowing it down at times.

**CAROLINE:**

I suppose that challenge of the nice staff versus the critical staff. Do you think now more than ever is the time for people to re-dust off that old CSR policies, dust off the old strategies, and kick it into action?

**GAVIN:**

Seriously, when you look around the world today, and all the challenges that the world faces today, there's some organizations that have dealt with their customers terribly. There are some organizations I will never go near, again, as a customer, through some of the things that have happened over the last 12 months.

I think the organizations that will grow in success are the ones who actually have taken the time out to look after their customers and look after their staff. Staff retention through the COVID time has been really, really important for a lot of organizations. Some have obviously had used the furlough scheme and laying people off. When this marketplace opens up, again, I think you'll start to see people wanting a different thing in life. Flexibility will be key. I'm talking to you from home today, a great deal of our staff are working from home, you've got to trust them, you've got to delegate the authority.

Organizations that haven't looked after their staff, either who have maybe cut salaries and not put in mechanisms that they don't trust, who don't take into account, trying to homeschool children, as well as trying to do a full-time job as well as trying to do 10,000 steps today to keep on top of your mental well being. Hopefully, you've done yours already today, Caroline.

**CAROLINE:**

[laughs] Not yet. Not yet. Soon.

**GAVIN:**

That whole type of thing. Now is absolutely time for CSR to engage with your internal teams, and also to engage with your customers. It's a great opportunity to profile your business as a caring business who people want to do business with.

**CAROLINE:**

Fantastic. That's what we're seeing. That's what we're hearing is that- now is the time. A lot of businesses that we speak to will say, "We've been thinking about it for a while and we need to do more in this space." Of course, it's tough. Thanks to companies like you Gav, who are coming on board with Social Good Connect. That's what we're here to do is give that helping hand really, not just about volunteering in your community but that wider consideration around what a good CSR, ESG policy processes systems will look like. It all makes absolute sense. Listen, it's been an absolute pleasure speaking to you Gav. There's lots of great stuff that's really practical that people can listen to and start taking away from our conversation. Any final thoughts in this space?

**GAVIN:**

Final thoughts would be, it might seem daunting but so is jumping off a cliff and to log or into a lake. Quite daunting. You can stand there and you can freeze and not want to do it and there's very strong, powerful reasons as to why you don't want to do that. Delivery, as a leader, I think means that you've just got to get on with it. You've got to take that opportunity, set a clear vision as to where you're going. We've chatted around making sure that you're bringing the right type of people in. Make sure your recruitment processes are absolutely rock solid.

I spend the time and effort in recruitment rather than dealing with issues for the down line. Make the environment a fun, engaging environment to work in. Trust your staff. Virtual working will be more and more the root way forward. You've got to trust people. Amongst all of that, you've got to learn to smile and you've got to learn to be happy. If you can do all of that and take those types of principles into your team, then it will be a fulfilling place to work where you will do fulfilling work and you will, through all of that, get to leave some form of legacy in the world.

**CAROLINE:**

Great input Gav. Great advice. What leader are you? How would your team describe you as a leader in three words?

**GAVIN:**

I was on a call last week Caroline and this may give you a flavor of it. I'm quite a cyclist. I like my bike. I spent a fair amount of time on my bike and I just find it's great for mental health. I get out into the fresh air and just escape and get out there and ride my bike. There's a shop in Austin, in Texas and it's called Crank, like the crank of a bike. I had my crank t-shirt on last week whilst I was doing an all-teams call to the 60 odd people on my team. I got a message from two of them afterwards and saying that should actually have had a Y on the end of it. I don't know where they were at with that.

**CAROLINE:**

I've known you for a few years now and I would say yes to that one.

**GAVIN:**

You would say yes as well. I like to bring fun and I think a fun leader is key to this. Yes, I'm cranky from time to time and recognizing that I'm a lot better at recognizing it now than I was before. I think that comes with experience as well. Allowing people to go on with our job, delegating the authority, delegating the responsibility, making sure that all those monkeys are on their backs rather than my back I think it's-

[phone ringing]

-absolutely key for me. I'm a faithful and trusting boss and I will lead from the front and I will lead from the back and I'll be a team player. I'll get stuck into helping anybody do anything.

**CAROLINE:**

Fantastic. Thank you, Gav. I really, really appreciate you taking the time to share your words of wisdom. It has been an absolute pleasure.

**GAVIN:**

My pleasure to you as well. Thank you very much, Caroline.

[END OF AUDIO]