



HIGH FLYER

# A CLEAR VISION

Local business success story Mike Greene proves that determination, hard graft and clear life goals ultimately pay off handsomely. With his fortune secured Mike has now achieved the perfect balance between family life, work time and his charitable causes. Clive Simpson popped along to meet this inspirational character – and glean a few tips in the process.

**M**any of the most successful people have experienced their fair share of failure before going on to do great things. And international businessman Mike Greene would count himself as one of them.

Born and raised on council estates, he's worked hard to achieve a financially rewarding career after overcoming bankruptcy at the age of 27. Now he is a well-known business entrepreneur and angel investor, as well as a director of companies, trade associations, charities, marketing and retail organisations.

Mike greets me enthusiastically when I arrive at his family home in the heart of the South Lincolnshire Fens. We chat sitting at the corner of a large farmhouse table

in the family's bright garden conservatory on a fine summer's afternoon and it soon becomes evident that Peterborough's very own Secret Millionaire is a man with a mission. If there are any secrets when it comes to success in business and life then here might be some answers.

His appearance on Channel 4's *Secret Millionaire* programme in November 2011 was a life-transforming experience. 'It really consolidated my thinking about my past and its effect on what I have subsequently achieved,' says Mike. In the programme he became involved with various organisations working with underprivileged youngsters in Peterborough. 'It was a deeply moving experience and I was affected by how



selfless some people can be in giving so much of their time and emotion to these causes.'

But it was the kids themselves who proved the real eye-opener. 'Most of them had a really tough start in their lives and all of them had some real challenges to contend with. However, the ways in which they chose to deal with them were very different.'

Afterwards Mike sold his main business and took a three-month sabbatical during which he worked to raise £100,000 for 100 charities in 100 days.

His appearance on the programme and subsequent challenge inspired him to commit one-third of his time to helping charities and mentoring others to help change their lives for the better. 'We live in an instant world and too often we want a quick fix,' he observes. 'The National Lottery and programmes like X-Factor lead a lot of people to believe that we can get rich quick without hard work – but life isn't like that.'

Mike's own journey to fame and fortune stemmed from humble beginnings. His father abandoned the family when Mike was just a few years old, leading to eviction and living in an old people's home before being rehoused in cramped, rented accommodation. 'It wasn't until the family moved to Peterborough when I was 11 that I finally got a bed to myself and no longer had to share with my siblings,' he says.

'Despite the tough early years I always swore

that I would be a successful businessman. Even as a young boy I told my mother that one day I would be a millionaire. And I really believed it.'

Today, Mike is living proof of his own mantra: 'It's not where you start that matters, it's where you end up'. He's a respected global retail consultant, an international speaker, a professional mentor, a philanthropist, an endurance adventurer and a passionate charity fundraiser.

Above all he is a dedicated family man, with wife Julia and their two daughters, who were part of the reason for writing his first best-selling and inspirational book *Failure Breeds Success*. 'I wanted to capture my background, motivations and passions because I was conscious the girls live a very different life to my own upbringing. I wanted to pass that on,' he says. In a nutshell his book guides the reader through a series of steps to define what success means, in all its definitions, to them personally.

For Mike, life and business are inextricably connected. Whether it is mentoring enthusiastic young entrepreneurs or speaking to groups of several hundred he doesn't pull any punches. 'People spend more time planning their next holiday then they do the rest of their life. 'We look through brochures, search the internet and we talk, but we don't spend the same time thinking about what's really important to us – are we in the right place now, where do you want to be in three years, five or 10 years?'

The reality is that people who have a strategy, whether it be personal or business, massively outperform people without them.

And there's no escape for the small business either. 'Strategy maps for small businesses are equally important, if not more so,' says Mike. 'Often they'll be working with limited resources and that is all the more reason to have an honest plan in place.'

Mike illustrates the point using the recent World Cup as a metaphor. 'If we take the goal posts away, who's going to win, how can they score? It's the same in business and life. If you haven't even set a goal you can't see a goal, and if you can't see a goal you can't score a goal, so how can you win?'

Mike describes much of modern life as 'mindless', a world in which we rarely take time out to sit and think. 'Too often we live in fire-fighting or reactionary mode and we don't take the time to think 'what am I doing, what do I want to do, or where do I want to go?'

Whether for business or on a personal level, Mike is a great advocate of mixing with the right kind of people. 'According to American business philosopher Jim Rohn there is a natural tendency to become the average of the five people you spend most time with - income, attitude and everything else,' he says. It's a sobering thought and the clear message here is mix most with those that inspire and encourage you.



## Failure teaches you the most important lessons you will ever learn

When it comes to communicating effectively, Mike also thinks that many businesses, companies and organisations fall short of the mark. 'Many of us grew up in the generation of 'on a need to know basis' and today this kind of approach is very condescending,' he says. 'My business successes have all come from a very open line of communication, sharing with people exactly where we want to be and exactly how I believe we're going to get there. Getting their input and their commitment is important. And if you share a problem you'll be amazed at how much people step up.'

Mike currently supports a number of charities in the Peterborough area, has around 20 investments in start-up businesses and is on nine boards, five of which he chairs. He's also involved in organising a charity auction with Peterborough Lions Rugby Club.

'I think I've got just about a perfect balance,' he says. 'It's about as close as I can get it to a third of my life being personal and family time, a third work and a third charity. I'm still a 16-hour-a-day person, but it's a really balanced 16 hours.'

Largely because of his own life experiences, Mike still has something of a fascination with failure and turning the negative into something good. 'I have long harboured the notion that failure is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a very important part of our life journey,' he says. 'Failure teaches you some of the most important lessons you will ever learn and if you are attuned to these lessons you will emerge a stronger, wiser and more resilient person – and be equipped with all the ingredients for success.'

His ambition is to help others achieve their goals by sharing his stories and experiences through inspirational public speaking, and personal and professional mentoring.

Would Mike Greene the businessman make a good politician? He probably would, but it's not an area he wants to get involved in. 'I don't get involved in politics partly because I find it really hard to respect the moral compass and consistency of the people in charge,' he says. 'The reality is they're all as bad as each other. They



all promise stuff that they don't deliver on, but if you don't vote then you haven't got the right to argue.'

Mike is also a strong believer that career politicians are not the best people to be governing the country. 'Those who do politics in school, politics in university, then become a political aid and a politician – I just don't think they really touch or understand the real world,' he adds.

Perspective is also important and Mike learnt a valuable lesson from a personal mentor at a time when he was so absorbed in building his business he was in danger of missing the bigger picture. 'My mentor advised me to take time out to get a fresh perspective but I felt I didn't have the time,' Mike recalls. 'But he was quite blunt and said if you want me to mentor you then you need to listen to what I am saying.'

And so Mike took off and climbed a mountain. 'My mentor was absolutely right. It got me to look at the business from a distance with a proper perspective and without all the interruptions we normally have. I came back and was able to grow the business faster and bigger – and so every year since then I've undertaken something new and different.'

During each annual challenge, which have included climbing mountains, sailing, marathons and long distance cycling, he looks for maybe a dozen life lessons that can be applied to business. 'Last year when I was doing the sail training there were questions like 'why would the steering wheel on a boat be at the back as opposed to the front?'. Of course, in the sense of a sailing boat, if you steer from the front you can't see what's going on with all the crew, but the skipper or the helmsman being at the back can see every crew member, every sail and everything that's happening.'

'The metaphor I take from this is that it's not always necessary to lead from the front. Sometimes it's more effective and safer to lead from the back, where you can see everything that's happening.'

Experiences from the 2013 Clipper Challenge will form the basis of Mike's second book. Originally it was to be called *Eye of the Storm* but it's now in the process of being reorganised and written as 52 short chapters designed as a weekly guide to doubling business turnover in a year.

It is evident from our conversation that Mike is a great believer in practising what he preaches. 'You should live the life that you want to talk about and you should be the success that you advise on,' he says.

'I think any consultant – whether it's in cardiology or business – needs to show they are in control of their own habits, desires and goals. Otherwise how can you legitimately advise on



how to do this or that?'

And the strapline that underpins it all? 'It would be 'businesses need to be more charitable and charities need to be more business-like', he replies. 'Where the two meet in the community there's a sweet spot that is really successful. And when that happens it's the equivalent of Bourneville or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.'

We could have chat for longer but I realise time is pressing – and I now have my own goals to set and a strategy to plan. I leave full of inspiration and with what Mike likes to call his business card – a copy of his book *Failure Breeds Success*.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
on Mike Greene's charity work, mentoring and other work, or to order a copy of his book *Failure Breeds Success*, take a click over to his website [www.mikegreene.co.uk](http://www.mikegreene.co.uk)