Faces of the Company: Michael McGrath

"I was walking away from it all, looking for something new in my life," Michael McGrath says, recounting how weary he'd grown of the business world. "But my wife, Fiona, got ill; so, I offered to lend a hand, and fill in for her at Interconnection," he explains.

"Now I'm part of the team. It wasn't part of any plan but I wouldn't change it," he says, "it's unusual in here, unlike anywhere else I've ever been."

His earnest admission of how he was ready to swap corporate culture for carpentry is compelling; especially when you learn of how far around the 'block' he's been, occupying management roles within international companies, too numerous to count.

Agreeing to take a look at Interconnection's books, he began to enjoy again what he was on the cusp of jettisoning. And soon he started to grow into the role, almost unwittingly.

Natacha picked up on both his financial expertise and his influence in-house. Before he knew it, he had been given the keys to the building. Although almost a year has passed since, the sense of surprise he feels has yet to abate.

"I don't know everything!" Michael says in his trademark matter-of-fact manner, his shotgun honesty catching you clean between the eyes, "… so of course I look to those around me to share their ideas and insights."

Without blinking, he allows you to see what some might consider a vulnerable aspect. But it doesn't cost him a second thought. Then again, Michael is different to your run-of-the-mill Finance and Office Managers.

"If you respect people and are open with them, the sincerity is repaid," he explains, "and here you are given opportunities to challenge yourself, and take on jobs that you may otherwise shy away from; the space is afforded for you to progress. All you have to do is take it; it's something of a one-off really."

"What makes the difference is that things like faith and trust get placed in you," he explains, "and they combine to give you the confidence to take on new things, and strive for success; it all hangs on people engaging with each other."

"Elsewhere I have seen what happens to teams once the clock strikes a certain hour. They fall into robotic roles, and punch the hours until day's end," he explains. "Not here!"

"How many people can truly say they like their place of work? Money's well and good, and all that, but I stay for the people," he tells me without fuss or even a hint of embarrassment. "It might sound corny. I don't care. The place is like family."

So much so that when he tells me how he looks forward to Mondays, his willingness to utter the likes leaves me with no other choice but to believe him – converted by a reluctant workplace messiah.

Michael McGrath
Finance & Office Manager

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Welcome to InterconnectionforBusiness

Established in 2002, Interconnection is a Cork based Franco-Irish company which offers a range of services to Irish businesses.

Trade Missions
Looking to expand into the French marketplace? Searching for new business partners and suppliers in France? We can help. A Trade Mission is a 5-day fully accompanied trip to France, during which we introduce you to a number of potential clients and business partners.

Student Internships
Would your business benefit from an injection of new skills and experience, without the additional expense of hiring a new employee? We have a solution.

We can help you find a high-calibre student seeking internship in Ireland. Our students come from all over the world and backgrounds vary from accountancy and administration to engineering and IT just to name a few.

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WRITER: DAVID YOUNG | EDITOR: NATACHA NOWACK | DESIGN & PRINT: B2B PRINT

INTERCONNECTION FOR BUSINESS

TransNational News INTERCONNECTION

ISSUE IX

Summer 2010

Dear Readers,

Summer's long bright days are coaxing the best out of us.

And Interconnection is far from immune to the wily charms of lengthy sunbursts. With an eye to the horizon, we're embarking on a bold initiative to grow our language school.

In this edition, you will perhaps for the first time spy behind the scenes some of our dedicated teaching team; and how they create the culture of Interconnection Language School.

You will meet our Director of Studies, John O'Keeffe, who has been with us from the very beginning – guiding teachers and students to contribute their best to the learning environment.

This culture of shared endeavour is reflected in the attitude of the teachers who join this summer's newsletter. Deirdre O'Shea, Laura Olden and Iris Ketterick illustrate how everyone has something unique to offer.

You will also glimpse the language school's brand new website. Its construction and launch marks the next stage in Interconnection's evolution. The very development is one we all are very excited about.

Aptly, Donal Molloy of HR Consult, tells us in *Expert Input*, just how to strike the right in-company balance to keep your team pulling in the same direction.

Michael McGrath is the *Face of the Company;* he's also its 'financial' conscience. For that, alone, we are eternally grateful!

Enjoy the read.

Natacha Nowack,
Editor

TRANSNATIONAL INTERCONNECTION LTD

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

How I got into language teaching?" John muses, almost taken aback "I would say I got into it from…hmm…that's a very good question. I never really asked myself that before."

But once posed of the astute Director of Studies of Interconnection Language School, he methodically dismantles his early influences and eventual motives.

"I was struggling with German in school…and I remember a very patient teacher encouraging me not to give up on the language; this is probably why I'm still pursuing it today," he offers, in a singular stream of open reflection.

"But I still wasn't thinking then of doing anything along those lines," he says, pondering how it all fell into place. "My third-level studies were all humanities oriented though, and they led me to an internship overseas before finishing college."

These early experiences whittled John's sense of the vagaries of grappling with more than just a mother tongue. "You never really have a language; you've got to work at it. It's like water in your hand," he says.

This pared down view of what it takes to acquire communicative competence in a second code, let alone a third, also stems from his first foray into his profession. With a mere smattering of Polish, he embarked on a sojourn to Central Europe, which somehow extended to a three-year stay.

"It was tough in the early days to get a handle on things," he willingly concedes. "And I still struggle with the language. But I do go back regularly." John credits this period as the time that really intensified his interest in languages and their very mechanics.

As he retraces his own steps, it becomes ever more evident that there is a natural empathy for all language learners. Wearing his heart on his sleeve, he walked through Interconnection's door in 2007, and soon afterwards found himself entrusted to establish its school.

Armed with a BA in History, Politics and Social Studies and an MA in European Integration, John set about instituting an environment in which students would find themselves at the centre of their own learning.

John O'Keeffe: Director of Studies At Interconnection Language School

Thus far, he has successfully created a culture of togetherness between them and their teachers. "Students very quickly appreciate that they can approach any of the teaching team at any time," he explains. "It's what sets us apart – we afford our students that extra attention as a matter of course. It's just how we do things."

"You could say that our school has a unique atmosphere," he continues, "we follow through with our students; mindful of how they get on beyond the classroom." It's a human touch that has become the hallmark of how O'Keeffe keeps the essence of the place from being diluted.

Now more than ever, the expansion of the school "the right way" is at the forefront of his mind. Perhaps it's O'Keeffe's spontaneous nature or the sheer vindication of having laid the foundations, but you cannot help feel that this next step is one he's been keenly looking forward to making for quite some time.

In truth, it's probably what brought him here in the first place.

WRITER: DAVID YOUNG | EDITOR: NATACHA NOWACK | DESIGN & PRINT: B2B PRINT

A Peek behind the Teaching Scenes

Meeting Some of the Team

Deirdre O'Shea

"Teaching at Interconnection was the itch I just had to scratch," says Deirdre O'Shea, explaining how a word-of-mouth reference prompted her to make her move.

Ever since she has revelled in the daily curve balls Interconnection has thrown her way: juggling classes of all levels and exam preparation – all while bringing the finer points of grammar home to enthralled students.

"I'm a people person," she admits, "and I just love meeting new faces and building rapport with students; it's a real buzz!" The bubbly mother can probably credit her two young girls for her limitless reserves of patience and ready enthusiasm, which are always evident in her coaching.

The holder of a degree and a higher diploma in Science, Deirdre cannot resist getting her groups on their feet, moving and speaking – generating energy. But she has a mellow side too.

"I'm always delighted to hear from students who've moved on; telling me of results or even just saying hello," she says.

Laura Olden

"My first class was a group of engineers, looking to experience Irish culture," Laura fondly remembers, "and we put together a course comprising history, sport, music, dance, folklore and legends…using instruments, video, audio, you name it."

Deirdre O'Shea, Laura Olden, Iris Ketterick (L - R)

"We had the most entertaining and informative classes," she says. "The students' proficiency improved dramatically, almost effortlessly; without them thinking too much about it."

With a closer look at Laura's vast business experience, you guess how devising courses comes as second nature. "For many years in Cork I ran a computer business," she says, "teaching in schools, the commercial sector and the medical profession, throughout Munster."

"Then I left to teach in Spain, where I had students from the police force, legal profession and the tourist industry," she continues "while also running a property business."

Although this resourcefulness is part of her teaching blueprint, she has another insight into the Interconnection immersion experience. "As a host mother as well as a teacher, I'm aware of what overseas students face by way of daily challenges, both inside and outside the classroom."

Iris Ketterick

"I'm fascinated by how we pick up language," Iris says, "in my studies I've examined how this happens in children naturally." And now, in her adopted city of Cork, she follows that linguistic path, with her love of understanding language reflected in her daughters' bilingual abilities.

Qualified in the Netherlands to teach both Social Sciences and Psychology, Iris has translated her admiration for the English language into a career at Interconnection. Her interest though is also couched in knowing what suits her students.

"Interconnection is a young organisation, with a mission to help young professionals to gain experience in their work field," she explains. "The team is dedicated and motivated to match the ideal work placement to the ideal candidate."

Of course, there's always a natural reward. "I enjoy teaching so much; I get to meet so many people from so many different countries; I get a real kick out of helping people to improve their language skills," she says, with an infectious gusto; a rare asset.

INTERCONNECTION *Language School*

Interconnection Language School is taking the next step in its remarkable development.

Fully established a few short years ago, it is a now a recognised learning centre in Cork City, Ireland; with the Advisory Council of English Language Schools and the Irish Department of Education saluting its professionalism.

The school's roots stretch back more than ten years though. Founder and Director, Natacha Nowak, responding to the language-learning needs of her business clients, began providing English classes.

Success brought further progress until it reached the point where a new roof had to be added to the Interconnection enterprise.

Since then, the school has assembled a team of teachers second-to-none. Here you'll encounter a cohort of mentors who'll take you along at a pace of your choosing.

Actually, they are happiest when you throw down the gauntlet with special requests. It's just the way they work.

As such, it is no surprise that once you sit into a group you are met with a ready expertise and robust support network. And the classes are purposely maintained at tutorial sizes, so that you can benefit from the extra time this affords you.

For the working person, there are evening classes so that you can keep improving your English, despite having a busy schedule.

Naturally, all aspects of language learning are covered but there is very much a special emphasis placed on advancing your spoken ability.

As an authorised test centre for the TOEIC exam (the Test of English for International Communication), rest assured the teachers are fully-equipped to determine how well you will cope in everyday workplace activities.

They can also prepare you for the internationally-accredited Cambridge First Certificate and IELTS exams – focusing on exam technique and assessing you ahead of the day of reckoning.

If you choose to undertake an internship initiative, one of the cornerstone programmes, the teaching team will prepare you over a number of weeks in carefully designed and intensive lessons – all to ready you for your time in the real world!

Then again, if seeking specialised training courses to suit your professional language needs, you will be able to improve your proficiency in any number of areas: from making presentations to chairing and participating in meetings; from negotiating with corporate clientele to socialising and entertaining with cultural awareness.

Cork people may always have boasted how special their city was. But now the place is regarded as one of the top ten places to visit in the world.

Now how did they describe us again? "Sophisticated, vibrant and diverse" – that's it!

Interconnection Language School is part of that special cultural blend. In the city widely regarded as the 'real' capital of Ireland, the school has established its very own niche. Take a look for yourself:

www.i4languages.eu

French Students: Solène Randu, Pierre Massot

ExpertInput: Donal Molloy

"How do you feel going to work?" Donal Molloy intones - just enough for you to begin to really consider what otherwise might come across as a rhetorical question. Then he rephrases, to elicit more precisely your thoughts. "How would you want to feel?"

Patiently, he waits while you formulate your fuzzy ideas – all of which clumsily hinge to some degree or other on being shown some respect. And then very smoothly, he backs you up.

"Exactly. Respected, fairly treated… appreciated. They are fundamentally important to any workplace and any team," he says.

Molloy encapsulates readily what most of us need time to phrase about how we want to be considered by our colleagues. "If you want to get the very best from your team, you simply have to make the effort to gauge how they feel," he says.

"It's necessary to survey in-house to allow people to contribute not only to their position but that of the company." A one-man human resources department, Donal Molloy does what it normally takes a team to achieve. He specialises in what matters most for any company: its people; its most valuable resource.

As he dispenses these nuggets of wisdom, you can't help thinking that there is something incongruous at play. And then you spot it. His youthful visage belies the lengthy road he has already travelled while serving his time in leading national and international companies.

Owner/Manager at HR Consult

But what has kept him fresh and far from the jaded rhetoric of hackneyed HR-speak? With over twenty years of honing his 'human' skills, Molloy believes in what he's doing.

He's also now growing his own company, HR Consult, alongside those with whom he liaises – invariably becoming an invaluable component in their mix. Since 2006, Molloy has been creating cost effective solutions for small to medium-sized enterprises; illuminating how to navigate from recruitment to redundancy.

This pioneering spirit of valuing people is one that resonates through Interconnection. The ethos of providing one's working team with the means by which they can fulfil their roles simply makes sense to Molloy. "It harnesses people's true potential – and the benefits are soon seen."

Molloy's seen it all before. And he knows what it takes to rebuild fractured relations within companies of all sizes. He's realistic though: "It doesn't happen overnight….it's a gradual turn-around…and it's all about rebuilding trust, opening the lines of communication."

"If you give commitments…follow through… and re-earn trust…and that can take months…" he offers. "…communication is critical."

As he tells you of how it "takes time", and of how "you just have to let it grow and develop", he convinces. His style is diplomatic, firm yet instantly familiar and engaging.

With a young family, all three under ten years of age, this man can be nowhere else but on his toes as he navigates school runs and drop-offs for swimming lessons. Somehow, he keeps HR Consult spinning like a plate on a stick.

And still he is there for Interconnection amongst myriad others, relishing the adrenalin-driven world of being all things to all people: sales, marketing, finance…and father.

"I just love working with businesses and making a difference," he explains, "and even more so when they're brimful with get-up-and-go. It's what has me working with Interconnection. Natacha's serious about doing things right."

And that makes him smile.