

Forge Podcast with Jody Wainwright.mp3

Peter Wooding: [00:00:07] Welcome to the Forge Leadership Podcast. This week we go digging for leadership diamonds as we interview Jody Wainwright, Director of Boodles the British fine jewelry firm.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:19] Well welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast. Today I am joined by Jody Wainwright. Jody is a Director of Boodles the fine jewelry company, the British fine Jewelry company. Many of you may have seen their shops in Harrods or New Bond Street or in the Savoy or in Chester or Liverpool and Jody, you're joining me from Liverpool today is that right.

Jody Wainwright: [00:00:43] I am on in my office on a rather wet day.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:47] Fantastic. Well let's start off with you telling us a little bit about yourself and about Boodles and how does one become a Director of a fine jewelry company, I'm really keen to hear about that.

Jody Wainwright: [00:00:57] Thank you Simon. I've been in the business for some 17 or so years it's a family business and it's in my family so I am actually the sixth generation of Wainwrights in the business and I started off in the church on leaving school actually working for the church for four year and came to a crossroads whether I get ordained or not and I felt actually maybe I should just have a look at business for a year and then come back to ordination or something else. And a year in the business kind of sold it to me that this is what I meant to be. So I've been doing this for 17 years and I love it. Yeah absolutely. In that place I think I meant to be

Simon Barrington: [00:01:40] Brilliant. So for those who don't know about poodle's tarsal about the company it's been going quite a while hasn't it.

Jody Wainwright: [00:01:45] Yes it has. Well actually this year is 220 years for us and 1798 we kicked off. History is perhaps not checkered in a bad way but we had our own jewelry company H. Wainwright & sons which going back 6 generations my grandfather started and then we kind of took over Boodle and Dunthorne in the early 1900s. They were competition is a strange thing to do but we got through a couple of wars a few wars and some challenges along that quite long history and really the last 30 years we've developed more into a brand of you like. Still a very long way to go but we moved from just being a provincial jeweler at that time with local where we started and Chester my grandfather opened in the 60s and then Manchester and my uncle who is now the M.D. went to London 30 years ago and we now have five or six actually just opened a new shop in London, six shops down there. So we're you know we're retailers but we design in-house we've got four wonderful designers and we make all the jewelry in-house. We don't actually own the workshops but we effectively subcontract most of the work for the two workshops that we normally deal in. And as I said we you know we are retailers very much at the front end or the last stage of a diamonds journey.

Simon Barrington: [00:03:17] Fantastic now you specialize in looking out for great diamonds and great jewels yourself as part of your role isn't it. So tell us about that and that's like that sounds really interesting. What does that involve you in and what do you get involved in as you seek to get the best fine jewellery out there for your customers.

[00:03:37] Yeah it's a role that I think probably started when I was about eight or nine with my father come home and open his briefcase and say what do you think the weight of this stone is, what do you think of that ruby, how do you think about this Sapphire. I kind of grew up hearing about without a great passion for certainly an awareness and it was sort of normal for us to be around

gemstones you know it's what we do and so since I've been in the business I started on the shop-floor, worked my way through done various things. And it's really the last 10 years I've been doing what I really love I suppose 50 per cent of my time is taken up with sourcing of our diamond's and our precious gemstones and that really is you know it is glamorous and it's not glamorous at the same time. There are moments like in any job then there's trips to Hong Kong or Antwerp and New York etc.. Often it's a lot of its done on the phone. But what's really lovely about that role is its all relationship. So the people we buy from we've selected very carefully many of them known for many many years and there are a close knit group of key relationships. For example next week, Saul from New York who supplies a lot of our Shoka cut diamonds that's a particular shape for a diamond - gorgeous stone. He comes over with his wife want's to have supper with Kirsty and I and you know I was at his daughters wedding last year we are good friends. You know he's 60 years old and I'm just past 40 , there's a gap there and it is a business relationship. There's lots of friendships within what looks like a very exciting world of diamonds and actually it's people and it's stories and it's relationships that drives what is a great product. No question.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:25] Now on your website it says that you know when you see a good diamond it's a bit like falling in love I mean tell me a little bit about that. You know what do you look for in a stone. And what excites you when you see something which you know is going to excite the people that you're selling to.

Jody Wainwright: [00:05:46] Well let me just say first of all we've got three great ladies in our PR team who write those comments as much as I proof it and give my comments they put it in their language so it is a bit like falling in love again looking at a diamond that you really love but you know it's not quite at the same level as falling in love with my wife Kirsty. Let's clear that up.

Simon Barrington: [00:06:09] It's good to have that clear.

Jody Wainwright: [00:06:11] You know what is exciting though, You know is when you see I remember hearing a very different story of but a similar theme running through of how does one spot a false ten pound note. Actually, the best training for that was to get real ten pound notes all day long and then suddenly you come across one that isn't real and you see the difference. Diamonds not to say real diamonds are not real diamonds but when you've got so many diamonds that you're looking at they're all beautiful but actually when you see a really good one in a rather reverse role to the ten pound note it jumps out at you. And you open diamonds when I'm on a buying trip there in little Brivka just like an envelope, a small paper envelope that they come in. And I'll be going through them the certificate before I look at the stone tells you one part of the story so I know what to expect and you look at a stone and think that's lovely that's lovely. Oh that is really lovely and it's just the X Factor it's finish, like a beautiful piece of furniture it's been crafted well, the material is bright. It has got the same certificate as that stone but somehow it just speaks volumes compared to that stone. There's just something about which, the way it's finished, it's just a lovely stone. You get an eye for and then that's my opinion as well of course you know I've acquired my own preferences for shapes of stones, but it's, it's an exciting experience.

Simon Barrington: [00:07:33] Fascinating. Now you talked about you know going into the church to work for the church originally and then coming out of it and starting your leadership journey in Boodles through being on the shop floor and then moving up. What have you learnt about leadership on that journey and how have you been shaped as a leader. Did you always know you were a leader or is that something that's come in later life really.

Jody Wainwright: [00:07:59] No I became a Christian when I was 19 and then I started hearing of lot of things about leadership and I think I probably felt other than feeling wonderful about knowing Christ, that's really one area that I'm struggling with is knowing am I a good leader. What am I

leading. Leaders need people to follow them, so whose following me and at various stages in my life I've not really had people following me. You can't be much of a leader if people are not following you and yet at the same time we are called I believe all of us actually as Christians to be leaders definitely we have a message that people have to follow its the most important message that anyone will ever . So, it makes every Christian leader has to be. At the same time there are good leaders and bad leaders and I think I could probably write more about where I've not been a good leader than I could about where I have been. I think part of my biggest challenge to be asking how that's developed has probably been in the area of being quite task focused, you know I have an opinion of things quickly quite often wrong, but I believe things quite passionately I'm quite passionate as a person. So, I find it hard to listen to other opinions or I have done. I realise now that that is something there is a blind spot, so it's no longer a blind spot if you like and a work in progress. You know listening to people is definitely one thing I don't always have the right answer and given that nature in me I've had 17/18 years in the business I've seen where I've been wrong a number of times and it does make you reflect because I'm still in a position of leadership so I have to correct it I have to learn from it. You know usually its issues to do with staff who are going to come good or not and there's a difficult decision there. There's a question of patience, waiting, being absolutely fair. I've in the past just jumped in and made a decision about people a bit too soon and realised gosh people can come good and actually quite often with the right support they do come good. So ,which is a good thing in business because it's much easier to work on people you have than to go out plucking in thin air wondering if there's somebody who's going to be excellent tends not to happen that way. So conveniently I've learnt to listen to people.

Simon Barrington: [00:10:16] Yeah it's often the hard moments isn't it where we're faced with difficult decisions and when we make bad decisions and we have to then I call them a dark nights so the soul really where we were then had to get back up and live out again that shape us and inform who we are. What are the kind of values and beliefs that you would say you have as a leader that you try and live out on a daily basis and that impact your decisions and the way that you make decisions in the business.

Jody Wainwright: [00:10:50] Well I think I said one or two of them just then but I am certainly developing my listening skills my pastoral approach. You know I'm more of an Evangelist if I was to be in a different world than the business one than a pastor, so developing that. I think really for me it is the value placed on people that I've learnt and I think you know of course you know people are the whole point not a means to an end. But actually I now realise I do think I realise that I probably hadn't realised that. So it's not just about getting the job done. It's about the people that you have on the way that matter and people can improve. That's really a key one for me.

Simon Barrington: [00:11:34] And how have you kind of worked on that I suppose in your daily life I was talking to a coach recently and they were saying you know often with leaders at your kind of level it's about re learning the soft skills re learning the engagement with people's lives and the things that matter to them. Would you say that that's true and then and had how do you work that out on a daily basis. What's that look like.

Jody Wainwright: [00:11:59] I think when I do pray for specific people in our company it's 110 so it's not that many you get God's heart for them I can't shortcut that. This is really for me the key which is to see people as as God sees them. And when I do that it changes you, your heart softens, or you know it prompts you to ask more questions than you might ordinarily or if you racing around it with lots going on, it calms me down. I think actually you're never going to get away from the fact that prayer is the starting point for me. The second thing is that there's three other family members in the business with me and I am a director, my cousins a Director. My father's Chairman and his 10 year younger brother my uncle is now MD so there's a jolly good sounding board and the learning how do I learn by actually listening to them. You know we've got a situation at the moment

that I can't go into but quite an awkward predicament that I am in which I am handling but I'm not on my own. I'm very fortunate that there are three others I can say, look, this is where it's at. You know it will affect all of us the outcomes, it's not major but it's quite an important situation and so just hearing and thinking ok, well three of them all think vaguely that thought or have that sentiment towards this. I'm in the storm, if I was to get out of the storm I'd probably be thinking like they are so they're probably right on balance and so there's that lovely ability to step back by people who are also battling for Boodles in the same way that I am. They're decent people, they're good people, quite balanced and with more experience than me.

Simon Barrington: [00:13:39] Lots of people I talk to find it very hard to actually live out their Christian faith in a secular workplace and I'm sure in a company like Boodles you know your interfacing with people who have faith and no faith, clients and customers in various different ways. How do you keep your faith sharp and focused in that kind of context and what gives you the boldness and courage I suppose to live that out and to say that you can pray for God's heart for people in a very secular context.

Jody Wainwright: [00:14:17] The first thing is knowing I'm called to the job that I'm doing. I won't go into it now but there's been a couple of times we took time out of the business. My wife, family and I went to do a YWAM DTS and take the 5 months out of the business at an opportune time when we left Ireland in 2009 to say Lord is it really still what you want. Now I was hoping the answer was going to be yes but I wasn't sure. I think Kirsty was really lacking in a husband that was really with her. I think I was busy building the business in Ireland, setting up a new shop. We had young kids and she was exhausted and I wasn't at my best and she was hoping the answer would be no and you know I was hoping the answer would be yes because I love it and the Lord called us both to carry on. The first thing I think is you know that we are called to be in this business therefore there's a confidence to do what I'm called to do. Now your question is how do I keep sharp - I can revert back to that calling. I think there's plenty of challenges that one faces in a business like ours. Not only the greed and gluttony attached to the top end of society people buying things that they probably don't need but at the same time my views is that God's put them in the ground, He's given us these beautiful things, the Bible talks about them and within reason and the context of people's lives it's a blessing. But it is a challenge it really is and I feel for me it's being uncompromising in certain aspects. You know there's tax related integrity. Customers, it seems the more wealthy some customers get the more they feel they don't need to pay taxes that they should and I start very firmly you know in the boat that we pay what we pay otherwise we can't do the deal. There's been plenty, there's been a few significant deals that I have had to walk away from because of tax related you know it is because of tax related issues, that some would have been fine with and I think that some other jewelers would have done it, grey areas but they're not grey to me if my conscience is playing up. So those kinds of things keep me sharp. Just, I think when I do pray for our business and for my people within the business I get God's heart for it and doors open you know that wouldn't have opened otherwise. So, prayer is probably the main thing for me.

Simon Barrington: [00:16:48] That's fabulous and I know I'll be a great encouragement to other leaders and particularly younger leaders who are setting out on their leadership journey as you're seeking to raise up younger leaders. What do you look for in the character and the competence?

Simon Barrington: [00:17:07] Passion. Why passion.

Jody Wainwright: [00:17:10] Passion speaks of, you know we talk about hiring on attitude not aptitude. You know the ability often follows with our best people and we're looking for people who are good people actually who love people and enjoy their company those are our best sales people. You know I go round our shops, nobody needs a piece of jewelry. You need a car a house in this society and depending on your means you go with you know what you can afford but actually

jewelry is the end of the list. No-one needs it. It's the add on which is actually our biggest strength because it's all feel good. It's about you know someone who's worked jolly hard and he wants to treat his wife off the back of selling his business and I think that's a really nice and we're there to make that experience for them, celebrate it with them, enjoy their company. And to do that you need to be good listening, you've got to ask questions. You've got to remember their names, their children's names perhaps or if they go on a holiday, how was the holiday last September when they pop back in the following year show an interest. So I think people who've got passion for jewelry and passion for people they tend to do quite well in Boodles.

Simon Barrington: [00:18:20] And do you find that's quite rare. I mean do you have to look really hard to find people who understand that business is about building relationships, business is about people, business is about getting to know and understand the various characters that you're working with and their differences and their joys and their diversity. Do you find it difficult to find people who have those kind of skills.

Jody Wainwright: [00:18:47] I think often like most people have something a very extrovert will all say most people have passion. It just comes out in different ways on many levels. For us we probably need people who are passionate on an extrovert level, they're good at talking, they've got something to say they're interested in life so they can talk to our customers about what's going on in the papers they're not just trying to sell a piece of jewelry, they are trying to create a relationship and authentically. Can we find them easily? I think there's a lot of people who are extroverts out there and often life has beaten them up a bit and we're not about counselling people but in a roundabout way I suppose do we come alongside our staff, you know we know them all and I like to think our, I think I mean I know our people enjoying working for us. They enjoy the way they're treated. we treat them well, we pay well. We're compassionate and I think all those things help people feel wanted and to feel respected and to feel loved and off the back of that safety net is you know comes a passion actually comes a rising up and a confidence. People feel secure so they're able to express themselves which is format we're after.

Simon Barrington: [00:20:08] Now how has that Bible shaped your leadership in particular is that really you know forefront of mind when we talk about leadership and the role in the workplace. I have talked to many Christians who find it quite hard to apply the Bible to their workplace. What is it from scripture that kind of informs the way that you lead and your values and your beliefs.

Jody Wainwright: [00:20:33] Yeah, I love the Bible, I was at Bible school for two years when I shortly after I became a Christian and it was a very precious time, you know I read the Bible thoroughly and still remember Scriptures picking them out of thin air and they are just sort of in me. I do love the word. I find one that gives me, I think to be a good leader you've got to know who you are before God and that he is your boss and that you're boss loves you and that he's your Father, He's your Dad and so Psalm 139 is a Psalm I memorised years ago and I love the sense that God is absolutely with us, He knows us intimately, before we speak. Before we get up, he knows. Before we were born, knitted together in our mother's womb, all of that. So, I feel for a leader, whilst it doesn't talk about going out and reaching people like Paul might do later on in Romans, or Hebrews, that Psalm is one which just establishes a man or woman and I think we have to established in order to lead people. We have to know who we are of course then who we are in Christ and I think Ephesians 1 and 2 I don't know how many times it says "in Him" in Ephesians 1 but you know the message there is we are in Him. And so there is that sense of just been part of something and we're called by this, this Kingdom. And we have this authority behind us to do things, you know all things are possible. Yeah I mean I wouldn't know quite how to be more specific.

Simon Barrington: [00:22:08] No, that's fantastic and as a massive security in that isn't there in

being able to lead out of knowing who you are and knowing who you are in Christ and knowing who you are established in Him.

Jody Wainwright: [00:22:19] The current stage of Boodle, six generations in we've been very much micromanaging our way through. So we've gone through three shops in ten in the last 30 years. We've had quite quick growth and with that comes a lot of infrastructure growth and different new roles, departments, job descriptions. I feel a bit like Moses situation where his Father-in-law said look you need more people to help you you are carrying the can here. And my Father has run the business as he should have done actually on everything and in everything. I feel a little bit like Moses' advice we need more Senior people. You can't take your eye off the ball. You need to know what's going on in your business if you are running it. You can't abdicate responsibility which some people who delegate would do. But I think delegating certain areas we could grow in that for my company where I am at. It's know who are the people that really carry the vision of this business, who have integrity that perhaps have the passion to drive it in a way that we would choose and one reason we haven't franchised the business out and expand it that way is because we don't feel people will replicate how we do business. We like being at our parties, we like being with our customers, we like being with shops in their events. So on one hand we've got the Moses problem but we've also to grow with it and who can take the vision forward in broader way. So Moses is pretty helpful.

[00:23:44] Yeah and you can't do those things too quickly can you really if you're going to establish the core values of the organisation you need people who who get that and have the passion as you say and also are trustworthy to do that for you.

Jody Wainwright: [00:23:57] I think Simon my experience and what I've seen from my father and my uncle is growing your own wood is critical in any business. Knowing, bringing people up who go the journey with you and they get it you know they see it they become part of it. Buying, for us you know in a rather contrived way, buying someone in on a senior level works in football but doesn't tend to work in Boodles. You know we need people who get our way have our DNA in them, know our little way, know how we like to treat our customers, know our little systems. So yes it takes time, you're dead right.

Simon Barrington: [00:24:39] Brilliant. Well Jody Wainwright thank you so much for joining us on a podcast today. I'm going to look in the Boodles window with more interest as I go into London this afternoon and walk down New Bond Street and I know that many of our listeners will just be so encouraged to hear of the Biblical foundations that you have in your life and the way you live out your your faith in a top end retail jewelers, so Jodi thanks so much for joining us today.

Jody Wainwright: [00:25:06] It's my pleasure. Thanks so much.

Peter Wooding: [00:25:08] Thanks for listening. More jewels next week as we interview the man responsible for a global network of outdoor activity centres. Don't miss an episode by making sure you subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher, TuneIn or SoundCloud or wherever you get your podcast. Don't forget that we love your feedback. You can e-mail us at hello@forge-leadership.com or follow us on Twitter or Facebook.