

If you're enthusiastic and motivated to learn, you might just be lucky enough to meet an individual who guides you through the early years of your working life. Through their practical and pastoral guidance, they help you set goals, achieve standards and reach milestones, shaping your career and your future.

Andrew Lloyd was lucky enough to have such a mentor in the Arsenal Grounds Manager, Steve Braddock. He shares his story with Pitchcare.

MASTER OF ALL HE SURVEYS...

Andrew Lloyd met Steve Braddock when he was five years old as pupils at the same primary school. As a teenager, he went on to play Sunday League football at the Royal Veterinary College where Steve was groundsman. The players collectively referred to the pitch there as 'the carpet', recognition that later led to George Graham offering Steve the Arsenal job.

Aged 20, Andrew left the country seeking new horizons, travelling to Israel where he worked on the collective community land at a Kibbutz for two years. After leaving the Middle East he moved on to Australia, working in agriculture, engineering and on a golf course during his months in Sydney and Brisbane.

The opening of Arsenal's Colney training ground in 1999 opened up fresh opportunities for ten new faces on the groundstaff and, upon his return to the UK, Andrew became one of them. The £10 million state-of-the-art development, built by Leicester-based Hewitt Sportsturf, contained ten full size pitches and a training area for goalkeepers.

Andrew had no formal groundsmanship training or qualifications but Steve was happy to teach him, the only prerequisite being a good attitude, dedication and commonsense. His internal training focused on the core tasks of pitch maintenance - cutting, marking out, spiking, aerating. A year on, and following good progress, Andrew was made second in charge.

"I guess I've always had a natural aptitude for working on the land" he summarised. "Added to that was my passion for the club as a lifelong fan and spectator."

All renovation work was completed in-

house and Steve and Andrew began to add to the fleet of specialist machinery.

"We were one of the first clubs in the UK to have a Koro" said Andrew, and I remember going to Rotterdam to see it in action. The invention of a machine that could take the surface off in one pass was a pivotal moment for anyone involved in sportsturf. It revolutionised the way we carried out renovations. From then on, I became the big machinery specialist at the training ground because I could keep my concentration for long periods of time - you had to with a possible 98 sprinklers to Koro over!"

Time for change

During his last two years at Arsenal, Andrew became increasingly dispirited. With a young family, the long summer hours became problematic. He wanted to remain in the industry but had a hunger for a new challenge.

"For more than six months I read trade magazines, researched on the internet and considered my options. I didn't want to go down the contracting route but needed to find a way to channel my skills into a venture that would also fit around my family."

"In the summer of 2007, I met up with Bob Underhill from Lawn Master. I'd seen his advert in Pitchcare and wanted to know more. He chatted to me about my background, family and ambitions for the future and explained that he was looking for professional turf managers with ambition, drive and good customer service skills to become Lawn Master depots."

"I was looking for a way to use the skills I'd learnt at Arsenal, with the flexibility to raise a family so I could build a better future for us all."

"Steve was one of the first people I



spoke to about it. He told me to think very carefully before making any decisions and was concerned about how I'd make money during the winter months. It was huge decision, with significant financial implications but, ultimately, a decision that only I could make."

"As with any new business venture, finance is a critical issue. I'd be leaving behind 80-100 hours overtime per month at the club and that gave me some wobbly moments. I discussed my concerns with my wife, friends and family. Bob suggested I spend a day working with Spencer Haines, a former Golf Course Manager who had joined Lawn Master the previous year. Spencer had made enormous strides since taking the decision to leave his golf club and appreciated the opportunity to talk openly and candidly with someone who had been in my position only a few months previously."

"As I was unable to raise the full amount of capital needed to buy the franchise, Bob agreed to defer the payments until I'd established an income. Slowly, the pieces fell into place and my decision was made. Eight months



TRAINING CENTRE

“It’s all about quality rather than quantity, but you do have to strike a balance”



after my search began, and with Steve’s reluctant support, I left Arsenal in March 2008.”

Hitting the ground running

St. Albans, where I live, is an affluent area but my Lawn Master venture began just as the phrase ‘credit crunch’ started to pop up with alarming regularity in the headlines. I admit feeling some trepidation until I completed my first quote. After that I felt totally at ease - I’d taken the plunge and I was flying. In my van I have a Dori scarifier and I spent the first three months permanently attached to it! I’d spent a considerable amount of time on a tractor at the training ground and the intensity of the physical work was a huge shock to the system!”

“To launch our service in the local area, which also covers Barnet and Harpenden, leaflets were sent to more than 110,000 homes so I had a reasonable volume of work right from the start. I don’t think I could have accommodated much more if I’m honest. I’ve learnt what does and does not work in terms of promotion but, by far the most common way of getting new

business is by referral - ‘lawn envy’ is a wonderful thing. Having worked at Arsenal has definitely helped me get business. People want to talk to me about it so it helps me engage with potential customers.”

A journey of self-discovery

After working abroad for years and having spent almost a decade at a Premiership club, was there anything Andrew could learn from self-employment? Absolutely.

“The attention to detail that was instilled in me by Steve’s high standards is definitely something I took with me, and it has certainly helped with both customer satisfaction and retention, but it has caused me a few problems too.”

“Initially, I spent far too much time on jobs trying to get them perfect when it has been unrealistic. When we first met, Bob told me that, unlike some other franchise companies, ‘this isn’t a numbers game’, which was one of my initial concerns. It’s all about quality rather than quantity, but you do have to strike a balance. I’ve also found that, having such high standards, has also made me reluctant to delegate.”

“Getting to grips with Lawn Master’s bespoke computer system has been okay, I used to do the scheduling at Arsenal so I know my way around a computer and I’m good with numbers. I’m also not the most organised person but I manage well under pressure.”

“The importance of self-motivation became apparent this winter. When we had snow I felt lethargic and downbeat but, once it cleared, I knew I had to channel my energies into something positive. When I’ve spent hours scarifying, have worked a long, hard day or if I’m at home doing quotes long into the evening, I try to stay focused on my goals and the positive aspects of my business, of which there are many.”

“Motivating myself when I’m out working is easy. Groundsmen at football clubs are largely taken for granted in my opinion, and I enjoy the regular praise I receive from my customers. I go back to work at the Emirates Stadium on matchdays and I’m always interested in their progress. If I went back to work at the training ground, I’d be a much better groundsman.”

“Every garden is a different project and I’m having to draw on every bit of



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my knowledge to deliver a first-class service. Good social skills are also vital. In football, you spend so much time working alone but now social skills are critical to the success of my business."

"Some customers don't care what you're doing, some want to know every last detail but, regardless, I like engaging with them. One lady called me a 'miracle worker' after I'd removed two inches of moss from her 100m² lawn. I'd scarified the lot and overseeded. Twice she rang me in a panic that nothing was happening, but I was able to reassure her. Once the seed was up and established she was delighted and I was duly rewarded with a pot of tea and biscuits. You can't get more rewarding than that."

"I don't work many weekends now. At Arsenal I was doing twelve days on, two days off for eight months of the year. A five day week has had a positive effect on my work/life balance. I have so much more precious time now with my daughter, and I enjoy the flexibility in my work schedule and being able to dictate the pace myself to some extent."

Making progress

So, has it all been worth it? Andrew can say, unreservedly, that it has.

"I've now been in business for sixteen months and things are going well. Like everyone else I'm sick of the media ramming financial negativity down everyone's throats. I spent the spring looking after existing customers, and the summer months have largely been taken

up with fertiliser applications. Pricing by job, rather than from a menu, has helped as it gives customers the option to spend according to their budget. For example, if a garden's neglected and the customer can't afford to turf, he may find that, for less than half the cost, he can have his lawn scarified and overseeded."

"As for what the future holds, I'm happy to go with the flow. I don't want to burden myself. Concerns about cashflow during the winter months were unfounded and I had a full schedule of liquid feed, turf hardener and moss killer applications. My first goal was to earn the same money I was on at Arsenal from a five day week, and to allow myself time to adapt to the lifestyle change. Now I've achieved that, I'd like to take someone on so I can extend my customer base."

And what advice would he give to anyone else considering self-employment?

"Think of other ways you could use your skills and, when you're looking at the options, make sure you do your homework. You must be motivated and able to rise to the challenge - it's hard work but well worth it for the rewards. You've got to have good PR skills to deal with customers, which doesn't always come easy for people who've tended to work alone. Finally, you've got to have good self-discipline - you're not going to earn money sitting on your sofa!"

TWENTY Questions

Scott Reeves - Kerrang! Appears to be a bit of a heavy metal fan. I've a sneaky feeling he likes Metallica!

Who are you? Scott Reeves, Course Manager at Leyland Golf Club.

Family status? Married to Tracy with three children - Evan (10), Alice (8), Adam (5).

Who's your hero and why? I admire a lot of people but I honestly have to say my wife. She raised three children, studied for a degree and achieved a teaching qualification. She was even studying whilst in labour!

What is your dream holiday? Somewhere warm but not scorching, sat by a pool with beer in hand and kids nowhere to be seen enjoying themselves.

What annoys you the most? Where to start? Mostly, people who cannot take responsibility for their own actions and the results of them. For example, morons up to their necks in debt on loans and credit cards who complain about the banks or MP's expenses.

What would you change about yourself? If my wife would let me, I'd never shave again. What a waste of time.

Who wouldn't you like to be? David Cameron's spokesman. I think I would break my remaining teeth from gritting them so hard.

Favourite record, and why? Easy, 'Master of Puppets' by Metallica. The best metal

record ever made and, since we all know that metal is the best form of music, it is, by definition, the best record EVER MADE. Fact!

Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? Oh, my wife of course. At a romantic, intimate gig by Metallica at the Marquee Club. See, I know how to treat a lady!

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Take the kids to Toys R Us, give them a trolley each and then let them loose.

If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why? A white Gibson Explorer, played through an enormous Marshall stack cranked up to 11. Some people love it, some hate it, but no-one can ignore it!

What's the best advice you have ever been given? "Scott. Shut up mate".

What's your favourite smell? Roast lamb. Mmmm ... roast lamb.

What do you do in your spare time? Ha ha, that's a good one! Ahem. Play guitar, Xbox, read and watch my kids do stuff.

What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked? "Why does the Cushman you want cost more than a Fiat Panda?" Duh.



What's your favourite piece of kit? Tough one. I would have to say the Baroness LM56 hand mower. The best greens finish I have ever seen.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Honest, inquisitive and loyal.

What talent would you like to have? I wish I could draw really well.

What makes you angry? People with agendas who don't put the needs of those they represent first.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? I would make it compulsory to vote, with stiff penalties for those who don't.