



Yorkshire Tech Leaders: Disrupting the Industry in 2017

"We should be disruptors and we should challenge. It's easier to say, 'I'm sorry but look at the result'"

Original research by

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There's been no better time to be in the Technology and Digital sector in Yorkshire.

Adesse Search has conducted a series of original interviews with some senior and influential figures within the industry, taking a candid look at what it means to be a Tech Leader in Yorkshire today, and how Yorkshire folk are disrupting the sector.

Filming was fantastic fun, and we got some brilliant stories (many of which we can't share in print), but a number of common themes emerged. This report, based on original research by Adesse Search, explores what's going on in our industry.

We hope you enjoy!

Featuring:



JP Drake

Digital Director of Attercopia



Martin Bell

Independent Consultant and ex-Deputy MD of Leeds' best-known Clinical software provider



Chris King

Deputy CIO of the NIHR Clinical Research Network



Gary Worthington

CTO of The Coaching Manual



Andy Park

Creative Director and Owner of Creode



Joe Moore

Recruitment Manager at Mood International



Lee Edwards

As Head of IT of the British Library



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What's the best thing about being part of the Technology industry in Yorkshire?

Whether born and bred or adopted, all our Tech leaders are proud to be part of this great region.

"We get to do our job in Yorkshire! We can offer a national level of service but Northern rates"



JP Drake

Digital Director of Attercopia

"It's the enthusiasm from everybody you see in the tech scene. Lots of big companies have come to Yorkshire recently (and there's a) big buzz about using technology"



Gary Worthington

CTO of The Coaching Manual

"I met my wife in a field in Glastonbury, moved to Yorkshire and the rest is history"



Chris King

Deputy CIO of the NIHR Clinical Research Network

"It's vibrant, and there's lots of work"



Andy Park

Creative Director and Owner of Creode

"People need to get out of London. There's a real vibe in terms of digital, technology and IT"



Martin Bell

Independent Consultant and ex-Deputy MD of Leeds' best-known Clinical software provider

What does it mean to be a Tech Leader?

We all agree that it's a great time to be part of the tech sector, but what does it take to be a leader? Undoubtedly it takes guts and determination to get to the top, but what inspired our leaders to step away from their technical ability and expertise to successfully coach, mentor and inspire as well as demonstrate business acumen?

Four years ago **Lee Edwards** was brought in to lead the digital transformation of the British Library, based just outside Wetherby. The function was struggling with the complexity of the tech. He put in place a clear strategy, got the right investment in technology and staff and successfully turned around the perception of the IT department, including implementing a hybrid Cloud solution and digitisation of the national music archive. IT is now seen as helping the business rather than hindering it.

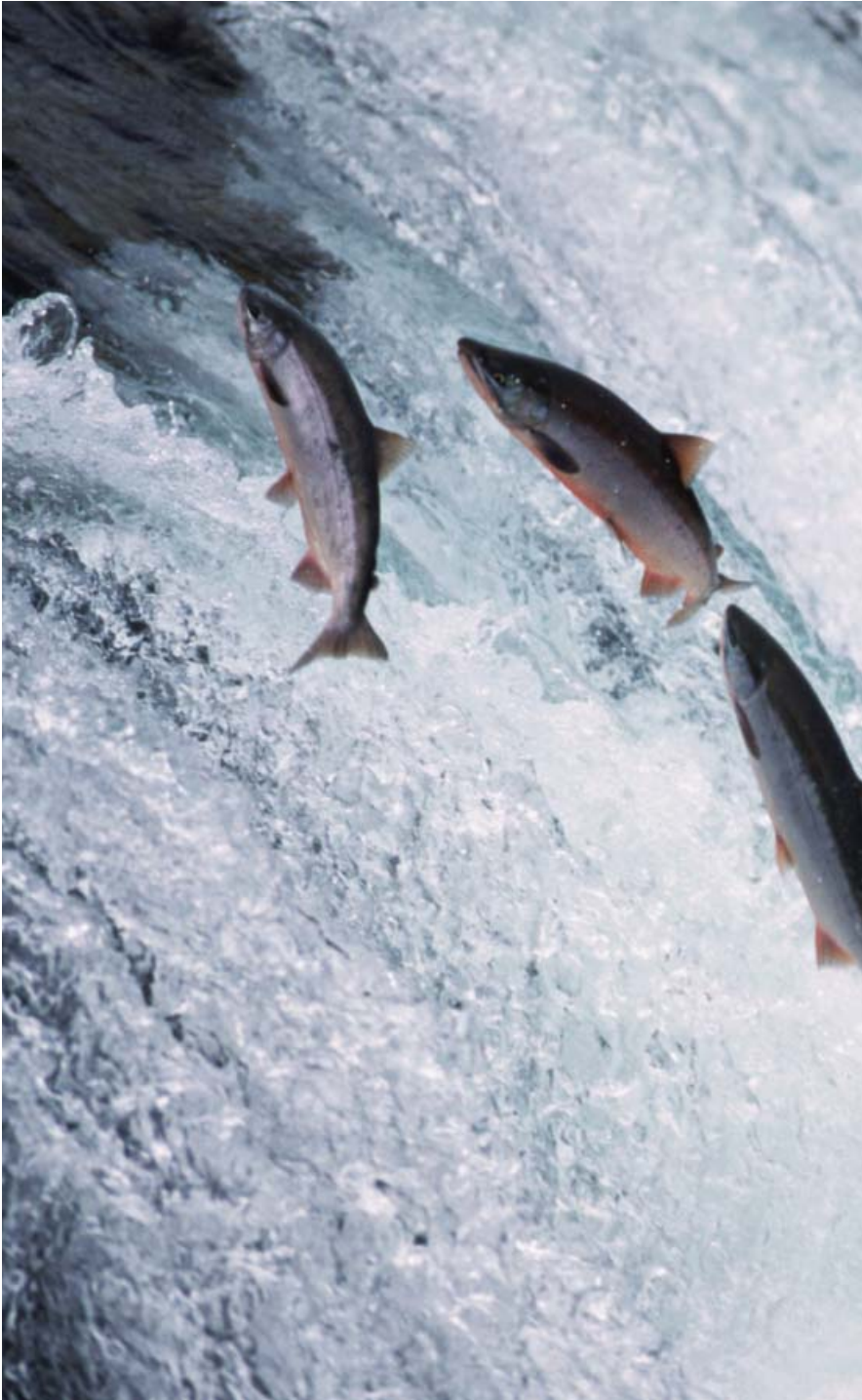
He sees the biggest lesson he's learnt is leading rather than dictating: "As a young manager I felt pressure to always come up with the answer. Now it's about leading people to an answer that they will come up with. (I) give them the broad direction but let them shape that."

Chris King says he's inspired by Cicero: "His ability to stand in front of a forum and convey a message and have people believe in him." He sees his role is to bridge the gap between what the business needs and what technology can offer, and to work with the business to find a solution.

JP Drake, who was a Director before the age of 30 says he took on board advice from his dad: "If you can like what you do, stick with it."

Whereas **Martin Bell** reflects that having benefitted by good management and coaching himself, he now wants to pass that on to juniors coming through the ranks. He calls it 'sending the lift back down.'





Biggest challenge facing the industry...

We asked the tech leaders what they considered to be the biggest challenges facing the industry and there were two broad themes; skills shortages and competition for the best staff, and ever-increasing salary expectations.

As **Andy Park** explains, "A lot of big players are coming to Leeds, which means smaller companies are struggling with recruitment. We can't compete."

Gary Worthington agrees: "Large companies are creating a recruitment bubble, which has meant a large increase in salaries and expectations. I worry that it's detrimental to the industry and creating unrealistic expectations."

Joe Moore, Recruitment Manager at Mood International in York, has just completed a massive recruitment drive to build a team to develop a greenfield AI product. He knows the pain of a skills shortage. "We had to work hard to attract the level of person we need to push the product forward."

JP Drake agrees: "It's a very saturated market for us, in-house teams are competing with agencies for work".

Lee Edwards believes one of the reasons for the skills shortage is the difficulty of keeping up with tech 'hype cycles' of "IoT, robotics, AI and Automation" and the challenge of attracting people with these skills – the quandary is whether to train in-house or recruit people with expertise.

How to attract fresh talent to the industry

Nearly all of the leaders we interviewed believed that nurturing young talent is the way forward, both for training the right skills, “Starting from scratch” as JP Drake puts it, and for encouraging company loyalty.

We’ve definitely got a headstart on this in Yorkshire, with some world-class educational institutions, both academic and vocational. In the words of **Andy Park**, “Come to Leeds for education, stay for the digital opportunities.”

Joe Moore puts forward a strong case for apprenticeships and work experience, a policy he’s seeing better and better results from. In his words, “You might just find a diamond and get there before anybody else.”

He also believes passionately in getting positive role models at school who inspire students to be in a tech environment. Moreover he states, “(We) won’t get more females into tech until they see role models doing it.”



How to attract the right people...

Many of us have seen the billboard in Leeds train station, advertising for fresh graduates to join a certain software company on a starting salary of £36,000. Many leaders we interviewed were adamant that trying to attract staff by competing on salary alone was a recipe for disaster.

At Mood, **Joe Moore** went down a different route. As he explains, "We tried to sell a story of where we wanted to go. A lot of companies focus on the benefits, but we tried to focus on why somebody should get emotionally involved with a product and what it means to them to take something from a small seed, an idea, a vision and take it to something eventually sold on open market, and that seemed to excite the kind of person we want."

He continues that the process needs to be as quick as possible. If it's too dragged out people lose interest, especially in a competitive market. He argues you need to get all the decision makers in the room, and have a clear understanding of what you can and can't offer.

Gary Worthington has a similar story to tell. In his experience smaller companies are struggling to attract top quality people, so he urges prospective employees to consider the whole package. He argues that bigger companies have fancy toys but less opportunity to make your mark. As a result, as CTO of The Coaching Manual, he offers flexible and remote working, a bigger opportunity to make an impact, and working within a culture of trust.



Hold onto your staff!

It's a massive challenge keeping hold of staff, when they're being bombarded with opportunities. Many are being approached daily, not just by recruiters or your competitors, but at meetups, networking events and hackathons. So how to retain your employees without inflating salaries?

Andy Park believes it's about creating a good place to work, improving processes and offering perks, treats and bonuses plus beers every Friday. One thing he's done at Creode is introduce a new appraisal structure to give people a chance to influence their own development. This allows employees to see what it takes to get a salary increase or promotion, and empowers them to take ownership of their development; in his words, a policy of "Let's help you get there."

Similarly, at MooD they offer remote working, plus give each team member half a day per week personal development to explore their own projects and play with tech. **Joe** believes this ensures the team doesn't stagnate.

At Attercopia, **JP Drake** has introduced a similar policy where everybody in the company must do half an hour of self-learning a day, without fail. This is tracked on a timesheet. He argues this gives them an edge over the competition, by keeping skills fresh, plus allowing staff to explore what they're curious about.





Lessons learned...

We asked the leaders what the biggest mistake they'd ever made was, and also the best advice they'd received.

Two owned up to professional errors. **Andy Park's** was assuming he knew what the client wanted, resulting in going down a rabbit hole. **JP Drake's** was not submitting a marketing proposal, as he didn't feel there was an angle for a commercial pitch. He recalls this was a costly mistake and the air turned blue when he owned up to his manager! He assures us his pitches are flawless these days though.

Gary Worthington is more philosophical. He recalls a time where he didn't speak up and listen to his gut when he had a feeling of "This isn't right, I'm being lied to". He now has a die-hard policy of, "If it feels wrong, stand up and say something about it."

Chris King was given a rather inspiring piece of advice by his CEO, who told him that "It's quicker to apologise than ask permission. We should be disruptors and we should challenge. It's easier to say, 'I'm sorry but look at the result'."

Lee Edwards recalls that when he was younger he was quite combative, and felt he needed to have the right idea. "If others had (ideas, I) dismissed them because they weren't mine." Over time he learned to listen, which meant better ideas which in turn resulted in better options.

Martin Bell was given slightly broader advice by his dad, "Assume everyone else on the road is completely rubbish!"



On work/life balance

Being a leader isn't all about work, it's about balance and enjoying the fruits of your labour. And where better to switch off than in glorious Yorkshire?

In **JP's** opinion, "Living in Yorkshire is a lifestyle choice."

Joe Moore recalls a story he was told on his wedding day, by the priest that married him and his wife, "Children are tyrants, make time for yourselves". He believes this applies to both children and work, and advises, "Make sure you get me-time."

Andy Park has a similar tale to tell. He says that owning a business is both rewarding and overwhelming. One thing he's learnt is to consciously switch off at the weekend, enjoy family time, meaning he feels rested when he comes back on Monday.



Killer interview question

We were keen to find out if our leaders had a killer interview question, and there were definitely two schools of thought: those who did and those who kept it informal.

Lee Edwards likes to ask, "What really annoys them in the workplace". He recalls one person who answered "Questions like these", which he thought was refreshingly honest.

On the other hand, **Andy Park** argues "There's no silver bullet, if you script it you'll get scripted answers". He prefers to disarm people, and dissolve tension.

Gary Worthington agrees. His style is to listen rather than trying to quiz, and he believes in the importance of free-flowing conversation.

Mark Prince feels pretty strongly on the subject, "I don't like the standard rude ones, they annoy me, and I think there is no imagination, and it goes against having a conversation."



Recruitment horror tales...

We couldn't let our leaders go without asking them about recruiting. We were keen to hear their horror stories about the most 'memorable' interviews they'd conducted.

Andy Park recalls a bright, charismatic guy who went to the funeral of Drupal 6, a jazz funeral in Louisiana. He offered him the job and said he's brilliant.

Gary Worthington shakes his head at the memory of blaggers. "You ask them technical questions and can see them make stuff up. It's funny in bad way. They lose all credibility."

Chris King shared the story of one guy who was so nervous and desperate to maintain eye contact that he poured a jug of water all over the interviewer and didn't notice.

“Adesse is proud to have a relationship with the leaders featured in this report, but we’d love to partner with you too.

Let’s start with a coffee, when’s good for you?”

Claire Ackers, Director of Adesse Search



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