

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

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Winner

Oliver Jones

Extreme effort in high-risk environments is the defining characteristic of Oliver Jones's sector-defining career in facilities management. It started with the London-born Jones completed a sandwich quantity surveyor degree at Kingston Polytechnic before moving into a graduate trainee job with the then BAA (now Heathrow Airport Holdings Limited) in 1983. He was fast-tracked, and by 1988 was two down from the board as head of QS at Gatwick Airport. BAA sponsored him for an MBA in finance at London Business School, during which he developed a business plan for Gatwick Premises Management.

When BAA was in the process of being privatised in 1987, its board began looking at how the company could diversify into other areas. That's when Jones saw the first of many great opportunities - "so I set up the first post-privatisation company for BAA. Of course, we didn't refer to it as FM in those days; the business was called Gatwick Premises Management."

He then founded and became managing director of Symonds FM. Work included a contract with BT for premises consultancy, his first purely FM job. He also landed the UK's largest market-testing work ever, for the then Department for Social Security. He took Symonds FM into Northern Ireland in 1991 to help to create a public sector supply market. When he sold the business in 1993, the company had 300 employees.

It's important to appreciate the depth of Jones' involvement in shaping the then nascent outsourced services sector. He assisted the government's 1995 studies on how to shape PFI outsourcing models. He was also part of the consortium with Goldman Sachs for the DSS Prime project, which in 1997 created one of the first property outsourcing businesses, today called Land Securities Trillium. He was even an early mover in fully serviced offices in 1998, when he joined Mark Dixon at Regus as group property and logistics director. In Dubai, in 2002, he helped create a major FM firm in that emerging market.

Further career highlights include being a partner at EC Harris, and the setting up in 2008 the mergers and acquisition brokerage Morphose, which supports business, professional and facilities management services businesses through step change development, acquisitions, mergers and divestment.

Today Jones is also the chairman of Engenie (electric vehicle charging) and remains involved in his English language training for business consultancy Babel Language Consulting. As if that wasn't enough, he is also non-executive director with Infrastructure Masons, an independent industry group of executive and technology professionals 'entrusted with building and operating the physical and logical structures of the Digital Age'. He was also co-founder and original Chairman of The Autism Trust charity.

In the early part of this decade he spoke about the "exciting stuff" he was embarking on in China: "Internationally, the fusing of property related outsourcing services companies and IT-related outsourcing companies is the future. It blows my mind that it hasn't happened before."

Today Jones is CEO of Chayora, a Hong Kong-based data centre infrastructure company which, at the end of this year, will make operational the first of seven major data centre facilities on its Tianjin campus just outside of Beijing, with the rest coming on stream over the next three years. More data centres across China are planned or already under construction.

Described by others as a life-long learner, Jones has always done more than merely highlight an issue - he's typically immersed himself in its solution. His enthusiasm for facilities managers' being able to demonstrate greater financial acumen as a means of proving their value saw Jones, through his then FM procurement consultancy firm The Asset Factor, running a training course, 'Engaging the CFO', with the BIFM.

Jones spent close to a decade judging for the BIFM Awards, including the role as head of judges. His reason? "To push the bar higher; to ensure that the BIFM Awards became the most important benchmark."

Indeed, Jones has often sought to help out an FM sector he sees as suffering from plenty of managers but not enough leaders.

In 2012, he said: "I'd like to see more powerful, strong, upstanding leadership in the profession. It deserves it; support services is one of the largest employment groups in the country, and we've got some brilliant chief executives out there."

Businessman, property guru, entrepreneur, strategist, contracts pioneer, - all words used to describe Jones by others. But how does he describe himself? In 2012, he answered: "I'm an enthusiast for life! I love business, I love people, and I love exciting business deals."

With Chayora's data centres coming online over the next few years, there appears to be no dimming of Oliver Jones passion for his work.