

INTERNATIONAL MEN'S DAY

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MENS DAY



MY STORY

Wondering why we need an International Men's Day is probably quite common. With good reason, men are often viewed as the complacent 'alphas' of society – you could say every day is already theirs. Questioning the need for a day to celebrate them further therefore seems fair. I was one of the people who thought this until recently, that is until I started to consider my own experience and that of the people around me.

Living in a pretty working-class area, being gay and growing up with parents of different races, there have always been men around me who had their own issues to cope with. These problems may not have been caused by their gender, but their gender can make them harder to talk about.

My parents faced a great deal of discrimination for being a mixed-race couple, but this was something my mum always felt more comfortable discussing this than my dad – he managed by pretending it didn't affect him. Similarly, I know too many other gay men who struggle with their sexuality constantly but have only been able to express this to me when intoxicated. Insecurity about their masculinity, caused by being gay, means they fear diminishing it further by being too emotional.

Drawing a simple conclusion from my experience – that men find it harder to discuss their feelings – is too crude. People of all genders struggle with expressing their emotions and there are many factors besides gender that impact this. However, the universality of this issue means we all need our turn to have our problems recognised and get encouragement to address them. So, this International Men's Day I encourage men to speak out more and know that it's okay to seek help when they need it.

Jacob Gahir
Media Executive

MY STORY

I was born and brought up in a small town in the West of Scotland. Historically, the area had been an industrial, working class place relying on heavy industry particularly mining for its employment prospects. My experience of men and fatherhood at this time supports what the stereotypical view has always conveyed: taciturn, unemotional and authoritarian. Unappealing these days but still a 'role' model very much in evidence then and that's still difficult to shake off now.

As I grew up I had arguments with my Dad about what subjects I studied at school – he wanted me to study the 'technical' subjects I would need to start a trade. Luckily, he worked away a lot so I prevailed. Both my parents were then horrified to discover that I planned to go to University to study English Literature - they had no experience of university and saw it as a waste of my time and their money. I know this sounds bizarre nowadays but it was a different time – to emphasise this point, I never admitted to my group of male school pals that I was going to University as this was deemed 'uncool'.

Despite all this, I always wanted to work in what I viewed as a 'creative' industry and was lucky enough to land a job in the media department of BBH (back then, this was 1988 after all, most agencies were 'full service' meaning they did creative, media, production, research & strategy). I have now worked in media for 32 years finding my spiritual home at MediaCom nearly 20 years ago! During the first 12 years of my career, the longest I stayed anywhere was 3 years.

Generally (well, we all have bad days), I really enjoy working in advertising as it's always a challenging, interesting and fast-moving environment discussing ideas with a range of different people. This is what has got me out of bed in the morning for the last 32 years.

Nowadays, I have two adult daughters and have always tried to reject any dictatorial approach to their education and choice of career. Instead, I have endeavoured to encourage them to do what they really enjoyed and believed in. I'm relieved to say that when I hear them talk about their work these days, it is with passion and commitment.

So, strive to do something you really enjoy because it's more likely you'll be good at it. This will breed confidence and therefore aid your progress. And never forget, it is an absolute privilege if you achieve this.

Taciturn and unemotional are still a work in progress.

David Shearer
Managing Director, Edinburgh

MY STORY

My wife often calls me the tin man...

I've never been a very emotional person; I rarely cry and I don't really look forward to stuff in the same way that she does. She is always 'buzzing' when we go out or away, eyes wide open desperately sucking the experience in, trying to appreciate everything that's happening. I am normally wondering when we are going to find a restaurant.

I am less emotional than most, but I also think it's my view of how a man should act and

is part of what I think masculinity is. Growing up in the 70's and 80's life was simpler and, in many respects, easier, even for a boy from a council estate in Birmingham. My initial outlook on life was defined by that time and the more traditional view of what a man should be. Strong, a provider, in control, ambitious, ruthless...lunch was for wimps.

However, whilst I still don't blub at the John Lewis Christmas ad, the man I am in 2020 is very different from what I have been in the past.

It has however been a journey and many years before joining MediaCom I did some leadership training. During an interview by the trainer I commented that 'I sometimes come across as arrogant, but I'm just covering up a lack of confidence'. To which the trainer replied, 'that may have been true once, now you're just arrogant'. I was delighted and it was a story that I retold to my adoring public, enjoying how far I had come from the brummie bookworm of my youth. I was confusing my ego with masculinity, being an arsehole was somehow being a real man.

While I still probably love myself a little bit too much, 15 years on from that training I can say my view of what being a man has changed. There are reasons for that, the privilege of working with my colleagues for many years who have shown me that trust, collaboration and the ability to listen are the bedrock to brilliant work. My wife who met the arsehole but married the bookworm, who has shown me that empathy and caring make a proper life partner. Most recently the birth of my now 11 month old daughter has shown me the joy of fatherhood, where responsibility and love are combined in a tight ball of joy in your chest.

The point of this is that who you are as a man will change over time, sometimes you'll get it right and sometimes you won't, however whatever you find embrace it and be as true to yourself as you can be.

Simon Price
Managing Director, MediaCom Leeds

MY STORY

I became a Dad for the first time in January 2018 and as I write this I'm just over four weeks away from doing it all over again. Without a doubt becoming a parent is one of my proudest achievements but it hasn't come without its challenges.

Nothing can quite prepare you for the day your son or daughter comes into the world. I spent the 6 months prior to Isobel being born reading every book possible, going to NCT classes, and wandering around Mothercare, I thought I had it all covered. Then the day arrived and life for the next few weeks was a blurred whirlwind of feeds, nappy changes, and a severe lack of sleep.

After two weeks of paternity leave it was time to head back to work and straight into the Sky pitch which was a baptism of fire! After the initial shock of returning to work I managed to settle into a routine and over the first 9 months things returned to a sense of normality. We won the Sky pitch and in April that year I was also promoted to Business Director.

My wife and I decided to move to Leigh-On-Sea in the summer of 2016. Whilst I knew it would add time to my commute, we wanted to move closer to family and live by the seaside in preparation for having a family of our own. My standard day would typically require me to leave home at 7am to arrive in the office for 8:30am and then leave at

5:30pm on the dot to get home around 7pm. Neither the early starts or late arrivals home bothered me in the first few months after Isobel was born as her broken sleep pattern meant I was able to spend plenty of time with her when I got home or in the early hours. However, as her sleep patterns become more consistent and she began going down at 7pm I started to see less and less of her Monday-Friday.

This began to have a huge impact on me personally as I was only spending 30 minutes a day on average with my daughter and I started to doubt whether I was being a good Dad. Whilst it wasn't impacting my work, I decided it wasn't sustainable for me or my family and as such I needed to make a change. I reached out to Nancy Lengthorn to discuss what options were available to me. Both Nancy and the HR team at MediaCom have been nothing but supportive during my 10 years at the agency but I was still extremely nervous going into these conversations as I was concerned about how any change to my work pattern would be perceived by my peers and team alike.

I needed not worry as Nancy put my mind at ease straight away and she was actually taken a back about how nervous I was about requesting a change to my working hours. We then followed this up with my Managing Partner Hannah McWilliam who again was extremely supportive and agreed that from October 2018 my contractual hours would change to 8:45am to 5pm. Whilst this may only seem like a minor adjustment it made a huge impact to me and my family as it enabled me to get home to spend time with Isobel and put her to bed.

When it was time for my wife to go back to work, she started a new job but unfortunately was required to go back full-time and as such we had to assess our options with regards to childcare. This led me to having further discussions and agreeing with HR that from March 2019 I'd work from home on Fridays on a permanent basis to allow me to drop Isobel off a little later and pick her up earlier but still maintain my working hours. Whilst my family are the most important thing to me I am also extremely ambitious and keen to continue to progress my career at MediaCom and at the time of making this change I was concerned about the impact it may have on my career due to people's perceptions about me being at home one day a week.

The first few months after making these changes were difficult and I constantly faced questions about how many days a week I was working or people implying that I was simply dossing at home on a Friday instead of working. However, eventually it just became the norm and I learnt to manage my week effectively around my new schedule. It had no negative impact on my work in any way, testament to this was the fact that one of my most senior client meetings would take place on a Friday morning whilst I was working from home. The client along with my senior stakeholders would all be in a room at MediaCom whilst I dialled in and presented the entire meeting. At no point did the client ever raise concerns about me presenting remotely.

It is not lost on me that it was my choice to live outside of London. However, having the ability to flex my hours and also being given the opportunity to work from home on a regular basis has had a hugely positive impact on my family and for that I will be eternally grateful to MediaCom. I'm lucky to have a great team around me who I know trust and support me as I do them. The support I have also received from senior leadership has been remarkable and that in itself has had a positive impact as I know they have faith in my ability to deliver no matter where I'm working from.

Whilst 2020 has been a year full of heartbreak, sadness, and frustration I hope we can take some positives from it in terms of how we have adapted as an agency to continue to deliver for our clients. I believe there should never be a trade off between work & personal life and hopefully this year will give everyone confidence that a balance is achievable as we look ahead to the new normal.

Chris Denman
Business Director

MY STORY

Masculinity, Mental Health and Purpose. Radical Candor, pushing 50 years old.

“Choose a life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players and electrical tin openers... Choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing, spirit crushing game shows, stuffing junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away in the end of it all, pissing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked up brats you spawned to replace yourself, choose your future. Choose life... But why would I want to do a thing like that?” - **Irvine Welsh, Trainspotting 1996.**

That year, 1996, I graduated from Pompey Poly with a 2:2; Born Slippy by Underworld, the soundtrack to Trainspotting, still makes the hairs stand up on the back of neck every time. What a track, what a time. I remember hitting my 20s in the very late 80s and early 90s and feeling fully bulletproof. 25 years on, look at me now. Middle-aged, middle class, privileged. Detached house, wife, 2 kids, a dog, on my second, yes second Volvo, mortgage, pension, and a big fucking television. Allegedly we are born free/ liberal of thought and at around thirty become increasingly conservative of mind (not politics). I vaguely learned this existentialist thought doing French A -Level which I failed (a grade N, N for Non) and am still not sure I understand existentialism in either language but the thought remains with me.

First as a son. I love my parents, very Welsh, speaking, singing, holidaying you name it. Both retired primary school headteachers hitting mid-seventies. 10 great years of retirement, teaching pays ok but the pensions are great and so with time and money they deservedly enjoyed their sixties. We are never quite sure when it started, but Mum now has full on Alzheimer's which is a pretty grim way to go – 10 years max. Essentially bit by bit you mourn the person you once knew, Dad has become a 24/7 carer which is massively taking its toll too. Last week when I saw Mum before the latest lockdown she thought my daughter was my wife and I was 21, but at least she still knew it was me, sort of. It is not yet time for Mum to go to a home – who would put anyone in a home in Covid, it's just not a choice, but as I left Dad last Monday, he was in pieces, I was in pieces, we had a good cry and hug - there is no real solution, see you in December – stay strong (fingers crossed). So for my Dad for IMD, I wish him a game of golf with his pals, an afternoon at the pub watching Wales finally win a game of rugby, a sing song, a curry and a taxi home. None of this will or can happen. I have tears in my eyes as I write this now but the kids are in bed so it's not so bad, I do not want them to see me upset.

As a husband. It was my wife's 50th late last month, we were lucky and made it to Dartmoor for a weekend as a family – lovely hotel/ great break. My wife is a student adviser, somewhere between pastoral care and social services. Teenage and even younger mental health in the UK is massive issue. Lynn deals with anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, drugs, broken homes and generally full on distressing situations at both senior and primary schools in middle class, middle England. Lynn is on about £10 an hour, I get a higher hourly rate but Lynn does far more deserving work. I deal with xlxs and ppt, Lynn with real lives.

At work. The menopause or perimenopause – this is really tough thing for women to have to face and for quite a significant duration. I am mentoring on the topic as part of Bloom (no doubt very badly) but the menopause is an unbelievably unfair further thing to throw into Ageism in the workplace and female mental health arena. Something I am trying to understand and get better at. Empathy, that is a quality that I have so much to learn. Bloom has been a brilliant and yet an uncomfortable discovery.

As a father. A son, 12 and a daughter 14. Brilliant and the relationships are no shit, very different. Lila and I have a great laugh together on so many topics. The other day she told me she wanted to quit school and Wiltshire to travel the world/ see the world with a rock band. She is 14 and I love her enthusiasm for life and the world, but let's be clear there are also clear no go areas with my daughter as she grows into being a young woman, I must get better at this but we are all protective of our daughters right? My son 12 – sport in all its guises at the drop of hat – love sport together. I always wanted him to play rugby (a Welsh thing) but he took to football early on and soon got signed to an Academy. A lot of training (too much) I was in London and my wife at home so she could do the commutes/watch him develop. For a number of seasons he was reviewed every six weeks before the eventual happened and he was let go (back to the Hasbro Nerf Jnr PL so not all bad), rejection at what you love is tough at 12. No real reason just not tough enough; be more Rooney / be more Rashford, not many role models in football, maybe he will pick up Rugby – a gentleman's sport.

The Dog. Our K9, Kolo. A handsome and athletic black lab, a gundog really. Kolo and I go mountain biking most mornings before work and up on the ridgeway. He literally tracks my back wheel crawling uphill and racing down. Man's Best Friend. Last week I turned to see him 30 yards back with a whacking great Pheasant in his chops, his kill. Good dog, bad dog, man's dog – who cares, drop it ffs Kolo and let's get out of here before the farmer shoots you. Two wrongs don't make a right but shoot my dog, expect a reaction (Grr)

My pals. In the main Straight White Males but between ourselves convinced we are not yet Stale, Pale and Male. A DJ, A movie producer, a chef and well, ok an IT consultant. All four obliterated by Covid, no gigs, no restaurants, no movies and just bad luck. All sat at home no income, pushing tea round the kitchen table, no pension and too old to retrain? Sell the house, sell the car, downsize, get out of the house and avoid repetitive awkward conversations with wife and kids about why you are always at home. Worryingly 48 is the peak in male suicide in this country. Loose one parent or worse both, lose your job, lose your purpose – what is your purpose in middle age when you are no longer needed by work, by your kids, your parents? (What's the meaning, what's the meaning of Life? Soul II Soul 1989, another cracking nostalgic track) – but we are now middle-aged with debts and no income, less time to debate these questions and way more responsibilities.

Finally a bit of me time. I took up reading on the commute (I actually miss my lengthy commute). Books are a great source of escapism outside of sport/exercise, my now go to drugs of choice. I love anything by John Niven, Kill your Friends and the Amateurs are favourites – think Trainspotting meets media and London in the 90s. These two Nivens have masculine anti-heroes but I equally love his Sunshine Cruise Company with feminine heroics at the forefront. All very very dark and hopefully not a sackable offence confession. Otherwise I love Westerns, Lonesome Dove is truly epic, a Pulitzer prize winner and the defining novel of its genre. Bravery, ambition, heroism, honour and so on.. Masculinity ?!?! eek I don't know sorry. The Sisters Brothers is lighter yet no less cinematic read if you fancy a foray into Westerns. Westerns and what the US has become .. well that is a big thorny topic itself. I am not sure what these books say about me but regardless, inspired by these Westerns I am very tempted by a cattle drive for my 50th from Texas all the way up to Montana, just on motorbikes not horses.

So Masculinity, Mental Health and Purpose. I am white, middle class and very privileged, I am so grateful for what life has given me. I still want to kick on, keep rolling the dice but also with age I want to protect what I have (protectionism yikes). Most importantly I want to learn more, use my experience more, my privilege more, to do more to help others around me.

Richard Davies
Chief Digital Officer