

## **Gavin Allen**

**Executive Editor-in-Chief, Huawei**

**Media Masters – July 22nd 2022**

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined in the studio by Gavin Allen executive editor in chief of Huawei technologies, who was previously head of news output at the BBC where he enjoyed a distinguished career. Gavin joined Huawei last year saying he was hugely proud to be joining a technology company that was, and I quote, "a creative force for good" during his career at the BBC. Gavin became editor of political news gathering, controller of daily news programming and executive editor of question time. As head of news output, he was responsible for a swathe of daily radio and television news programs from Radio 4's Today programme, to the News at Six and Ten. Gavin, thank you for joining me.**

Good to be here. Thanks, Paul.

**A long distinguished career at the BBC, and now executive editor in chief at Huawei. I mean, when people think of Huawei here, they think of the phones, the tech, and of course, the controversy, let's do that in a minute, but what does an executive editor chief do at a tech company?**

It's a very good question. I have to say I got there on day one and sat at my desk, as everyone does on day one at every new role. You sort of sit there thinking, okay, what do I actually do now? But you just carve it out. You find out and it's odd starting somewhere at quite a senior level like that. Normally when you start somewhere new, you learn the ropes. It's all fine. Of course, on day one, as with the words, executive, an editor and chief in your title, people are looking to you for sort of decisions.

**Sounds quite impressive!**

It's incredibly impressive. What was good about, it was oddly similar, I discovered, to the role I had at the BBC. It is fundamentally an editorial role. It is about oversight of content, it is about getting our message across it is about storytelling.

Fundamentally. It's about stories, and it is about attention to accuracy. I run and set up a thought leadership magazine, called 'Transform', I've done an overhaul of the media elements of the global website and I offer analysis on media relations. So, in a lot of ways, as I say, this sort of inform, educate and entertain that the BBC was sort of built on and impartiality I've kind of taken and transferred and used with Huawei as well.

**Is it kind of like Alistair Campbell's role in Downing Street that you are the ambassador to the public helping communicate? Or is it more about, as you said, that thought leadership editorial role? Are there elements of PR to it in a sense?**

There are elements of PR, but I think every member of staff has that everywhere. I don't mean uniquely to Huawei. I mean, we've got something like 195,000 people, which in itself surprised me. I didn't realize just how big this company is, just how global it is. I'm not sure I'd compare myself to Alistair Campbell, as much as I love his podcast. But it is a communications role, of course, and it is about, therefore, finding out what are the stories we want to tell about Huawei that people don't know that might illuminate their understanding of the company. And I think one of the biggest things I found coming into it, myself included actually from the outside was just my level of misunderstanding of what this company does. And, as you said in the intro to this, that it is a force for good, I do fundamentally believe that we are transforming lives for the better and it's therefore, okay. So, one of the stories that we can tell that stop us from being in the eyes of some, just a techy and slightly geeky company. I mean, they're a brilliant company, genuinely brilliant company in terms of innovation and the sort of research capabilities, but I just want to make this a bit more accessible, so my mum can understand it, and frankly so that I can understand it and tell those stories.

**It's weird, isn't it? Because as a company you've come under a reputational attack, I don't believe in any conspiracy theories at all per se. So, I certainly don't believe the ones against you guys, but in a sense, you have a choice that if you then go on the front foot to deny things that then frames the debate about whether you are part of some vast international Illuminati conspiracy, I**

**mean, it's almost ridiculous to even have to ask you of course, but like it must be a challenge because people do believe these things.**

Gavin:

They do, and it is interesting. Before I started at the company and when I was looking into it, considering, "okay, would I work for this company?" I'll be honest, I thought, okay, so it's a sort of Chinese state-owned company, wrong. It's not a Chinese state-owned company. So I got that wrong. It's been embroiled in huge amounts of spying, wrong. There's been absolutely no major cybersecurity incident in its history in its sort of 30-plus-year history. And so all these things you kind of stop, pause, actually dig into and start to find the truth about. But I think one thing you're absolutely right about is the more you talk about issues that other people have set the narrative, the danger is you sort of perpetuate this myth about what we are and what we aren't. Again, I remember during the Brexit campaign at the BBC, this whole thing about why don't you call out the Brexiters on this £350 million figure. I cannot tell you how many times we pulled apart that figure at the BBC and quizzed Brexit.

**I remember Boris being in the back of that bus where someone said to him, "that's a lie on the side of this bus!"**

The problem is, of course, that's absolutely the right thing to have done. We scrutinized it, we assessed it. We sort of picked it apart. And we tried to sort of give factual information to the audience. But if you are a campaigner and what you want to get out is the message basically millions of pounds from the EU are being spent by the UK. Well, it doesn't matter if it's 350 million or a hundred million. The bottom line is there's a lot of money going. So sometimes by shining a light on things that just aren't true, the danger is you just spread that myth. And it's really, it's a constant problem with disinformation and fake news for every organization, particularly media organizations. When do you lean into and say, hold on, this just isn't true? But it's the same for Huawei. So, I come back to the point that we are a company that is supporting thousands of jobs, making sure that it's connectivity for literally billions of people, worldwide pumping billions of pounds into economies across the world. That's what I want to focus on how we're transforming those lives in healthcare, in industry, in transport and in travel. Not about the stuff that just isn't true, but I understand at the same time, I totally understand why people who aren't quite sure about it want to get to the facts about it, but I'd say we're an independent company, global, full of really very talented people from across the globe.

**Don't you ever want to go back to parchment and Quill, where we'd send a pigeon to the next village with the news?**

I can't pretend personally to be the most technologically adept. I have to be honest with you. So, I can't sit here and give you a bluffers guide to sort of the whys and wherefores of massive MIMO and all the rest of it, but that's the job being in communications. I can sort of pass on the message of other people's brilliance as it were. I think the thing about simplicity of communication, the sort of paper pen send a letter. It's just so slow though. I mean, what is amazing to me is...

**I couldn't write anything anywhere now, my handwriting is gone.**

Isn't it, but isn't it extraordinary though? What I love most about things like social media, and this sort of instant accessibility, I can see, and in fact, have a conversation with genuinely world-class, brilliant people, just in the click of a few buttons and, tweet and retweet and DM and all the rest of it - that is pretty extraordinary! Whereas in the past there'd be gatekeepers to these people, there'd be letters to send. So the whole accessibility of connectivity has been a massive plus, I think, but at the same time, yes, I don't get me wrong. I still like opening a book in silence without any technology around me at the same time. So it's a mix.

**It's completely redrawing the way that business is done as well. I work for several people in the music industry and record companies having to rethink themselves because like Cardi B can connect with her fans directly. She doesn't actually need a publicist or an agent or a label anymore.**

Well, what I like about that is that we've no idea where we're going to be in five years, maybe not even in two years. Technology and the speed of change are so fast and accelerating all the time. I think, what we are trying to do as a company, and lots of other companies are as well, is just embrace that, embrace that sense of change, try and keep innovating, be open to it and work together and look for. And I think when there's an innovation in America that innovation is going to spread across the world. If there's an innovation in China, it's going to spread across the world, you can't shut down these scientific and technological advances. And I think that's a great thing. We are looking for global standards, global development, global modernization and digitalization. And I think to be in a company where they're absolutely at the forefront of that is incredibly exciting.

**So, what does Huawei do then? Now we've established that they're not part of the Illuminati. You said there are nearly 200,000 people there. My view as a consumer is I've seen some of your phones. I've obviously seen Trump attack you guys or whatever, but like, and I'm aware that you do things to do with digital infrastructure, but like for our listeners that genuinely don't know the scale and the depth and breadth of what Huawei literally do. Could you paint a picture for us, please? And, please do start at the beginning.**

At the beginning? Well, the beginning was 1987, so that's when it was set up, but I won't go in real chronological time. Don't worry. I mean I think what is interesting about the company is it's constantly adapting and had to adapt. It's got a really intriguing, quite startup mentality to it. So even though it's been going for sort of 30-plus-years, there's a sort of energy to it. So you're right. It is about information and communications, technology telecommunications, but also the sort of smart products and devices around that. So laptops and phones, et cetera. But it's more than that. It's about the infrastructure around computing and digitalization.

**So do you make cell towers and things like that?**

Well, exactly. So base stations for 5G.

**Do you hear my hesitancy?**

No, it's very good.

**I really thought I can't say too much cause he'll know, I don't know what I'm talking about.**

This is a sort of "call my bluff", isn't it, of knowledge? I'm not sure who's going to win on that front.

**You'll win, I assure you.**

I think again, one of the things that have been brilliant for me, to answer your question, there are things like cloud computing there's things like data storage

there's, AI and what that can do to transform industries. So all the sort of support networks and services around digitalization, but again, what's exciting is people innovating in these fields, just pushing the boundaries. And for me personally, if I'm selfish about it, there's something fantastic about just learning. As I say, I make no bones about the fact I'm not from a technology or an engineering background and therefore learning about these different elements, learning about the capabilities of what these products can do for good is fantastic. Who doesn't want to keep learning in their job rather than just flatlining and taking the money at the end of the day? It's not, that good.

**I'll do that rather than the one that involved the effort, but you are right though because I think in our industry in communications, it's actually a virtue to not know the tech because those tech people don't necessarily have the communication skills to communicate to people like us who have to buy their products and services and so on. So there is an element of you need to know what you're talking about, but not the detail because your skill is in translating that into, dare I say, plain English.**

That's definitely true. I remember when I first got to Huawei, when I first got to the BBC, every company, there's tons of jargon that everybody knows at the BBC, what a VT is, what an OOV is. There's so many of these things that, once you're in it, it's fine. Just knock off an OOV and it'll be fine or do a quick PTC and we'll send it out the line, but for the outside, it's like, "what are you talking about?" Talk to me in English. And I think a lot of the basic communication is based on, will my mum understand this? Will my kids understand this?

**I always say it's intelligent, but an ignorant person. I mean, in the proper sense of the word, not to disparage someone, but they don't know. I was always grateful when I was learning, if I went to a seminar at university, the lecturer would use jargon, an acronym or something, and one person would put their hand up and say, "what does that mean?" And everyone was actually grateful that someone did it.**

That is one of the best things I learned from James Harding when he came to the BBC and he ran the BBC news, is that around that table of genuinely brilliant editors both onscreen and offscreen. There's always a bit of bluffing. There's always a bit of, "oh, have you seen page 17 of the guardian?" It's a fascinating piece and everyone

nods wisely. And what James was brilliant at was just saying, "sorry. No, I haven't seen that." Or "I still don't understand, why is that important?" Not in an aggressive way, in a genuinely curious way. That curiosity, that eagerness to learn, whether it's in technology or news or whatever, it might be just information, is critical. It's so important just to be interested in the role.

### **That's why you are in journalism, isn't it?**

Well, exactly. Well, except I think what the journalists should be doing is really digging out. Why is this interesting? Why does it matter? Why is my mum or my daughter going to care about this story? And then once you've worked out, what's interesting about it. Now tell it in a way that they'll think, oh, I get it. Okay. That's engaged me. I'm interested.

**We had the editor of the week on a couple of months ago, and they've got a column called boring, but important. So I always read it as well. I love the week because that's the stuff that you would gloss over, but it could have repercussions for my life, community, et cetera.**

But even the title. What I like about that is there's a sort of conversational, normal communication sense to it. You're not trying to be clever. You're not trying to be overly familiar. There's just a sort of actually guys, you should, you should read this stuff. This probably will matter in a few months or in a few years from now. and funny enough on technology, I always think it's so difficult for news to do technology away from here's a new phone or here's a new device. The big juggernauts of change, which technology is in its biggest sense are quite slow together. They develop over a long period of time. They're not lending themselves to an easy headline. Whereas news itself is all "it wants it now", it wants the instant sort of change the instant top line. So I think sometimes making it accessible, making it clear, and just conveying that "don't worry. I know you might think this is boring, but really honestly, this will change your life, it's worth tuning in for this bit". Is an art in itself.

**I mean, this is a compliment, but like your job title is so raw.**

"This is a compliment, but" that's not a good start...

**You can basically make anything of it as you like, really, because it's anything you choose to focus on will come at the expense of anything else you've got to prioritize. You've got to define what success looks like. And you're obviously a senior, very professional guy. The right person in that job could make something of it. How do you define what it is that you actually do? Because there is innumerable things that you could choose to focus on?**

I think that's true of any role at a certain level. And I think that's one of the most, , liberating moments for me as I rose up through the BBC, there was a point where I thought I literally cannot listen to and watch every program that I'm now running. I literally can't do it. And actually, that was quite a relief because before then you're trying to see all the output and feedback to people. And you're just scurrying around being incredibly busy, but not very strategic. And I think once you step back and think, what overall do I want to achieve here? Where do I think I could usefully make a difference? I remember someone saying to me about only doing what only you can do, which I think is a really good rule of thumb. And if you're keeping busy by sort of duplicating what the person next to you is doing well, don't do it.

**Just because you can do something doesn't mean you ort to do it.**

Yes, exactly.

**It's difficult though because you've then got to trust the right people and hire them. And also they're going to make mistakes. They've got to learn.**

Yes, you are going to make mistakes as well. That's fine, I think giving something a fair crack thinking, this is what I want to focus on going for it, trying to make the difference. Do you know what? You might make a bit of a marginal difference? You could make a massive difference. You're not going to know until you start down that road. So for me, it's about just giving a few things a try and working out where you think, I really don't think this element is up to scratch. I think I've got something that could improve it. Let's work on that. Or over here, we lack this all together. I think we should fill a gap here with it. And I say, you'll learn as you go and you'll get it wrong. And that's fine. I don't know a single leader who's made every decision spot on and the problem is you look at everyone else and tell yourself, my God, they're brilliant. Everyone's making extraordinary decisions and life-changing reforms, what am I doing? Well, you're doing what they're doing actually. But you just see the great bits at the end of it.

**It's tough, isn't it? So how do you define success then? What are the bits of the job that you enjoy and what are the challenges? There are three questions.**

I can pick and choose like a politician. I'll just take one of them. I think what I do enjoy on a personal level, simply learning about things, but that's of no great benefit to the company per se. Although I think it helps me in the job.

**Are you learning what's the art of the possible that technology could do, because I imagine you're not learning sort of instruction code?**

No, exactly. It's more the scope and scale of what's possible. The potential of what's possible. And what's satisfying is when you see something, it could be from the thought leadership magazine that I mentioned earlier, 'Transform' magazine, what's satisfying about that is just seeing what the industry's doing. It's not about Huawei. We, we sort of host it, as it were, but it's not about the company. It's a much more global-facing outward looking magazine. If you end up, as I have in the last few weeks, interviewing a Nobel peace prize, winning environment, economist, the founder of Wikipedia, Clive Woodward, the rugby union world cup winning ex-coach. They're just interesting people. What's not like and learn from these people and the insights they can give you across a whole range of topics.

**Sounds like you've got a better podcast than I have!**

It does finally make me realize all those presenters did have a good job after all, actually. So it is quite fun being to enjoy that. It's fantastic. Because you're chatting, you are personable and you're curious, what's not to enjoy? I think so long as you've got somebody on the other side of the table, who is also open and engaging and interested to tell you stories again, it comes back to storytelling. I want to find out their story. I want to learn from them. And I want the people listening and reading the magazine to learn from them. I'm relying on them to come up with something vaguely interesting and engaging so that we can all learn together and have a decent chat, and at the end of it go our own ways.

**It's fascinating. I've learned over the years of doing this, that extroverts love this kind of thing. But if you're an introverted person that you can also be a good leader, it's a different type of podcast. I've had quite a few introverts on**

**where frankly we've allowed longer time to record it because often there I will have to ask them more questions and shorter. Lionel Barber won't mind me saying this, but his podcast was like an hour and a half in recording cut to 50 minutes because his answers were quite short. He's a brilliant editor, but he's not a chatty person and you have to be chatty, it's a self-selecting bias, isn't it? That you have to have good radio people on the radio.**

You do. Although I think it's changing, isn't it. And I think what people view as introvert and extrovert is changing. I actually class myself as definitely an introvert, because I'm perfectly happy in my own company. I don't need to be surrounded by lots of other people now. But they're neither good nor bad are they? But I think it does change. I think you need a mix of these people, don't you? If you're all one type, whatever that type is, it's the same as if you're all men in a company. If you're all, I don't know, aristocratic in a company, if you're all left leaning, it's no good. You need a mix of views and viewpoints because that's what gives you the dynamism and the challenges and someone quietly making a point that no one else had thought of. So it's not good or bad. It's just a blend is what you're after.

**What's the Genesis of the thought leadership magazine then because, I've seen it. It's great. But then inevitably, and there's no legitimacy to this, of course, people might perceive that it's like the local council's newsletter that says, "oh, the local council's done a great job again, don't read the actual local newspaper and those horrible journalists." How do you balance that? Do you host views that are critical of Huawei?**

Yes, absolutely. And in fact, that's why I was really adamant that it's not about Huawei. It's really important that this is not the equivalent of the local council saying "another tremendous thing that we have done as a company", because I think that it's, not necessarily boring, it's just a bit predictable and it kind of washes over people.

**It also is boring, noone's going to read Huawei saying how great Huawei are. Or any company in fairness.**

Well, I think there's two things. One is that, so the magazine doesn't do that. It absolutely doesn't. And if people want to criticize Huawei or, elements of technology or disagree with the stance that we take, that is not only welcome, it's a real positive

because I think that's the whole point of having the debate. What can we learn? What can we all learn from each other? But, I do think that having that space a sort of calm space to debate things at length, I say there's hard copy, but it's online as well. Just enables people to think and pause and look ahead and sort of try and give insights into a couple of years from now, what are we working on? What are we working towards and what are the areas where we could improve for the sake of all sorts of societies, not just any given company. That said, I still think that if you tell an interesting story about a company, then the good news for that company, isn't the local parish council equivalent. It's actually, this is just an interesting story. It so happens. It's positive for Huawei, but it's actually a really interesting story. So it's trying to find that mix in the day-to-day job of what I do of telling those interesting stories, as well as in this thought leadership, exploring what everyone else is up to in the field of technology.

**I think the retention metrics speak for themselves as well. We produce quite a few podcasts and you can always tell people will listen to the first two, but if it's not very good yes. For whatever reason, they won't come back, because no one can force them to keep buying it. So you'll see that if your readership engagement rate dropped off a cliff, then you know that they don't buy it. But of course, they do, it's going from strength to strength.**

I think that's the other thing that's good is that you learn as you go. I mean, the idea that we're going to come up with a thought leadership magazine, that edition one is absolutely sensational and billions are reading it. Of course not. You've got to spread the word. You've got to adapt, maybe you need to tweet the pictures or the presentation or the design or the content obviously. Now, actually, I think, so far it's, it's gone really well. It's very new. We've only had three editions coming up with the fourth one soon and it has engaged and people really are reading for sort of minutes at a time, which in magazine terms is a lot of time on any given article.

**The so-called dwell time, sometimes it's nothing to do with editorial quality. I mean, for example, when the first pandemic happened, we lost about 20% of our listeners and as did many podcasts. And then I thought, why is this? And then of course I realized that many people listened to podcasts on their daily commute, and they weren't commuting anymore. And I also was thinking, why they're not listening to mine, but I'd also stopped listening to other podcasts as well. It wasn't a conscious decision, other things take over.**

I do a lot of running and I tend to do a run for between 45 minutes and an hour. So I need a podcast that is going to last that long because I don't want it to stop halfway, and it's okay if it jumps to the next one, that's fine. Also, if you're listening to podcasts, that's just a bit annoying. It contains good stuff, but it's a bit jarring in places. I don't want that, I'm running. I'm tired enough as it is. And there's just so much choice. I love history. I love politics and obviously technology and sport. Well, there's a lot to choose from there and every time you're listening to something that is not brilliant, you think this is 50 minutes of my life, slightly wasted, where I could have listened to something brilliant.

**It's interesting, isn't it? Because I ran until injured my knee, I'll be back running soon. But, I could never listen to music. My wife listens to music when she's running and exercising, but I then end up running to the tempo of that song. And if it's slow or varied, I'm knackered, whereas at least with voice, there's no rhythm. So you can sort of go full pelt.**

I completely agree, before I've done a fair few marathons and I did one with music, and hated it. I literally had to rip the headphones out cause I couldn't bear it after a while because I was just getting distracted and the noise of it. And what I ended up finding was better, was just before I start a marathon now or any long run, I replay Ipswich Town versus Barnsley in the playoff final, from 2000 - I'm a massive Ipswich fan, and the final goal in which we score the fourth goal to get us promoted. And I find it's such a surge of, joy and euphoria that starts me for the run. Believe me, it does actually last hours as well.

**You mentioned in an answer a few moments ago, that you were talking about what's cooking, what is cooking then at Huawei, what's top of the to-do list? What are you on with at the moment?**

Well, I refer back to the kind of startup mentality, obviously what we're trying to do, we're pumping billions, staggeringly huge numbers of dollars sort of \$22 billion into research and development across a whole swathe of, of areas. So that is trying to push at theories of technology. It's pushing cloud computing capacity, obviously, green tech is a big area for us. How do we reduce our energy consumption? And of course the energy consumption of all those who use our technology or help supply us on that chain, and we're looking for partnerships, obviously all the time. Digital power, we're looking at obviously electric and smart cars, as well as all the devices.

So in a way the to-do list is, is oddly not splinted, but it's varied because there is so many, so many boundaries to push at than a huge number of people more than half the, the company is in research and development, is in innovation. They're pushing at those boundaries and then enabling us to sort of tell those stories about what that leads to. Those micro-stories about individuals who've had their life transformed by what this technology does. I think otherwise technology can be slightly distant and slightly confusing and inaccessible, bringing it down to one person and how their life has been assisted and transformed. Suddenly it comes to life.

**What does a typical week look like for you then? Like how are you managing people? How big is your team? What do you actually do sort of day to day, moment to moment?**

Does anyone have a typical week? I don't know anyone on the planet that has a typical week! Well, funny enough, the team is an interesting point because I'm speaking to you here in London at the moment, my team is in China and I haven't been able to get to China for obviously COVID restriction reasons since I've begun. So I'm due to go out there again for the fourth time as in, to try for the fourth time very soon. So, running a team at distance is really hard. It's not the same as kind of, "oh no, we're working from home". It's like, I know, but, have you ever met these people?

**In terms of the time zone, are you up with the larks?**

Yes, I am and that's fine. I don't mind that that was the nature of media work. You're constantly on call. So I don't mind that so much, but not being able to literally sit there face to face and chat stuff through with people is harder. But, it's great having a much smaller team rather than sort of 1500 people at the BBC to have a few really working on projects. Therefore, it could be anything from sort of media advice on a particular video, how are we going to produce this video and present it? Where does it go out to, or it could be about the latest guests for the thought leadership magazine, or it could be doing a training session on communication with the media. So, each day is very different to what I'm doing. It's just that extra level of complexity when I'm in one country and they're halfway around the planet.

**Is there an element of them wanting to westernize their communications, their outward-looking nature, because they could have hired a Chinese guy in**

**China? You are a British guy and here we are in London and someone's chosen to hire you. Could you talk through their strategy overall in terms of doing that?**

The thing is, they're a global company. So it's not that they're looking to westernize. I think they are conscious that if we are operating in 170 countries, we need to broadcast to 170 people and nationals in those countries and across the world as a whole. So culturally, of course, there are differences across every country, not just between China and the UK. And I would say I'm far from the only Westerner working for them. They have excellent people, ex Sky and ex ITV people working, and elsewhere across Europe, across the world. What they're trying to do is, tell their story in a way that is meaningful and lands in every country that they operate. So, it's neither Chinese nor Western. It's trying to be genuinely global, and the problem with all these things is it always sounds a bit glib and a bit banal, but, well, they're a global company. So, of course, they want to have global messaging that works and people comprehend, and sounds like it's spoken in England by an Englishman, in France, by a French woman, in Africa. Do you know what I mean? I think you've got to adapt accordingly. It's the same message, but you've got to convey it in a way that understands the sensibilities and the culture of the given country.

**I've been reflecting on globalization recently, and if you think about it, the concept of the nation-state is weird, dotted lines on a map, I've never understood that. There are so many global brands that sort of transcending countries, you think of PayPal or Nike or anything like that. Obviously, they started somewhere, Ben and Jerry's, but Huawei has a perception that it is a Chinese business going global. Is that something that's just ultimately going to, as we globalize, become less and less relevant?**

Again, slightly like the BBC is a British company that's gone global. There's no denying, nor do I want to, because I think its Chinese heritage is a fantastic thing, that's where it was born as a company but, we've been in the UK for 20 years plus now, and a number of other countries. So I think again, every company starts somewhere, it starts small, it evolves. It changes, it realizes that the way it operated 10 years ago, isn't quite right for 10 years from now so, you are constantly changing. I agree with you, the dotted lines in an era of globalization become less and less meaningful, particularly in the field of actually media and technology because they instantly flow. I think that that's a very positive thing. And I think that the standards that you have as in, when we are setting global standards for technology, they need

to be global rather than ring-fenced and cut off. I think it's good that there's huge cooperation between brilliant engineers in Europe and America and China and Africa and the rest of Asia. I think it's all these things putting up false barriers to development that could benefit every single person living on the planet seem to me, both counterproductive and sort of delaying the inevitable. Anyway, these advances will happen. Why don't we do them together rather than having 15 different types of railway tracks, you have a sort of an accepted standard. Well, the same is true for 5G, for any innovation that's coming down the track, let's try and make sure we're cooperating and partnering on these things so that we can all benefit from it.

**Did you think you'd be a BBC news lifer because, at one point before this, you were obviously one of the big senior people at the BBC, and now you're not! If you could walk our listeners through your career, did you envisage being there for 60 years and that you would never sort of go corporate?**

No, it's interesting actually, I started the East Anglian Daily Times. In fact, even before that, when I left university, I got two jobs. One was in media, for the East Anglian Daily Times in Suffolk and one was for Proctor & Gamble as marketing. And it was a real moment of, which of these careers am I going to do? They're both really good, one pays a heck of a lot, and one is the East Anglian Daily Times, And it was like, "do you know what? I'm just more interested in doing news and being a journalist." So, I went down that route and then to get the BBC job after a couple of years was just genuinely an amazing moment for me. I thought "I'm going to work for the BBC! I've watched this stuff, and I've listened to this stuff. This is amazing!" And then each time I got a promotion, whether it was working for Radio 4 or working for News Night or running the political team and Nick Robinson, at the time, so far as anyone can run Nick Robinson, obviously. Each thing was kind of, "wow, I can't believe it. I'm doing X. I'm doing what?" So as it went on, yes, I probably did envisage. "I going to be at BBC forever. This is just fantastic!" And it was relatively recently the last five, six years. I just thought, "am I though, am I going to do this?" I'm never going to be the head of news, the director of news, both by choice. And also because frankly, there are other people who are infinitely better than me to do that job, but I also thought I genuinely don't want that job.

**It's like being the Home Secretary in a sense, that it's thankless until something goes wrong and then heads will roll. Starting with yours.**

Well, there's that, but there's also an element of I've done it. I've done that role for five, or six years. Do I now flatline for the next 10? And I had an opportunity of running the world service, which would've been amazing and incredible, but would it in three years' time be amazing and incredible, and would I be back where I started, am I going to be the BBC forever? Or if I'm going to jump, if I'm going to go somewhere else, I've got to give myself time to actually learn that and embrace it. And this felt like the best time to do it. And it's sort of all things fitted together. So I just thought let's do it.

**What have been the surprises then since you've left, what's gone along the lines of what you thought it would and what hasn't? There were things that you would know you would learn. I don't want to sort of paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, but there would have been known unknowns, but what would've been the unknown unknowns, the genuine eyebrow raisers?**

I mean, of course, there are cultural differences that I knew there would be cultural differences, but until you see them and hear them then obviously, okay, fine, I hadn't expected that,! But actually, do you know what, boring answer, not that many! Really, not that many that was unexpected. Part of that again is because I'm here in the UK. I think when I go to China, and I've been to China before, but not with the company, then I think there will be more of a different experience than working in the middle of the BBC, obviously. I think actually, because it's broadly an editorial role because I'm working for a very large company and the BBC was a big old corporation as well, albeit a fraction of the size. And I'm used to sort of hierarchies and getting on with your tasks and just being quite creative, actually not massively different. And that's, what's sort of quite interesting. I think for me, realizing I'm not, I mean, a completely different field as it were, it's not media it's technology, but actually, the crossover is enormous.

**When I started this 20 years ago, whatever it is that I do, I actually thought that an editor sort of edits, like what a sub-editor would actually do, look at the actual document and put commas there and so on. Obviously, the role of the editor is to be a leader who sets the strategy and the turn and all these kinds of things. What type of editor are you?**

I would say, I am pretty, maybe everyone says this. I'm definitely open. I genuinely want conversations. I'm not somebody who says "right, do this. I'm the boss I'm

telling you to do it." You've got to trust the people who are your editors, the people who are, one step beneath you as it were. The people who are in charge of the today program in charge of the 10 o'clock news, there's a reason they got to those positions. They're really good. They've got excellent judgment. What they want is on occasion to bounce some ideas off you and have a different insight, a different perspective. So, I think what I try to always do is A) be supportive B) not interfere. You're not changing the running order, that's their job. It's fine. You might give a view on it. You might discuss things. And I think what I really try to do a lot of is, again, back to the curiosity point of what are we trying to explore and are we looking at all elements of this? Are we looking from different perspectives? It's very easy I think for the media to get into a bit of a, not a blind alley, but a kind of group think, where this is the story, and rather than just stop a second, is it so mad what they're doing? Why aren't we looking at this on the other side? Isn't that a bit more interesting? I think that was the sort of joy of journalism. You could take any story, or ignore the big story that's running and look at something totally different. My role was to be supportive both on a sort of professional and personal basis and be there, as an accessible boss, as it were. But also to try and change one or two things, whether it was tonally or whether it was practically. I remember, at the end, when I left Question Time, David Dimbleby said, "what was good about you Gavin is you didn't get in the way." And I thought, well, that's a slightly backhanded compliment, and he said, "no, no, no. I mean, it, it's very easy to get in the way what you were there was when we needed you, you were accessible, but you weren't constantly looking over everyone's shoulder and sort of interfering and prying and just sticking an unnecessary ore in", and I think trying to get that balance of leading, but not feeling presenteeism is actually quite valuable. So, that's what I try and do.

**I can't watch Question Time anymore and don't get me wrong, Fiona's fantastic. She's an amazing journalist and as good as David, it's nothing against her. But, it's the general public, it's the people in the audience. There's negativity to it, and there's this whole sort of two Facebook feed things where people aren't listening to each other everyone's on broadcast mode. And it just seems that Question Time is just a gruelling, unpleasant experience. I don't blame the production team for that, I blame people. You can have people in the audience who're going to be unpleasant.**

It's amazing how nervous the panellists get. I mean, really very, very, very senior people who are...

**I've had clients on it. I've been in the audience. When you're advising someone who's on there, you're biting your nails. You don't know what is going to be asked.**

No, you really don't.

**And you also don't know which order you're going to be brought in because whatever the question, good or bad, you never want to be last, because anything that's worthy of being said has already been said.**

Yes, exactly. Equally, you don't particularly want to be first either with no time to think. I think what's brilliant about it is it's very easy for me to have my view and I discuss it with my wife and surprise surprise me and my wife sort of agree on most things, and I chat to my friends and surprise surprise we all agree on things, within reason. What's great about Question Time is there are a bunch of people who just disagree and aren't afraid to disagree. And the dynamism of having a cabinet minister and a member of the public just going directly going at it, I actually think is something that we should be very careful about losing. Where else do you get that? The whole kind of on-the-stump rallying, the sort of almost Gladstone, we need that kind of visceral element in politics. I still don't think there's any need for it to be rude or abusive, but I don't think Question Time is it's pretty raucous on occasion, but it's direct and it really does give you a sense of wow. It's great for news people because it's like, hold on a second. Are we missing a trick? They seem really riled about this issue. We could do more on this.

**I've always thought Astair Campbell was a genius, and never more genius when he had the so-called masochism strategy after Iraq, where he deliberately with Tony's consent, put him in front of very angry people, I think that was good from a selfish point of view from a strategy, but it was also good for democracy. There was the prime minister going in front of raw people who genuinely despised this man and said, I'm sorry that your son died. I think it was genuine, I hate the phrase win-win, but actually, that was good for democracy, and he gave that person a little bit of catharsis that they could actually.**

Funny enough I've cited that recently actually the 2005 massacre. Because, I agree. I thought it was a really effective way of not just cathartic, but he got to hear what the

arguments were direct. He had to really hone down his argument and what worked, what didn't, not in a cynical way, but in, a kind of, what is landing, what's not, but also, as you say, just for democracy, like, I'm not hiding, I'm not coming out with some statement on Twitter, but not engaging with the public or the media I'm going out there. I'm absolutely face-to-face going to chat with you. The problem, of course, is that maskism strategy one-to-one is a pretty inefficient way of doing politics. It's great. If you can meet all 65 million members of the UK, but you're not going to. I agree as a concept, don't duck the big question, just engage with it. Whatever you think of the Iraq war, it doesn't matter what my personal view is. He believed what he was doing was the correct thing to do, for whatever complex reasons. And that's fine, therefore he should have the courage or did have the courage of his convictions to go out there and argue that, that is surely what democracy is about, whatever your view of his politics and his decision. At least he's there standing up for it. And I think that is, again, party politics aside. I think that is laudable.

**I stood for parliament, myself for the Labour Party in 2005 and that was after Iraq, and we won a big majority, or reasonable majority.**

People always forget that.

**I was there literally there. The narrative took root afterwards because frankly, Gordon's lot wanted that Tony was a war criminal with all his lies and everything. And then, I think, Tony took a decision deliberately that he thought he wasn't going to beg for his character and that he was going to go be a global states person. And why should he spend years denying it? Frankly, that was the bit, I think he got wrong because there was no one rebutting some of the lies. When we got elected in 1997, we had the rapid rebuttal strategy that Mandelson brought in, which was genius. Someone would say something completely wrong on the today program. And within five minutes there was a facts coming into the editor's thing saying, no, that's absolutely not true. If you don't have that rebuttal, then that negative, that wrong impression takes root. I think people don't realize is that all this negativity toward Tony took place after he left office.**

To a degree. I mean, obviously, politics is divisive. People do feel strongly about the issues they care most about and they're most knowledgeable about.

**Do you not think there's rudeness now on both sides? Like everyone just seems to be angry and on shouty mode?**

I looked at this in a Harvard course at the tail end of my time at the BBC. I don't think the media, I hate to say this is, entirely innocent of that though. I think the more you have, let's have a discussion about who thinks X is great, and who thinks the opposite of X. I think too much political debate, and too much public discourse. And I include the media in that, is a bit too polarized and it's a bit too "life is black and white." Let's get the white view, the black view, let's smash them together and we'll have colour and it'll be a really lively debate. Without being po-faced about it, is it particularly illuminating there? Am I learning anything from that? The interviews I love and, I sent a note to a presenter recently, he did this interview and he was just interested. He was interested in what the answers were. Wasn't soft. He was absolutely holding to account, but he gave the person a chance to answer, to engage with him. If they're ducking the question, of course, you've got to be robust. I'm not calling for soft interviews, but what is the point of journalism it's meant to be, to inform people it's meant to be, to educate, entertain, et cetera. But at the end of listening to someone for 10 minutes, I want to go away thinking great. I'm actually more knowledgeable or more understanding of their position than I was at the beginning. And if it's just a shouting match of one person attacking one person desperately flailing and defending, what is the point other than a bit of theatre. Sure. But I think it does, if you're not careful, it does debate discourse in general. And so I know that sounds totally high-minded. I just think it matters that, there was a very brilliant thing that someone said to me, and I saw Evan Davis do as well, actually, really brilliant journalist. And again, he was interested, curious, precise and not soft, but he did this thing where he said it was about Brexit actually. And the exercise was, can you explain your opponent's argument back to them in a way that they would agree with? In other words, it's no good caricaturing. It's no good saying it in a silly way. They're not going to agree with that. Everything has to start with at least understanding what your opponent's view is. Then you can start to have common ground in a debate, but if all you're doing is caricaturing their position and they're caricaturing your position. There's no meeting of mindsets. You're just shouting at each other.

**I studied law for my degree, and whilst I can't remember any of the cases apart from a couple of them. One of the things it did teach me is how to think and how to go about those things. So we did this process over the whole course called mooting, where you would be given a case and it would be in a mock**

**courtroom, but you wouldn't be told whether you were prosecuting or defending until three seconds before someone said, right go. So, you absolutely had to know the other case because you had to know the weaknesses and the strengths of both sides. I think that that made well, fictionally in this scenario, a better advocate because you have to. Also, frankly, selfishly, if you could know the weaknesses and have a genuine understanding of the other side, then actually you are a more fearsome opponent.**

Well, the phrase you used just then it's that genuine understanding. It's not a caricature, it's not a willful misunderstanding or a positioning of their argument in a way that benefits you, but isn't really their argument at all. I did history at university and love history, all I ever read is history books because I think it's everything that tells you about the modern world and where the world's going, ironically. I think it should be pretty compulsory.

**I hated that it was called history at school because actually I've got into it now, and science, and it's actually people, it's everything. It's the world, everything that we ever think about has already been done infinitely. And why can't we learn from that?**

It's this idea of being willing to learn. This again comes back to Huawei, be willing to understand what is the company, actually understand the company don't buy into every attack line on anything. Not just one way, anything, if everyone is attacking something, why not find out? Why not actually read? Is that true? Is that correct? And I just think too much now is based on, well, it's what I think, it's what I feel. It's like, okay, it's great that you feel that, but what is it based on? And I don't want everything to be a sort of an academic exercise, but I do nonetheless think that these things matter. News does matter what is going on, what is changing really does matter and is going to change your lives, at least do yourself. The favour of understanding it enough that you can make a coherent sort of argument about it, or have a debate about it and, and try and change it in the way that benefits you.

**I suppose the most depressing question I've got for you, is a matter of genuine existential dread for me, what's the point? Because, for example, I had the pleasure of working with Richard Dawkins many years ago and he used to have this phrase, which really stuck with me that said you can't reason**

**someone out of the position that they've not reasoned themselves into. And for example, on Brexit, I don't know about you, but ever since it was even called the debate over the many years before the vote itself, I don't know anyone that changed their mind. There were either people who were always going to vote remain or always people that were going to leave.**

oh, I did. I knew quite a lot of people. I myself was pretty, I could argue. I mean, funny enough I did exactly the exercise Boris Johnson did, I didn't go as far as actually writing it. I agree he's in a different position from me, just sat there thinking, oh, what do I think I'll mull it over. He's going to have to lead one of these campaigns potentially. But nevertheless, the exercise of challenging yourself by saying this is absolutely my view. Actually, what's the counter view? As you say, it's healthy. So I think, what's the point? It's almost an endless question obviously in these things.

**I know you're already optimistic, you haven't engaged with bitterness with the misery of the question.**

I think I am actually fundamentally an optimist. I think that's true. And, I don't know, whether goes back to being an Ipswich Town fan, I think actually you've got to be pretty optimistic constantly. And there are times there. I wonder what's the point, but I think having kids as well is always going to make you feel there's a future. There's something more to this. And I want to, do something that makes them feel, oh, the world's a slightly brighter place. Even if it's brighter just in our household, just for that day, what are you doing that just contributes and leaves the whole place marginally better than you not having been in it? If we all did that again, without being totally banal, just I think these, these micro acts of kindness, all these various things that people do good. Why be cynical and sceptical about that? What's the downside to that of people being pleasant to each other. Great. Go for it, multiply it. Fantastic.

**I condemn all this pleasure.**

I know it's far too optimistic and positive.

**I wish to disassociate myself formally from this optimism. I mean, the BBC does get a bad rap, but I believe it's committed to truth and it's committed to good journalism. And I, also support, the plurality of media, of course, but not to condemn the times or the Guardian or The Sun, but they have their own**

**agenda in so far as a The Sun reader has chosen the lens through which he or she wants the news. They want to read The Sun's take on it, which might come from a slightly right of centre, a certain way of looking at the world. Whereas the BBC can't have that luxury due to the way that it's funded. And therefore you're never going to please anyone. In fact, everyone's going to always give you a kicking.**

That's certainly true that the BBC was quite the brunt of attacks from all sides. I have to say when GB News started for instance, and it was, this is the antidote to the BBC. I genuinely welcomed it, because I think why would you be anti another media outlet? I want the Telegraph, the Daily Mail, the Guardian...

**People wanted it to fail though, from both sides of the argument.**

I thought it was bizarre. I just think, look, if you don't like it, and if enough people don't like it, of course, it'll fail, but why condemn it before it's even begun? You've not even watched it yet. At least give it a chance. And I knew a lot of people who worked there and I thought this is a good thing that we are starting up immediately know whether it's global. I think it's just an odd thing for a journalist to be against. Now. Of course, I am pro due impartiality and accuracy and precision and don't get me wrong, there are articles and things I see that make me mad. Because I think this is so bad, this journalism, but it doesn't mean the entity doing it is inherently evil. I just think, look, you can disagree or agree, but this, this seems to me, the multiplicity of media of all sorts, small and large, I think is great for the sort of British democracy and globally having all these institutions, different media outlets, challenging and vying with each other is a good thing. But there is a massive responsibility that comes with that, I think. And that's the bit that I go back to, how we conduct that journalism is important.

**What advice would you give to someone starting out in their career now? I ask this quite a lot because I'm fascinated by it, in one sense there are fewer journalism jobs than ever. So, there's a scarcity there, but on the other hand, there's an opportunity to make a name for yourself and get noticed with social media and blogging and podcasting and so on. Would you have gone about your career in the same way if you started it now as you did back then?**

Yes, it's a really good question. I didn't particularly go into the career - when I began, it was not like I had this lifelong drive and I was writing articles left, right and centre. As I said earlier, I weighed up a couple of options and thought, "oh, I'll give this one a go. That one seems to appeal to me more." I think now, the key thing for any job is enthusiasm. If you've got energy and enthusiasm, you're not going to come up with a Pulitzer prize-winning piece straight away, or you might do, but it's unlikely. But I think if you are just driven and you are interested in people or interested in stories, I'd probably advise people if they have got a specialism to sort of, as long as it's not absolutely micro, to pursue that. Because I think as you say, the platforms now give you such a voice that real expertise I think people hone in on. I can look at any given news app and scan it and go, okay, got, yes, I've got it. I've got the gist of the news. I know what's happening broadly. I know who's in and out of the conservative campaign. I know what's happening in Sri Lanka or whatever, I get the gist. What you want is the depth beyond that, who's going to give me the real insight into those stories, or any given story? So I would say focus down and become an expert and you'll be much more in demand than frankly what I was, which was a sort of generalist. But, don't underestimate enthusiasm, people can choose from a million different potential journalists. You want someone on the other side of that table who just looks keen, who's going to really give it a fair crack and you just think, great. I want this person to be working with me.

### **You have a personal connection to China, do you not?**

I do, yes, long before getting a job with a global Chinese-based company. So, my oldest daughter is adopted from China. She's coming up to 18 this year, and this is the wonders of modern technology actually, and science because we didn't want her to be the only Chinese child in the family, we wanted to adopt, again, from China just at the time when actually they were really slowing down adoptions and it became clear, this was never going to happen. So, my wife rather brilliantly managed to find an egg donor entirely altruistic, I should say egg donor. Who's obviously now a lifelong friend. So we now have a second daughter who is half Chinese, a Chinese egg donor, and carried by my wife and my son. My youngest son is the twin of my second daughter. But there's a difference in age of eight years. That's because of a frozen embryo. So in terms of modern tech and modern science, you look at the family and think, wait a minute, you guys are both sort of white, Anglo, you've got a Chinese older daughter, you've got two kids who look sort of Chinese. That's the joy of London life, isn't it, it doesn't matter, they're great kids.

**My first thought there was who cares. And I mean that in a positive, warm, loving way, who cares where anyone's from these days, what matters is what MLK said all those years ago, it's the contents of your character.**

That's definitely true, and that's why, funnily enough, the whole COVID stuff and the "China flu" and views of China. We do feel it a bit more than some families. I think you do get a backlash, I wouldn't say as strong as Sinophobia, but just a suspicion of Chinese or suspicion of the generality of an entire country feels like such an ignorant starting point.

**It is ignorant. I take out that it's getting less and less, if you watch Blackadder Goes Forth, they hated the Germans, "the vile Hun", they would say, as it were. Now, no one hates Russians, we might have problems with the Russian regime, but, there as big a victim as we are - they don't want this.**

I think that's true.

**I think there is an elevation of consciousness now, more generally around the planet. I have no problem with Chinese people, I have various issues with the Chinese government. I have various issues with Milton Keynes's council.**

Now that really will be going down tangential avenues.

**No one wants to bomb Milton Keynes.**

Well, some people do, but yes.

**I'll make sure that I'm not there when they do it!**

You are right. You're right. And I think it's not a universe and so, I think that's what gives me hope actually, that they're just building that understanding, finding out a bit more and we're all fundamentally the same, aren't we? We all want the best for our families, we all want the best in life. So, it's just interesting seeing it through different eyes, not my eyes, but through the kid's eyes.

**Obviously, being active in the Labour Party for so many years, all of Tony's sayings rub off on me. But one of the things that he also said, and I was thinking of it then, is that the whole left, right dynamic doesn't really work anymore now. And there are sort of two different types of thinking in politics now. One is, are you fearful of change in the future? And the other one is let's embrace the uncertainty and change.**

But that's always been true, isn't it? That's the core divide in politics and in life, of people who are quite happy and there are people who want to jump forward and embrace it. I would say that, again, it comes down to understanding, I totally understand why if you are happy with your lot, and you're really not sure you understand this sort of technology, for instance, I mean, I've seen it with my own parents and parents in law of "I don't really want to do online banking. I'm really not sure about that". When you do it, of course, you think "why didn't I do this years ago? This is fantastically simple!" But you've got to make that jump.

**When was the last time you wrote a cheque?**

Well, I was in the post office yesterday and the person behind the counter said, "you'll have to return it via cheque" or something else that was just like, no one has these! I can't remember.

**I wouldn't even know where it is!**

No, I just think no one uses it. And, but no one mourns it. I don't think anyone mourns it. And in all the choices we have, all the access we have, all the connectivity we have, but I totally accept these things have to be explained. And there's a slow pace, we don't need to get impatient with people who are anxious about those things, because there'll be things that we in turn will be anxious about come down the track. So I just think it's a bit more patience with people, a bit more understanding, a bit more listening, frankly. And thinking, okay, well, how can we reassure you? What could we do that would make you embrace this change for the better?

**Last question, then what's been the best day of your journalism career so far? Or your career, I should say! What's the thing you've done that you're most proud of?**

I think the one that was the most memorable is definitely the day of 9/11 back in 2001.

**I was on holiday, but you would not believe this. I was on holiday during 9/11 in a Greek island and it was, and I had no signal. So for two days, I didn't know what had gone on. And then I rang my friend and said, oh, how is it going? And he's like, well, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, something happened. And he went, do you not know? And I went, no!**

You were like the Japanese soldier in the jungle. Weren't you basically, after the war and finished 30 years later! I think it's funny. I knew someone exactly in that same circumstance, but as a journalist, there's a human reaction of "my God!" When that second plane hits and you're watching it live, because we're in the newsroom and you're thinking, "oh, that first one was an accident."

**Other planes, one had been downed. One had crashed into the Pentagon. You're thinking could there have been another 20 planes?**

It was just a staggering day, you just knew the world had changed in an instant. And then someone saying you, right, can you do a sort of special PM program on Radio 4 you can edit, so half of you is, "this is extraordinary as a journalist", half of you is panicking about, "what am I going to put in this program?" And at the same time, of course, everyone wants to speak. So it's almost too much, you're almost overwhelmed with extraordinary images and tragedy.

**And isn't it in that moment actually about reportage, about getting someone who's there down the line to say, what the hell are you seeing? Like there's no time for analysis because it's still going on.**

Well, I think that's the other thing about journalism and news. It's so quick now it's so, how can we take this story on what's our new top line? It's like, do you know what, before you give us a new top line, just explain to me again, what's going on.

**Paul Royall said that that's the problem with editing the 6 and the 10 now, before Hugh Edwards has even opened his mouth. Everyone already knows the news. They've got the breaking news alerts and everything else. You don't**

**watch the 10 now for the news, you watch it for to be explained what has happened.**

Yes, I think that's probably true. I worked with Paul in my team and he is brilliant editor. I wouldn't underestimate actually a lot of people still do come to the news as a kind of I've sort of got the news, I've sort of got the gist, just put it all in one place and tell me it. And I think, at the moment Sri Lanka is a very good example of this, of like, sorry, why is it all falling apart? Keep telling me why. And it's no good saying "no, we did that on Tuesday." It's like, I know, but it's Thursday and I didn't see Tuesday's program. I want to know why.

**And also it's happening now. But, I didn't know that the president years ago said we're not going to use fertilizer for example, and you think why didn't someone... I mean, it might have been in the news. Of course, I might have just sort of thumbed past it in the newspaper as you do. But again, an incredibly important thing where I think, why didn't people speak out? Why did we let them get away with this lunacy?**

It's also one of the biggest challenges, how do you stop the news being relentlessly repetitive? Because it's always explaining. Now just explain why Sri Lanka is in this sort of mess. If you do that every night, people will think, oh, I've watched it already for everyone who hasn't seen it there's the person who has. So it's a constant challenge for people like Paul.

**Well, I had Alan Rusbridger sat in that very seat a couple of years ago, and he said, that's the problem with climate change, it's an existential crisis that's going to kill us all if we don't do something about it. But, it's not newsy. There isn't a bridge that's collapsed or someone that's got stabbed or a blood stain or a car crash or something. Yes, you can have stock footage of an iceberg, which is falling.**

They certainly do have that footage.

**Which is almost cliché now. Also, it might be that the actual iceberg did collapse yesterday and there's the footage, but it looks like a stock image of an iceberg.**

But this is the craziness of news at one level, which is exactly, as you say, or as Alan said, it's kind of, this is existential. This could be the end of the planet as we know it, it's the future of humanity versus "yes. But boring though, isn't it? Not much of a top line" and you think, what are we doing? How can it be boring?

**Boring but life-threatening.**

Exactly!

**But it is going to change everything. When you actually read about the repercussions of climate change, it's genuinely chilling.**

But again, and this is something that people like Roger Harrabin at the BBC, who has just left, made it his life work to try and explain the importance of these stories. Again, it comes back to storytelling. Again, it comes back to how do we bring it to life? And it's true for all technology, all technological change, even existential, even non-existential, how do you convey this? So I understand it. I'm interested in it. It could be anything from looking at what's happening to the red squirrel population of the UK or Wales or, any given future of the Panda. It doesn't matter. How do you bring it to life to say, this is having an impact. This is the micro change as part of this massive story. Each time there is an iteration of it. And, as I say, you could do it every night on every news outlet, and you've got to pick your moments.

**We do need explainers though. Because you mentioned there about the red squirrel population. I seem to recall as a child, that one, a grey squirrel might be vermin, or it might be the other way around. Like someone needs to tell me, a Hugh Edwards needs to say grey squirrels are regarded as vermin and the, red squirrels need to be protected or it could be the other way around. But like you said there about the red squirrel population declining, I wouldn't know whether to go well, that's great news or, oh, that's terrible until I've had someone to tell me how to think.**

Funny enough. I actually picked the red squirrel out there because I've just been thinking about it with Huawei because we are doing some work protecting and analyzing the environment. They're the British squirrel, the great British squirrel. You're right. Look, people get confused, people try to work out what's going on and look, you're hearing it now in the middle of a heat wave, everyone is going, oh, it's

not so bad this climate change is it? It's quite nice weather! And you just think, yes, but there's a downside. And it's natural reactions and picking those moments where people are interested in something that seems reflective of climate change. Great. That's your in, that's your chance to explain something in a way that doesn't feel medicinal and I'm the teacher and lecturer and you are the pupil.

**I rudely interrupted you and we have gone off on several tangents there, because you were talking about 9/11. What is it about that day then that made you so proud as a journalist, you said there that you've got everything and nothing? How did you actually do the job at that moment? I thought you were editing the PM program.**

Yes. I edited the PM program that day.

**Was the mayor presenting?**

God now, who was it presenting? I think it probably was, but I actually genuinely can't remember. Which is weird that I can't. Well, I think that's what made it a proud day that in your head you are sort of screaming almost of like, oh my God, this really, really matters. All ears are going to be on this program and this is much more important than media, this is just an extraordinary event globally. I've got a proper responsibility here and at the same time as that sort of screaming voice saying my God, are you up to it? And all the self-doubt, you're just having to make decisions. And it's really quick decisions, really quick deployments, , whether you're doing a montage of this or chasing this interview or bringing in that piece of, as you say, reportage. And so it's just the organizational element. It's the end result of it, or just feeling slightly, emotionally drained at the end of it. But this is day one of a moment that clearly is going to go on for days, months, and years to come. And we've got off on the right informative foot on it, on this station, on my program at the time. Also, it's partly pride. It's also just as a journalist, you want to be there for these amazing stories. So it was just a kind of journalistic pride, personal pride and enjoyment is not the right word, obviously for a moment like that, but you wouldn't want to miss it. You wouldn't want to be having a day off or being on the Greek island as a journalist when this story is breaking, you want to be involved in it. Trying to explain it as best as you can to people as much as anyone could explain it on that day.

**Gavin, that was a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you ever so much for your time.**

Thanks very much, Paul.