



# Happy in life & work

After starting out with nothing but £100 for a suit from his father and an instruction to ‘find a job’ – a determined Neil Stone has gone on to develop Bargets into a very successful independent agency. Here, Neil enjoys a conversation with Natasha Higgins.

**N**eil Stone is amused. His laughter is hearty, wholesome and infectious. The source of his amusement? This question: “Where did it all begin?”

“Where did it all begin?” he repeats rhetorically. “Well, you see, it all began in 1979, on my first day back at school after the summer,” he recalls, an ability to capture his listener immediately as he casts his mind back 30 odd years. “I thought I was about to start my A-Levels but my headteacher looked puzzled and asked why I’d come back to school.”

On that note Neil went to see his father who gave him £100 for a suit and told him to find a job. “I remember buying a pair of grey flannel trousers and a navy blazer before catching a bus from West Hampstead, where I lived, to St John’s Wood.”

That day Neil walked all through London knocking at the door of every agent in town until he got lucky. Lassman’s in Mayfair offered him a junior role for £1,300 a year plus shoe leather. He stayed there four years.

“While I was at Lassmans I sold the house of the owner of Bargets at the time, and he in effect ‘poached me’ to come and work for him, so I accepted his offer.” Today, almost three decades have passed and Neil, who then bought Bargets in 1989, has successfully created one of London’s leading independent agencies.

Bargets’ offices sit on Park Road, adjacent to Regent’s Park ideally located for the patches they cover: Regent’s Park, Little Venice, St John’s Wood, Hampstead and further north. The office itself reflects neither flounce nor flair – it’s a simple, solid hub with a dedicated team of staff. “I like to keep things simple,” explains Neil. “I’m not

a fan of overcomplicating anything”.

Smartly dressed in a dark suit, light-blue shirt and his trademark specs, it’s a Thursday morning and Neil is mid-negotiations. “At Bargets, we’re fortunate enough to deal with the top end of the market,” explains Neil. “We deal with properties from £2 million to £50 million so it can get really interesting and exciting. When you’re dealing with such valuable assets you’re interacting with extremely intelligent and savvy people.”

Neil recalls one such deal where he had a buyer who wanted six properties within

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a specific modern development on The Bishops Avenue. The complication lay in that the buyer needed the transaction to happen in one single day or not at all. The first step was getting the homeowners to agree to sell and then coordinating the entire sale to happen on the same day: “We had four months to arrange the deal and I was on the phone the entire time, like a City broker, but it all worked out in the end.”

The reason for Bargets’ longevity and success, Neil believes, although careful to state that ‘you’re only as good as your next deal’, is down to the speedy responses their clients receive, Neil’s ability to make a sound decision in three seconds, his availability 24/7 and a fantastic team. “I’m also very competitive but I suppose everyone is nowadays. However, we also understand this is invariably people’s biggest asset and

a transaction that needs to be handled with care.”

Neil puts his ‘entrepreneurial skills’ down to the politics he’s grown up with and rates Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister, as one of his heroes. “The year I left school, 1979, was the year Thatcher came into power and she really influenced me. She encouraged people to set up their own businesses and be wealth creators.”

What about his view on the present Government’s decision to raise the level of stamp duty? “It’s a slap in the face to foreign buyers who’ve invested in the central London property market for so long and kept it so strong,” says Neil acerbically. “I actually find it very damaging.”

Despite fluctuations in the economy and a down-turn in homeowners selling their properties, Bargets is still going strong partly thanks to its highly-successful lettings division. “We’re incredibly popular with international people looking to rent in London who want to be near to the American School in St John’s Wood,” he explains.

Neil certainly looks happy and relaxed. He’s just been to Washington on a holiday with his wife and two children, where they were given a guided tour of the two Houses of Congress. He says he loved Washington with its fabulous architecture and history.

“I love spending time with my children. The other day I came home and my son, who’s doing his A-Levels, told me he’d taken an aptitude test at school which determined he be suited to being a lawyer. I never had that sort of insight but I’m forever grateful for my late father’s guidance, and the £100 he gave me that started this whole thing off,” Neil says, a smile beginning to form. Is he about to laugh?

**Bargets**  
**020 7402 9494**  
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*A superb double fronted house, built circa 1905, which benefits from off-street parking and a 70ft east facing garden.*



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*An attractive Grade II Listed, double fronted stucco house situated in one of St John’s Woods finest locations.*



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