

JOHN KNOWLES

Pro-Chancellor,

John Knowles is a prominent businessman and entrepreneur. As Chairman and formerly Managing Director he has led DEK Printing Machines Ltd, a Weymouth-based microelectronics company, to world leadership in its specialist field. For many years he was a member of this University's Board, serving as Deputy Chairman and as Chairman of the Personnel Committee. Mr Knowles is also Deputy Chairman of Poole Foundation Trust Hospital. He plays a leading part in the development of entrepreneurship in schools.

John is first and last a Yorkshireman, as anybody would find out within a few minutes of meeting him for the first time. His family heritage was in the wool industry, so he was destined for a business career from the outset. After school he joined the Shell graduate management training programme on a sandwich degree course in Business at Leeds University. As part of the programme he joined the Shell Mex and BP Company in London. His first role was working with Shell Mex & BP's National Benzole retail brand on what was then a highly innovative promotion: free drinking glasses! Not only was he very popular with friends needing glasses for parties; so successful was the promotion that retail sales through the National Benzole brand came close to overtaking BP's branded sales. The powers-that-be considered this to be unacceptable and National Benzole gradually declined, eventually to be subsumed by the BP brand.

John then changed direction and took a Short Service Commission in the Army. Shell again sponsored him, treating this military experience as part of his management training, and guaranteeing his job. He spent three years in the Royal Artillery, much of the time in West Germany training with tactical nuclear missiles and guns. He also spent as much time as possible skiing, where he represented the Army, and organising adventure training schemes for soldiers.

On leaving the Army John's career took another turn. Instead of returning to Shell he wanted to work in a smaller business, and in sales, so he joined DEK Printing Machines Ltd, expecting to stay about two years. However one thing led to another: after seven years as Sales and Marketing Director he was appointed Managing Director and in 2000 became Chairman, an appointment he still holds.

DEK started life making small, hand-operated printing machines. Now it is the undisputed world leader in the design and manufacture of printing machines used in the assembly of printed circuit boards. The company celebrated its 40th anniversary this year, and around the world its 18 offices held simultaneous parties in which all employees were asked to wear a hat! When John joined DEK, in 1974, its annual revenue was \$6 million and it employed 30 people; now it turns over more than \$250 million and has a workforce approaching 1,000 worldwide, including 300 in China.

At DEK John's leadership has always strongly emphasised teamwork - he built a senior team which has now been together for over 12 years - and a business culture which treats change as an unthreatening matter of routine. This approach was particularly effective, and never more necessary, in 1990 when the last economic recession hit the microelectronics industry and the company had to change rapidly or go under. John established a flat management structure and made fundamental strategic changes, from long to short production lead-times, using what were then innovative "Just In Time" and Kanban techniques to achieve this. Order-books are now short and machines are built to order. When John introduced these business practices they were regarded as highly advanced, at least in the UK, and companies like Ericson and Motorola beat a path to DEK's door to see how it all worked.

Following this restructuring and recovery, DEK grew rapidly and consistently. It now serves worldwide markets with high-profile international customers including Nokia, Intel and Motorola, and manufactures about 50 per cent of its output in China. Product developments include a revolutionary new printhead device known as ProFlow, which it now licenses to companies such as Sanyo,

Panasonic and Yamaha. Recently the company has introduced a new range of machines which are used in the production of solar cells. Over the last ten years DEK has acquired companies in the UK, France, the Netherlands and the USA. The company has achieved an enviable reputation for quality, reliability and best practice. In John's own words, 'ethical business standards are at the heart of all we do', and he is convinced that 'the good guys do actually win in the end'.

John Knowles is highly active in other areas of business and the community. He is Deputy Chairman of Poole Foundation Trust Hospital, taking great pride in its excellence, and is a director of four other companies. He and DEK are strong supporters of Enterprise in Schools, and work closely with The Enterprise and Skills Company, promoting initiatives to attract children into manufacturing business careers. John has understandably proved to be a notable role model in this regard. At DEK he launched a Junior Entrant Training scheme and a graduate entry programme. Bournemouth University students have also benefitted greatly from placements at the company.

Bournemouth University is delighted to acknowledge the many years of service which John Knowles has given as a member of the Board since 1999, during which time he has been Deputy Chairman of the Board, Chair of the Personnel Committee and a member of the Nominations Committee, the Remuneration Committee and the Strategy & Resources Committee.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present John Knowles, and ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Business Administration, *honoris causa*.