

**"...when you build that trust  
and work as your client's  
partner, it's truly the most  
rewarding career."**

Jonny Shingles



## **Flying high – from tornado pilot to financial advice entrepreneur**

Jonny left university to join the Royal Air force in a career that saw him flying fast jets including the Tornado. The job came with a responsibility for a £30 million armed fighter jet, all at the age of 25. His Air Force career spanned a decade and culminated with his last job; training instructors on the Hawk as well as spending two years on the air show circuit display flying the RAF's basic trainer.

### **A change in direction**

A decade later, Jonny left the Air Force to pursue his other career interests in business and finance at the London Business School, where he studied for an MBA. This transition was triggered largely by the desire to make a lifestyle change. Jonny explains, "I'd had the most amazing job in aviation, but working crazy hours with my wife working as a captain for British Airways wouldn't work long-term. We also wanted to start a family and I'd just been diagnosed with an auto immune disease. With all of these things combined, I was reluctant to rely on flying as a career. I wanted a fresh start."

Following business school, Jonny joined a start-up called merger market in the financial media space. The concept was led by a team of journalists reporting on mergers and acquisitions. Jonny headed up the account management team which saw the media company grow from 50 people in the UK to 500 plus people globally. After five years it was bought by The Financial Times and changed its name to Acuris under private equity ownership, before it was bought again by ION Investment Group.

It was during this time that Jonny got to interact with wealth managers in this space and marked the beginning of his interest in finance, although it wasn't a direct route.

Not long after leaving merger market, an ex-military friend approached him to set up a private jet company. Jonny explains, "This opportunity for me was head and heart, a combination of business with my love of flying. Moving the family to Portugal when my youngest was six weeks old was all part of the adventure. But unfortunately, this all changed with financial crash of 2008 – as a result, it totally changed the luxury industry".

Jonny returned to the UK and to a role at Egencia, the corporate travel arm of Expedia, and this experience over two years finally led him to pursue his ultimate goal; to run his own business.

### **Going it alone as a financial adviser**

As with most things in the financial advice industry, the strength of your conversations and connections can often lead to great things. One of the regional directors of Jonny's private jet business had a share in a St. James's Place practice and whilst he could have joined him, Jonny was determined to pursue a business of his own. This led him to the St. James's Place Financial Adviser Academy and ultimately to set up his own St. James's Place partner practice.

### **The value of relationships**

Jonny quickly found that a career in financial advice provided responsibility (for clients' wealth) and problem solving in equal measure and that the ability to build relationships built on trust were key attributes. With regards to Jonny's key driver to own his own business, he found that becoming a financial adviser through an academy such as St. James's Place Financial Adviser Academy allowed him to be "entrepreneurial within a framework". This had obvious benefits for Jonny starting out as a financial adviser, but it also benefitted his clients as well. Jonny explains, "When starting out as a financial adviser, clients understand that

their investments are with you for years rather than weeks. So, the strength of your relationship with them is crucial. But at the same time, clients have the peace of mind that they have the backing and credibility of a large organisation – moreover with great values and integrity - to support them.”

“My experience of going through St. James’s Place Financial Adviser Academy was incredibly supportive; not least because it valued diverse backgrounds and celebrated difference”.

Whilst Jonny acknowledged that you can’t be all things to all people, his background ‘story’ is beneficial to his business.

### **Your network is everything**

Jonny counsels that that the first year of operating as a financial adviser after graduating from the Academy is often spent advising mainly friends and family. The second year can also be difficult as this is the first point of renewals and it’s likely that this stream is not well established yet. Similar to a client’s investment portfolio, building a financial adviser business relies on a strong network and growing this network is lucrative over the long-term. A decade on, Jonny’s client base is a diverse mix of contacts including those he flew with in the air force, contacts from his days in the private jet industry, commercial pilots, business owners, senior City professionals, ‘C’ level execs and former Acuris employees. This certainly demonstrates why having a varied background pays off and why connections and conversations are essential in developing a sustainable financial advice business.

### **Long term growth plans**

In terms of the growth, Jonny’s business expanded gradually within the first year when he took on a serviced office and the following year, he took on extra resource to support diary management, administration, and the delivery of pre and post appointment packs for clients.

Jonny now feels that he has a career that he will struggle to retire from. He is even considering expansion or acquisition further down the line. In fact, he has no plans to retire because his business offers him the perfect work-life balance and a purposeful and meaningful career working with people he genuinely likes.

Jonny concludes, “When starting your own business, everyone needs a bit of luck. But if you have the support of knowledgeable people and an established brand with great resources, you get a head start. St James’s Place Financial Adviser Academy is there to support you throughout. The industry that we operate in requires a lot of hard work and a lot of patience – after all, you can’t rush a client into making decisions. But when you build that trust and work as your client’s partner, it’s truly the most rewarding career.”

[St. James’s Place Financial Adviser Academy \(sjp.co.uk\)](http://sjp.co.uk)