

# A window on a wonderful working relationship

Taking Harrogate's Nationwide Window Cleaning out of Yorkshire and rolling it out across the UK has been a true team effort. Here, its chief executive and chairman discuss how deep a knowledge of the sector, the right connections and the timely arrival of an equity backer have allowed the business to thrive

## TWO'S COMPANY

In the Two's Company series, the chief executives, founders and chairmen of small and medium-sized businesses – all of which have benefited from BGF investment – are given an opportunity to discuss their working relationships. Several of the chairmen will have been introduced to the business by BGF. The result is an insight into the thinking behind some of the UK's most successful SMEs – and an illustration that a company is more effective where a clear, solid understanding exists between CEO and chairman.



**THORNTON TASKER, 50,**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**It can be a lonely job being** the chief executive of a fast-growing business, but the management team have been a great support and it's a team effort. My brother and I built up our first business; Stuart sold it for us and we've been friends ever since.

Window cleaning is a very fragmented market in the UK and, after I'd founded NWC, the opportunity for us to build it into a unique national window-cleaning service was clear. But if we wanted to accelerate that

process we needed some funding and outside help – and Stuart was a natural choice. He has got all the experience and I trusted him.

BGF and I courted for about 18 months about them taking an equity stake. Stuart had been involved with BGF managers before and knew them. When I engaged him to be chairman he took us in to see BGF, dealt with the process, valuation and mechanics, and we did a fair deal. With our BGF funding we have been able to

grow hugely, evolving from a £5m-turnover business employing 100 people to a 325-person business with a forecast turnover of £17m in three years. They've invested again since then.

My family has cleaned windows for four generations; Stuart brings something else as a dealmaker and a business builder. The cleaning is the easy bit – it's the planning for growth and experience of rapidly growing environments that is critical for us as a company.

**STUART LEES, 61,**  
CHAIRMAN

**I've known Thornton for nearly** 15 years. After I helped him exit his last business we stayed in touch and I've helped as an occasional and unofficial non-exec. I'm a bit older than him but I won't describe it quite as a father-son relationship.

I'd say I'm pretty hands-on. I don't just rock up for the board meeting. Thornton and I will speak at least twice a week and meet probably three times a month outside the board meeting. My background is corporate finance, including

time at Arthur Andersen and Deloitte, whereas Thornton is very experienced in this sector – he's cleaned windows and I haven't – not even my own for a few years.

I'm a graduate of Manchester University and had all sorts of formal education and Thornton learnt the business himself. Our backgrounds complement each other and that gives us a slightly different perspective. As the company gets bigger, he relies on me for my knowledge of larger businesses and asks

sometimes: "Are we getting this right, Stuart?" I will offer my take on contracts, pricing, commercial affairs and cash flow. But I'm also there for BGF and I see part of my role to be the bridge between investors and management.

Sometimes BGF have things they want to finesse, or influence they want me to bring, and I can do that. And if Thornton feels that something is not going right, it's my job to be that shock absorber in the middle.

ILLUSTRATION: PETER JAMES FIELD

For more information about how BGF can help your business reach its full potential, visit [tgr.ph/bgf](http://tgr.ph/bgf)