



Pat Gurren, GRP, on a walk through the Clonmel Hills in County Tipperary, Ireland.

Irish Eyes Are Smiling

7 | 2012

workspan
The Magazine of WorldatWork®

Pat Gurren, GRP, Enjoys Life on the Emerald Isle

It's a long way
to Tipperary.

Unless, of course, you happen to live there, as does Pat Gurren, GRP, an independent HR consultant with more than 25 years experience in HR and rewards management.

A native of Ireland, Gurren and his family live in Clonmel, a town of 20,000 in County Tipperary, a name made famous by the World War I-era song "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."

Gurren's career has included working in a variety of HR capacities in Europe, Asia and, for a couple years, the United States. His employers have included international giants Intel and Motorola. These days, when he isn't busy working for clients like Abbott, Aviva, Bausch & Lomb, Kellogg's, National Irish Bank and Pfizer, Gurren, 49, spends his time wandering the hills around Clonmel, cycling long distances or driving his classic Morris Minor convertible.



Hal Mattern
WorldatWork

Gurren recently agreed to share his work experiences, hobbies and family stories with *workspan*.

workspan: Telling people you are from Tipperary has to be a conversation starter. How do they usually respond?

Gurren: Usually they have no clue as to where it is. To give them a mental picture I explain it is located half way between Dublin and Cork. The county of Tipperary is part of the central plain of Ireland. The terrain is diversified, containing several mountain ranges, as well as some of the premier agricultural land in Ireland, often referred to as “the Golden Vale.” No part of the county touches the coast. The county is well known in Ireland for Gaelic hurling, race horses and agricultural production.

workspan: Your career has progressed steadily over the years as you increasingly have taken on more responsibility while moving from company to company. Tell us how you grew and learned about your field as you moved up the ladder.

Gurren: As far back as my college days at the University of Limerick I had a career plan. It was always in my head that I would set up my own business at some stage in my career. Leaving college with a business studies degree, I wanted to get as much varied experience as possible under my belt. I had a desire to continually learn and challenge myself in new positions or organizations, which probably explains why in my corporate career I changed jobs every two years or so. Fresh out of college, I was fortunate to get a job in HR within the high-tech sector (Digital Equipment Corporation). Even back then, the company was very progressive in its approach to HR management.

Four years later, I moved to Motorola, where I initially worked in human resources and later moved into a manufacturing manager role. After four years in Motorola, I moved



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to Intel as I wanted to get in-depth experience in rewards management. At Intel, my first job was C&B manager for the Ireland site. After two years, I became regional C&B director for the Asia region. Two years later, I returned to Ireland and worked as the regional C&B director for the European region. My final job with Intel was as global head of C&B operations, based in the U.S.

As I look back on my corporate career, they all look like logical moves, but in reality it was just that I have a burning desire to be challenged and to learn and I was fortunate that my employers provided those opportunities. Since 2004 I have worked as a freelance C&B consultant based in Ireland, but also undertaking some international work. Freelancing works well for me as I am always working on new projects and challenges.

workspan: At one point in the early 1990s, you were manager of a team of 350 employees manufacturing battery products for cellular phones and portable radios. Wasn't that a bit of a divergence from your career in compensation and benefits?

Gurren: Not really. I had just spent two years in HR at Motorola and wanted a new challenge. I jumped at the opportunity when I was asked to take on the manufacturing manager job. I was keen to develop my “business” understanding. It was one of the most challenging and enjoyable jobs I ever did. I have never been measured as much (cost, quality, output, scrap levels, safety, employee engagement,

etc.) as I was in that job. I really honed my business acumen in that role, which has continued to serve me well to this day in my C&B work.

workspan: You worked in the United States for a time. What did you do, and did you like living and working in America?



1 Gurren on the Clonmel Hills.

2 Brenda, Jack and Lorna Gurren on the London Eye.

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Gurren: In 2002, Intel asked me to move to the U.S. to take up a position as global head of C&B operations. It was a new role where they were seeking to get greater synergy between C&B resources worldwide and HR business partners resources worldwide. I was delighted at both the opportunity presented in the job and the opportunity to live in the U.S. I moved my family to Portland, Ore. I loved working in the U.S. and the family loved living there. Oregon is a beautiful place and the weather is better than in Ireland! We almost decided to stay in the U.S. long term. It was a finely balanced decision to return to Ireland. The decision could have gone either way. We knew that given the ages of our children at the time that if we stayed a year or so longer we would be staying for more than 10 years. I have nothing but fond memories of my time living in the U.S.

workspan: How long have you been a faculty member at WorldatWork?

Gurren: I became a member of the teaching faculty in 2008. I love teaching as it is one thing to know something, but quite another to be able to teach it. I typically teach eight to 10 classes a year on the GRP program. I teach classes all over Europe, including Dublin, London, Geneva, Moscow, Berlin, Munich,

Frankfurt, The Hague and Paris. It is a great way to keep in touch with emerging issues and challenges with total rewards management.

workspan: Tell us your thoughts on total rewards.

Gurren: I was fortunate in that my first real exposure to total rewards was positive. Intel was an early proponent of the concept. At Intel, total rewards was integrated into both the business strategy and the HR strategy. I was able to witness firsthand how effective total rewards can be in enabling the attainment of both business and HR objectives by engaging employees in both the business and the culture of the organization. When I teach, I always tell students that total rewards has the benefit of common sense underpinning it and that the concept is pretty straightforward. The key challenge for HR professionals, in my experience, is being able to execute the total rewards strategy across multiple geographies, cultures and regulatory environments in an effective and efficient manner for both the organization and employees.

workspan: You have a wife and school-age children. Tell us about your family.

Gurren: I have been married to Brenda for 20 years and counting. She is a native of Tipperary, which goes a long way to explaining why I now live here. Brenda works part time in a local veterinary practice in an admin role. We have two children. Lorna is 14 and is just finishing her second year in a local all-girls high school. She is a typical teenager and

enjoys music, teenage discos, buying clothes and spending time with her friends. Jack is 12 and is in the final year of primary school. He loves technology (PlayStation 3 in particular) and also plays on local soccer, Gaelic football and Gaelic hurling teams. Both Lorna and Jack are fluent Gaelic speakers as they both were taught exclusively in the Gaelic language in primary school.

workspan: You did a lot of job-related traveling over the years. Do you still travel a lot, either for work or pleasure?

Gurren: When I worked at Intel, I lived in Singapore in 1997 and 1998 and in the U.S. in 2002 and 2003. The nature of the roles I held required me to do a lot of business travel, some of it on an extended basis. In 1999, for example, I spent 12 weeks in California with Intel covering for the worldwide director of C&B when she was on a sabbatical. My time at Intel was very busy for me on the travel front and I got to

visit many fabulous locations worldwide, including Israel, the Great Wall of China and Sydney Harbor in Australia. I still travel on a regular basis but not to the extent I used to. My WorldatWork duties take me to all the major cities located across Europe, and as a family we usually take an annual vacation outside of the country.

workspan: What are some of the more interesting places you have visited?

Gurren: Last year we spent two weeks on Tenerife in the Canary Islands enjoying both the island and the sun. It is hard to explain the joys of the sun to people who live outside Ireland, but trust me, it becomes very attractive after some of our winters. The previous year we vacationed in London, which was great as there were so many interesting things to see and do right in the heart of the city. On the business front, I was recently in San Francisco doing some work for a client. It was a great feeling to be back in



3 Gurren on one of his regular bike rides.

4 Gurren's 1961 Morris Minor.

San Francisco. I was tempted to stay by the lure of the buzz within the high-tech sector there.

workspan: What do you like to do when you aren't working?

Gurren: I do a lot of hill walking. Clonmel is located in the foothills of the Comeragh Mountains, which consist of 12 mountains that are very popular with hikers and hill climbers. I regularly walk these mountains with the family dog, Thando, and my friend Sean. I find it very relaxing to be out in the fresh air. It is a great place to unwind and is good exercise as well. I climb the mountains at least once a week in all seasons, sometimes twice a week. By U.S. standards, the mountains are tiny — 2,700 feet high — but they do not always feel that small when I am trekking up them.

If I am not walking up the Comeragh Mountains, there's a good chance I am cycling around them. I ride a racing bike and typically cycle about 30 miles on a trip. I have been cycling for more than 20 years and it is my favorite hobby, particularly in

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the spring, summer and autumn. What I enjoy most about cycling is that it enables me to totally unwind. I cycle one or two times every week. Keeping fit is an important part of my lifestyle. I am a member of a local fitness center and generally exercise in one form or another three to four times a week.

workspan: You have an interesting classic automobile. Tell us about it.

Gurren: I own a 1961 Morris Minor convertible. I have had an interest in these cars from my childhood days as they were quite a common family car back then. The Morris Minor is a British economy car that was first produced in 1948. More than 1.3 million were manufactured between 1948 and 1971. This is my second Morris Minor. It is unusual in Ireland to have a convertible car, and it certainly was back in 1961, so it is a bit of a rarity. 🇮🇪

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