

# Off the record




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## Vital Statistics

Name: Ken Wilson  
 Age: 50  
 Job title: Managing Director  
 Company: Calor Gas  
 Qualifications: CPA

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 "But after that – who knows?"

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*Jennifer O'Connell is an  
 Assistant Editor of The  
 Sunday Business Post*

It's no exaggeration to say that when Ken Wilson decided to begin studying by night for his CPA qualification, he had literally no idea where the it would take him.

In the short term, it took him into jobs in the construction industry and advertising, and then into Calor Gas. In the longer term, however, it has taken him to Central Europe, South America and Asia and, eventually, to a position that few accountants would turn down: managing director of one of Ireland's foremost energy companies.

Back in the early 1970s, all that was a long way from his mind. "My dad died in 1956, and we were left with a small family farm in Monaghan and not much money. I had to get a job when I left school, and I wanted to get a qualification that was Irish-based and gave me the flexibility to work as well. That was the rationale for it," he says.

Having joined Calor Gas in 1977 he had become the company's management accountant by the late 1980s when SHV, a Dutch multinational, took a large shareholding in the Company.

He was identified as part of a team that would explore the possibilities for expanding the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) Division of SHV, then a very small part of their interests.

"We started out by wanting to become one of the top three players in the sector, which was incredibly ambitious, as it was a tiny part of SHV's portfolio," he says.

But it was a gamble that paid off – by 1998, the parent company had become the number one marketer and distributor of LPG in the world.

During the 1990s, he spent two years in Bratislava, establishing SHV's interests there. "I moved there with my wife and her two daughters, and it was a fascinating experience. We ended up getting involved in setting up an international school there."

This was followed by short stints in South America and Asia, and two further years in India, where he headed up the organisation's interests in the sub-continent's five southern states. In practice, this meant developing the business from scratch – overseeing all the capital investment, and turning it into a fully operational organisation.

He describes this as an "amazing" time for his family. "Our daughters went to a boarding school that was a 29-hour drive from our home. At first there was shock, horror and tears all round, but it very quickly grew on them. India tends to do that to you," he says.

In 2000, he returned to Ireland to the position of MD-Designate for Calor Gas, and took over as managing director six months later.

For the moment, he says, he's happy to give his itchy feet a break. "I've been in my current role for almost four years, and I'm quite happy at the moment. I enjoy the freedom I have to run my own operation, and it still involves quite a lot of international travel. I've got three children still in university – the other one has started working – and I'd like to be here to see them through that."

He pauses for a moment. "But after that – who knows?"

# Two minutes in the mind of...

## Ken Wilson

What's the most pleasurable part of your working day?

*Working with people I like and trust.*

What are the best and worst pieces of professional advice you ever received?

*Best: To get a professional qualification.*

*Worst: How to enter a particular foreign market.*

What do you drive?

*BMW 520.*

What's the best career decision you ever made?

*To work internationally within the group.*

What's the last book you read?

*"The man who broke out of the bank and walked across France" by Myles Moreland.*

What's the most rewarding aspect of your job?

*Being in a position to make a difference.*

What's the most essential item in your briefcase?

*My laptop – it's a big briefcase.*

Where's your favourite restaurant table?

*The Lobster Pot, Ballsbridge.*

Which three people would you most like to invite to dinner?

*Valentino Rossi, Billy Connolly and Andrea Corr.*

What would be on the menu?

*Bikes, comedy and music.*

Where do you go to clear your lungs?

*Across the Wicklow mountains on my motor bike – a Honda VFR 800.*

What's your favourite business travel destination?

*Paris.*

Which question would you always ask of a prospective employee?

*Why he or she wants to work for Calor.*

What three items would you bring to a desert island?

*Besides a yacht – a survival kit, solar powered radio and some photographs.*

What would you save from a fire, and why?

*Photographs – they are not replaceable.*

The best thing money can buy you is...

*Independence.*

If you had to choose just one, which adage do you live by?

*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.*

What's the most valuable piece of advice you could give to someone starting out in your profession?

*Choose an employer of good standing with a proven HR development programme.*

What's in your CD player at the moment?

*Roy Orbison.*

Who, or what, inspires you?

*Top sports people – for their focus and commitment.*

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*Ken Wilson,  
Managing Director,  
Calor Gas*