



Stéphane Bouvier

**FINANCE & COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
NORTH & WEST EUROPE REGION,
G4S SECURE SOLUTIONS**

From the French Embassy in Serbia to controlling the finances of 10 European countries

As a qualified chartered accountant, one would assume that Stéphane Bouvier scrutinised the company's financial credibility very closely before considering working for G4S. But financial results, though extremely important, are only one part of the equation that produces a successful company.

"One of the key elements for me was the people I would be working with," Stéphane explains, as he recalls the decision-making process that led him to move to the world's largest security organisation from an international business process outsourcing company, where he had similar responsibilities.

Having been headhunted and with no prior direct involvement in the security industry, he confesses that his knowledge of G4S was limited. Clearly, the company's recruitment specialists saw potential in Stéphane Bouvier, but what did he see in G4S?

"The discussion process allowed me to meet a number of key people in the business and that was very positive – that was the key filter," Stéphane explains. "As anyone else in my situation would have done, I then looked at the strategy and the business: where they were at, where they were going, their skills and so on. I then made a judgment on that, as well, but it came very much second because, if you like the people and understand where they are going, you can work with them to achieve the company's goals."

And since the company's goals are to provide secure solutions for a wide range of customers, it falls to Stéphane to provide financial solutions for the businesses which, together, form the North & West Europe Region of G4S Secure Solutions.

The director responsible for that region, David Lidbetter, was equally happy with the qualities he saw in Stéphane: "I was seeking a top drawer finance and commercial director with a proven record of delivery who would be a real business sparring partner with a sense of humour – not just someone who keeps the score! Stéphane impressed early in the process and clearly his commercial and business process outsourcing expertise will be fully utilised in augmenting the G4S secure facility outsourcing strategy."

After seven years at a London-based company, responsible for a division that had 1,000 employees with £250 million total revenue across four countries, Stéphane now finds himself heading up the financial control of a £1 billion turnover business operating with 34,000 employees in 10 countries.

Within two months of joining G4S in October 2009, he had visited all 10 countries as he began to familiarise himself not only with their often very different business models but also with the people who drive those businesses. It is totally in keeping with his goal to be "visible, approachable and trusted".

The career path that led him to G4S really began in the early 1990s when Stéphane – born in France in 1974 – achieved a first class degree at the French School of Management (ESSCA) and a BA (Hons) degree in Accounting and Finance at the University of the West of England, Bristol, where he studied for a year under the ERASMUS European exchange programme.

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Securing Your World



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Compulsory French National Service then intervened but he opted for a substitute programme which took him to the French Embassy in Serbia, where he served as an attaché at the Commercial Section in Belgrade for two years.

With that duty fulfilled, it would have been natural for Stéphane to return to France. Instead, he headed for England once more. The reason – a not unusual story – is that he had found love while studying in Bristol and he and his partner had remained in touch while he was in Serbia and she was working in London. They subsequently married and have two daughters.

After a couple of short-term assignments, Stéphane joined Ernst & Young, one of the “big four” accountancy and advisory services firms, in December 1998, where he started in the audit services division. He quickly moved up in the organisation and joined their corporate finance practice in August 2000. He also qualified as a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales in 2001.

During his time with Ernst & Young Stéphane was responsible for advising large European groups, as well as private equity investors, on various types of transactions, including acquisitions, mergers, disposals and restructuring programmes.

It was in July 2002 that he moved to an international business process outsourcing company, where he joined as a senior manager in the business development function, with a focus on the UK and France. He then became finance and commercial director responsible for its procurement, HR and IT hosting division, headquartered in London but with operations across continental Europe and Asia Pacific.

The next door that opened for him was at G4S, whose geographic footprint impressed Stéphane. “I assumed at the start that it was a very Europe-focused company, but it has been globally very acquisitive. I was also surprised that it is about much more than cash deliveries and manned security services. It has a sizeable Technology business and is also very active in various other areas.”

The biggest initial challenge for Stéphane has been to understand the very different market dynamics that exist in the region. “In one country, for example, manned services are the major focus, which is also the tradition within the Group, but in others it is technology – electronic systems – that drives the business.

“Obviously, being in finance I have a core duty, which is to ensure we report and analyse our performance every month. I have to review each country’s results and validate their integrity. But I must also go beyond the numbers, to understand what activities they are doing well or not so well, where they are in terms of achievement against the budget and the actions needed in order to deliver against our targets.

“We are also laying the foundations to change to a secure solutions business model that will make us a differentiator in the market. So, together with my boss, the regional president David Lidbetter, I’m giving a lot of support to each country in deciding what help they might need in terms of infrastructure and resources to achieve that.”

As for his own future with the company, Stéphane discussed the possible career paths open to him before deciding to join the company. “G4S clearly has the ability to bring people on board not necessarily for what they are doing today but looking at their potential for broader roles in the organisation,” he observes. “That’s a very important quality and I feel G4S is very open on that.”

Away from the office and when he’s not travelling, Stéphane Bouvier enjoys spending time with his family. He indulges his passion for scuba diving while on holiday, but otherwise it is the simple pleasures in life that help him relax after a hard day’s work.

Riding a mountain bike through the local woods or playing Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” on the piano are guaranteed to free him of any stress and prepare him for a new day working for G4S.