

From college drop out to the BBC

Kevin Howells is an inspiring example for journalists of the future.

By Antonia Fairburn

Kevin Howells is known for more than just his broadcasting skills. He has a humble outlook on life, is kind, and has a natural ability to communicate that can captivate a room.

Howells has spent 38 years in the radio industry, but he didn't get in via the typical route. He dropped out of college a month before his 17th birthday and pursued his dream of working in radio.

Howells explained that he loved school but didn't believe himself to be academically smart. After taking part in his O Levels (what we call GCSEs today) Howells went on to college, but left in March of his first year.

A new radio station opened in Shropshire, and he was offered some work. Howells was eager to start his career, so he accepted. Almost four decades later, Howells is now a radio broadcaster on the BBC staff and has had countless opportunities come his way following the brave decision he made at 16.

Howells remembers his childhood fondly. He took part in numerous extracurricular activities and had a love for the arts growing up. He found himself being the lead role in school plays on many occasions and even went to weeklong drama courses.

After a while Howells decided to give up drama as the environment made him uncomfortable, even though one of his teachers wanted him to go to prestigious drama school RADA. He said: "[the] environment wasn't for the kid whose parents worked in a timber yard and cleaned houses for people, I felt it was more like for people's houses who were cleaned."

Howells looks back at his teachers with a smile on his face. He came from a small town, and everyone knew one another. One of his teachers even drove Howells to an appointment to benefit his career. "I got invited onto a radio station in Wolverhampton, and from where I lived it was about an hour and a half away, two hours," Howells said, "My mum and dad were both working, and they couldn't take me, my maths teacher took me to that radio station appointment."

When Howells did decide to leave college, his teachers didn't object. He recalled his headteacher having a chat with him about dropping out but said they knew he was "mad keen on radio" and an opportunity like this might not come up twice.

He still believes teachers today are "amazing" but thinks they are expected to meet different requirements now, he said that his teachers helped him back then because "it was their way of life."

Howells is in his 38th year of being a successful sports broadcaster. He believes to be in the industry you need numerous skills, he said journalists: "Need to be focused, need to be ambitious [and] they need to have a real desire to get to that truth."

He also believes journalists have certain criteria they need to meet, he said: "I think there is a sense of responsibility within journalism to sometimes tell people what they don't want to know and what they don't want to read and hear about themselves and the world in which they live."

Although Howells loves his job, he feels that the industry has shifted. Believing at the start of his career those in radio stations had power over their work and what they produced, but says this isn't the case now.

He said: "There wasn't the pressure to do what you were told from above but now there is immense pressure, real strong pressure, to do not what you think is right but what you think the person above you thinks is right."

Howells believes his journey in journalism has changed him and impacted his life, believing he wouldn't be as understanding or have had the same opportunities. "Because of my job I got to go to countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India and Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Those are countries that I would never have gone to if I wasn't in the job, I was in."

He believes without his job he would have stuck to "mainstream" places like America and Canada. Howells believes that these opportunities have opened his eyes "It's introduced me to peoples and lives and communities that I wouldn't have done otherwise and it's not for me to say it's made me a better person than somebody who hasn't but different for that."

Howells also believes his work colleagues helped him see things differently: "being with colleagues who are different from the family and friends I would have known otherwise, they've made me do things I wouldn't have otherwise done."

Howells shows no sign of stopping his career now, giving talks to budding journalists to inspire and educate while continuing to work for the BBC as a broadcaster specialising in cricket coverage...