

# PROGRESS

**It's a blast:** Steve Wardlaw started doing drag at 50 for the fun of it!



PHOTO: AIDEN O'NEILL

# 'I run one of the UK's first truly inclusive insurers'

**OLIVER STALLWOOD TALKS TO LAWYER STEVE WARDLAW ABOUT A CAREER SPENT CHAMPIONING LGBT+ RIGHTS**

## LESSONS I HAVE LEARNED AS A LGBT+ ACTIVIST

**S**TEVE Wardlaw is a lawyer and a championing force in the LGBT+ community, fighting for those who need it. Steve set up Emerald Life, an insurance startup that addresses the financial discrimination within his community, running the organisation with Heidi McCormack, a former executive director at General Motors. Steve was spurred on to start the company through hearing friends complain about the lack of financial options open to people living with HIV, as well as transgender and single parents. Steve grew up in a home he shared with his mum and grand parents. The campaigner was able to raise £1.8m to launch the

company in 2016. Today, his award-winning organisation is the UK's first truly inclusive and LGBT+ friendly insurer. So what has he learned?

### Remember your role models when they've gone...

Your younger life is shaped not just by family but teachers, mentors and older friends. Never forget the effort they put in to make your life better. Those principles will serve you well in your life and career.

### Take a leap...

My husband and I decided to move to Moscow so that I could run a law firm there. We spoke no Russian. It was the best eight years of my life and those experiences and friends will be with us forever.

### You CAN teach an old dog new tricks...

I only started performing drag shows at my 50th birthday. It's been a blast so far.

Learning something new is what will also push you into the next step of your career.

### Don't lend money to friends or family...

Unless you never want to see them or speak to them again. In which case, go right ahead. The same applies to business - know exactly what you are doing.

### Politics are important...

We still function as some sort of democracy. Make your voice heard, particularly if things aren't going your way. You can't complain unless you have participated.

Managing competing human interests will serve you well in office politics, too.

**Every journey involves potholes...** There's no such thing as a perfect relationship, a perfect job or a perfect life. The real world is not an Instagram feed and you'll get damaged believing otherwise.

**Deep down you know what you want to be...** Others will always tell you what's good for you, which is sometimes what's good for them. Listen to that small voice inside you.

**Sometimes old fashioned is the best...** When I met my husband phones were still attached to walls. I've never used a dating app. I'm not sure they make people happier just because they're convenient. In relationships now, there's too much consumption, not enough construction. As with work, life involves planning and managing expectations.

### Study your history...

I tell younger gay friends, to look up Elaine Stritch, Joe Orton or why the Stonewall riots are important. The equality we have shouldn't be taken for granted. A lot of what is normal now was illegal when I was their age.

