

# Maintaining integrity amid the meltdown

**Stephen Kirk, a serial entrepreneur and author of *Enlightened Business: Making a Living Without Selling Your Soul***

"Money itself never leads to happiness. Business sense always has to be the priority.

"It is difficult to judge what is the right thing or wrong thing when looking at specific companies such as Ten UK. The principle I am talking about is to deal with others as you would want others to deal with you.

"You saw it in companies such as the original Cadbury's and Marks and Spencer, which all had these principles that their shareholders and customers

were treated like family, and this gave fulfilment.

"We have gone away from those basic trading principles. Trading is actually so simple, unsophisticated and rewarding. If you set up a stall in the market and sell something and I know you as my customer and I know you as my supplier and you as a customer feel that I have charged a fair price, everyone feels great.

"The challenge is that as the company becomes bigger you have to maintain those basic trading principles.

"There are some wonderful big companies, but principles get lost in complications

within the business.

"The best way to stick to your principles is to look at what you are doing as if you were someone else. I always think it helps to imagine what you would say if you were telling your children what you are doing. Children ask honest questions, so they make you truthful.

"If you have any gut feeling and it is a bad gut feeling, then that is the time to examine what you are doing."

**Nick O'Reilly, partner in the business recovery department of Vantis, an accountancy firm**

"Company liquidations are far more common than administrations or any other form of insolvency process because of the sheer volume of businesses that come to the end of their natural life.

"Pre-packs are seen as deals cooked up in smoke-filled rooms. The reason we see more and more of these deals done is because most businesses in Britain today are service businesses, which hire or lease all of the fixed assets.

"The main assets of these companies are people, who come in at 9 o'clock and leave at 5.30. It is that which almost drives the rise in pre-pack deals."