

soldo

Liberate finance.
Accomplish more.



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

What 25 years in finance teaches you about leadership

Jitesh Sodha, the CFO at Spire Healthcare, is weeks away from retiring. Here are his lessons from a quarter of a century in the role.

Speakers



David McClelland
Host and TV Journalist



Jitesh Sodha
CFO at Spire Healthcare Group PLC

You're two weeks from retirement. You've led IPOs, navigated economic downturns, and shaped financial strategies for PLC boards. You've worked across industries – B2B and B2C, domestic and international.

What would you have hoped to have achieved?

Jitesh Sodha, the CFO at Spire Healthcare Group PLC, the guest of this episode of The CFO Playbook started his career with a simple goal in mind: leave every business you join better than you found it. And that's what he did.

Sodha has worked with highly recognised and respected names such as Dell, T-Mobile, De La Rue, and PZ Cussons. In his role at Spire Healthcare Group PLC, the largest private hospital group in the UK, he has played a pivotal role in driving financial stability and strategic growth.

It's this track record of transformation and leadership that earned Sodha recognition at the 2025 Hot Topics's CFO 100, an event that celebrates the pioneering spirit and financial acumen of Chief Financial Officers shaping the global business landscape.

In this conversation, David McClelland asks Sodha about his biggest career lessons, the evolving role of the CFO, and what's next as he steps into retirement.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

David McClelland: What's been keeping you busy this week?

Jitesh Sodha: I'm in the last two weeks of my executive career as a CFO. I've been working on two things: the handover (which is going very well) and what I'm prioritising in my post-executive career.

David McClelland: As you transition into the next stage of your career, away from the day-to-day of being a CFO, perhaps we can touch on the route that got it all started. Why did you want to become a CFO?

Jitesh Sodha: The simple answer is, I didn't. I absolutely did not want to be a CFO. I grew up in an Indian family where you had to be a doctor, an engineer, or an accountant. But I grew up in the 1980s and remember watching Sir John Harvey-Jones as chairman of ICI on TV. And I thought I'd love to run a business. That's where my interest started.

David McClelland: Was there a moment that you realised that a CFO type role would be something that would enable you to pursue your purpose?

Jitesh Sodha: When I left university, I went into consulting. I found two things that were wrong for me. First of all, the consultancy I joined was very IT-focused. While I was actually quite good at it, it was not where I wanted to be. I was running a development environment for 250 developers on an IBM mainframe in an advisory role, and I wanted to be in the nuts and bolts of a business.

I had two options, do an MBA or qualify as an accountant. I couldn't afford to do an MBA. So, I qualified as an accountant and switched over to the corporate world. It was great. I went in there and was able to start getting things done straight away to make a difference.

The purpose that I've always been driven by is to go into a business, improve it, and leave it in a better place than when I started. I've had the pleasure of being able to do that early in my career in smaller ways and later in my career as a CFO.

David McClelland: Problem-solving is a big part of that, isn't it? You know, being able to identify a problem, take a step back and then make that decision. Are you a fan of problem-solving?

Jitesh Sodha: I felt fairly quickly I knew the problem and, often, the answer. What I had to really learn was: How do you get it done? How do you implement it? How do you make it work? And the answer became much more about other people – working with them and creating win-win situations. I think that was probably the biggest learning. So, it wasn't about "this is the answer, let's just get it done". It was more about how you get it done so that you're bringing people along with you.

David McClelland: Finance roles are about much more than just the numbers. It's about identifying the challenges, making a decision, and then acting upon those.

Jitesh Sodha: If you look at your baseline role, it's about truth and reality. So, first of all, you need to know exactly what's happening in your business. Then, take it head-on, in a non-emotional way.

I've been in businesses where you get data once a month, at the end of the month. It takes one or two weeks before you get it. By the time you've made the changes and looked at their impact, you can only make five or six decisions in a year.

If you get the data more frequently – daily – you can make 250 decisions a year, and then you can drive those decisions and get half of them wrong and still make a big difference.

The other thing about the CFO role is that you must be proactive. What do I mean by that? Look out for things that could go wrong in advance. You can either prevent them from happening or deal with them as they happen.

As a CFO, only you and the CEO really look over the business as a whole. Every part of it, the rest of it's much more siloed. So you have the opportunity to get access to data and information and help with decision-making.

David McClelland: You've mentioned there already about importance of relationships, decision making, and executing on those decisions. What kind of principles though were you developing on how to do the job well?

Jitesh Sodha: I suppose I'd look at five different things in a different way.

First of all, it's not a half-a-job. You've got long hours. If you're looking for a work-life balance, it's much more towards work. You need to be prepared for that. Be prepared to wake up in the middle of the night thinking about work and managing things you can't control. The flip side of that is you can get things done. It's great when you do. And, of course, you do get paid well as well.

The second is that you are the keeper of truth and reality. So, take things head-on in a non-emotional way. Because the sooner you can do that, the faster you can handle it.

The third is about the frequency of data.

Another key principle, the fourth one, is to be proactive, not just reactive. Look at what could go wrong, and so you can deal with it when it does go wrong.

And, then, finally, people, people, people. It's not just your team, it's the organisation as a whole. It's your team, the board, the shareholders, the CEO, the exec team. It's everyone.

David McClelland: Using data that's available to you to steer the company in the right direction – how has that changed in the 20+ years?

Jitesh Sodha: If there's anything that we've been talking about for 10-15 years, it's data, data, data. Big data. Lots of data. Rapidly available, instantly available data.

The idea that we get a chunk of data at the end of every month and it takes a couple of weeks to process may well have been the way of working once upon a time. But it certainly isn't always the case now. Now, there's far more data available and you can use it to make decisions across the business.

I've had the pleasure of doing roles outside of finance, even in M&A, procurement, or supply chain – data matters. So, the skill set of using that data, analysing it, and making good decisions based on it is a skill set that the finance community can help the rest of the business with.

David McClelland: Sometimes there are a lot of decisions that need to be made and only enough days or resources to act upon them all. Do you have any principles with regard to prioritisation? How have you made sure that you're able to address those actions that serve the needs of the business most?

Jitesh Sodha: A phrase that I use is: "Do the right thing." Because the right thing's always the right thing to do. You've got to get the basics right, doing the right thing. That varies in many different ways in different businesses. I've been in different industries. In the clinical environment, sometimes it's fairly straightforward. You don't want patients to be worse off. But even in other businesses, it comes down to prioritising the key goals for the business and its stakeholders. This is where proactivity is important. How do you focus on the big things that will make a difference? Decision-making becomes straightforward if you look at what the data is telling you. And the sooner and the more frequently you do it, if you get it wrong you are quicker to change it. So, it's circular.

David McClelland: You've said that there's no such thing as good news or bad news. It's either on time or it's late. Expand on that for us.

Jitesh Sodha: The difficulty in a business is people like to tell you what they think you want to hear. They're afraid of telling you what they really think. But when all those things are the most important things you need to know, it's about the time of news. The sooner you know the news, the sooner you can act on it. So, as a CFO, you have to create an environment where people aren't afraid of sharing the truth.

David McClelland: You've moved through various positions in your career from those early days. Andersen Consulting, Dell, T-Mobile, De La Rue, and then Spire Healthcare Group. What have you learned from those different organisations? What role has luck or planning had to play?

Jitesh Sodha: It's luck and timing. Because, let's be straightforward, most CFO roles come along because there's a problem. So, you need to play the long game.

I've seen people go into companies where they just got the timing wrong. Maybe it was a business going through difficulties, and despite the fact they did a great job, the timing was just wrong.

I've seen the opposite as well, where people have just got really lucky, just happened to be in the right place at the right time and suddenly they could fly along with the business with little or no effort.

David McClelland: On a personal note, in 2022, while cycling in Regent's Park, you were involved in a serious accident, which resulted in a prolonged hospital stay. Thankfully, you were able to return to work after the accident. But here we are just over three years on, as we record. Have to ask, how are you doing now?

Jitesh Sodha: Well, first of all, I am the luckiest person in the world. There was an 8% survival rate that I got through. I'm glad I went back to work. It was really important as part of my recovery. The people around me were amazing. For my recovery, just going back, being able to live my old life and be able to do the job and deliver some great numbers at Spire and do some M&A was great. I also went back to my cycling world. Got back in the saddle. Last year, the longest ride I did was 170 km.

David McClelland: Did it change your outlook and perhaps your approach to work?

Jitesh Sodha: Yeah, I mean, it has absolutely changed it. It actually makes me think about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. You start off with your basic needs. Food, water, security, safety. Then your psychological needs. People, family, friends. Then, the aspirational stage. The sort of house or lifestyle you want. But I think I'm at the final stage, the self-fulfilment stage. I'm now in a position where I can do what I want to do rather than what I need. And I think what a great place to be.

David McClelland: So, what's next?

Jitesh Sodha: So, my plan is to "go plural," in a non-executive career and help other people. As a non-executive director, that's really your goal: to help other people deliver the changes that help businesses succeed. I'm hoping my experience will be able to do that with a number of other people. It's about creating those win-win situations that I talked about earlier.

David McClelland: What are the kind of market trends, the technology trends that you might see shaping finance leadership at least over this next period, as far as we feel comfortable kind of predicting at the moment?

Jitesh Sodha: I think we're all going to have to be very agile in coping with volatility and handling change quickly and rapidly. The other area you just can't ignore is AI. AI is here to some degree already. It's going to transform the world. It can be fantastic, but it can also go horribly wrong.

So, how do you make it work for you? At Spire Healthcare, we looked at ways that you could use it to prioritise. AI can look at hundreds of images in seconds and help consultants prioritise the ones that are highest to be reviewed. That way, you can help those who need access to treatment sooner.

David McClelland: Jitesh, it's been so good to chat with you today. I wish you every success in this next exciting stage of your career. This season, we're asking guests to give us their reflections on the phrase "progressive finance." What does progressive finance mean to you?

Jitesh Sodha: I see it a little bit like in the way that Donut Economics is for economics, progressive finance is for finance. So it's not just about putting the numbers together. It's broader than that. The role of the team working within finance is about helping drive decision making in an agile way. Empowering team members to drive better decision making, they can be proud of the business they're in and the contribution they're making.

Jitesh Sodha is the CFO at Spire Healthcare Group Plc. David McClelland is a tech journalist and podcast host. Comments and opinions expressed by interviewees are their own and do not represent or reflect the opinions, policies, or positions of Soldo or have its endorsement.

[View podcast library](#)



Subscribe to stay up to date with the latest trends in technology, finance and business, from world-class CFOs.