

# From armed forces to residential surveyor and business director

## Lee Dowdall AssocRICS

Sava graduate and now Residential Surveyor and Director of Dowdall Surveying



### What was your background before pursuing a career in surveying?

I was in the Armed Forces, more specifically the Corps of Royal Engineers, from Jan '08 until Feb '21.

### What made you consider a career in residential surveying?

I needed a change in direction and have always been interested in property. I saw an advert for the Sava Level 6 Diploma in Residential Surveying and Valuation, checked Sava out on YouTube and, after watching a few of the videos, I knew surveying was for me.

### What drew you to the Sava Diploma in Residential Surveying and Valuation?

I had a house and a family, and I couldn't afford a drop in pay. It was great to be able to complete the course alongside my career in the Army.

### How did you find managing work and your qualification?

I was extremely fortunate to have obtained a posting to a training regiment in the Army where I am unable to deploy on large-scale exercises and operations during that time. My previous line manager was very pro-self-development and was very accommodating.

It was tough, as my role there was very demanding, but I was very motivated to complete the course so managed to find the right balance.

### Would you recommend the Sava diploma to others looking to pursue a new career in surveying?

I would definitely recommend it and have already done so to a number of people who have since embarked on the course. I thought it was fantastic.

### What has been the highlight of your journey?

The best moment was being offered my first job. I felt like I had achieved something so incredible. My proudest moment was being told I was a finalist for the RICS Young Surveyor of the Year Award 2022. Since then, I've embarked on an entirely new and exciting journey, setting up my own surveying business.

### What motivated you to set up your own independent surveying firm?

I felt like I needed more. I enjoyed most of my time employed, but felt so unfulfilled. I wanted to have time to learn and develop, as I genuinely want to be the best surveyor I can be. I knew that going independent would allow me to make a decent living whilst expanding my knowledge.

I also have a family, including a new baby, and I wanted to have the freedom to have a day off when needed. I recently volunteered to go on the eldest's Year 2 school trip to Bolsover Castle, and it was great not having to ask permission. I now divide my time between working, learning, spending time with experienced professionals to increase my knowledge, and, most importantly, family events.

### What do you love most about your new career?

I don't think there's any greater honour than to have ordinary hard-working people relying on you for your professional advice before they make the largest purchase they might ever make. I've always felt like everything is

stacked against the buyer and it's only the surveyor who has their best interests in mind. Nothing is more rewarding than receiving thanks from a client.

### How did you find the process of setting up your own business?

It was actually quite a challenge but definitely worth it. I'm fortunate to have good friends who own their own successful companies who gave me some great advice, another family friend taught me a little about branding, and another close friend helped with my website. There is so much to think about and many choices to make. It was a lot of hard work, but now I'm reaping the rewards.

### What's your advice to anyone looking to start their own practice?

You only need confidence and determination. Everything else you can figure out on the way. Lean on your friends, family and broader network, particularly those that have been through it before.

### Is there anything else you'd like to share with the next generation of Sava learners?

Looking back, I could have set up my own company on the day I graduated, and I would have been okay and made a lot of money, but by seeking employment first I've learned so much about surveying, defects, myself, and my clients, enabling me to set my company up in a way that reflects me, my values, and my goals.

My advice when looking for employment is to choose wisely. Speak to as many people as you can and consider focusing on a company with good values and a structured training programme over those promising the best salaries and bonus schemes.

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