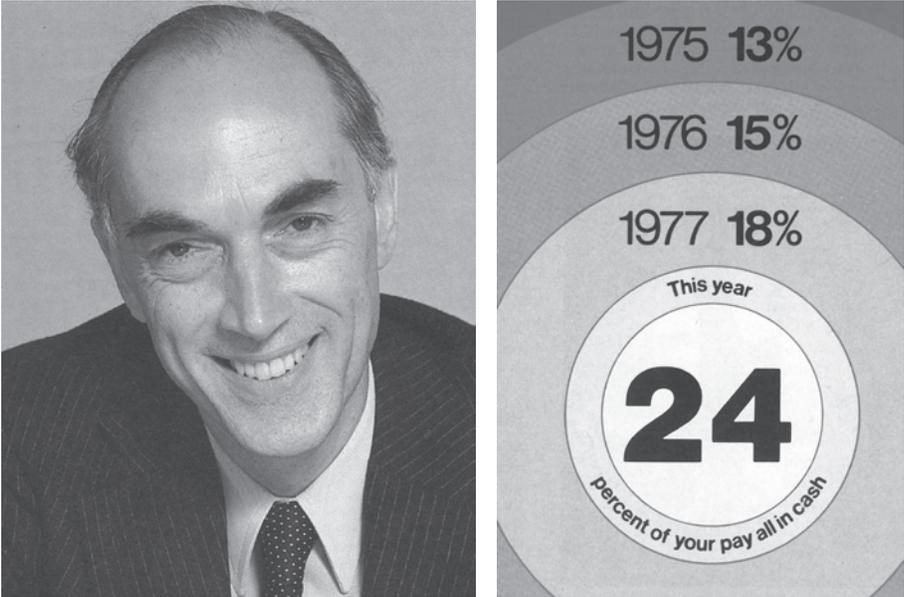


# Peter Lewis and a Bonus Bonanza



Peter Lewis, and the Gazette illustration of the record Bonus distributed in 1979  
(and again in 1987 and 1988).

The *Financial Times* said last week that the atmosphere inside the Partnership, generated by profit sharing and so on, 'not only cramps the style of managers with an authoritarian frame of mind but can hamper decision-making and expansion. If over the last twenty-five years the British economy had enjoyed half the Partnership's growth in sales, profitability or employment, what a country we should be!

PETER LEWIS, IN HIS ANNUAL CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH  
TO THE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL, MAY 1986

In the Partnership the next Chairman is nominated by his predecessor towards the end of his term: there has never yet been a modern 'nomination committee' approach. As we've seen, Spedan had eventually settled on Bernard Miller after much heart-searching, once he was convinced that his son Edward didn't want the job. Although Spedan appeared to hope Edward might change his mind, it was soon apparent this wouldn't happen. It looked as though the Chairmanship had left the Lewis family for good, because the only other possibility, Oswald Lewis's son Peter, virtually the same age as his cousin Edward, had like his father opted for the Law. After a spell doing National Service in the Coldstream Guards, Peter had read History at Oxford before studying Law, and was called to the Bar in 1956. Three successful years later he was contemplating his next move and trying to choose between two attractive alternatives, both in the Law. His default long-term aim, though it wasn't something that often crossed his mind, was to be a judge.

He was discussing these options with a friend who at one point said, 'Have you never contemplated going into the family business? Well, of course, you're too old now for that.' Peter Lewis was twenty-nine, and this suggestion that he was too old rankled. He had decided the Law would suit him well; his grandfather's business was long out of the family, and he had not really considered the Partnership. But now he did, and somewhat to his surprise a short time later in the summer of 1959 he found himself as a management trainee at John Lewis. His father, incidentally, proud of his success in the Law, described it as 'a lamentable decision'. By the end of the year he was managing the stationery department on the ground floor in Oxford Street. The Partnership didn't treat him (or anyone) with kid gloves: the run-up to Christmas was pretty hectic, and in stationery it was something of a baptism of fire. That was in the Stanley Carter days, a year before the shop was fully re-opened, and Peter Lewis recalls that when he first started there 'the whole of the south-west corner was a hole in the ground.' Derek Rawlings was then a merchandise manager, and remembers with some relish an early encounter: 'There was quite a crush in the department, and I found him in his office. I said I thought he would be more use at the moment serving customers than doing his paperwork.'

The following August Peter Lewis became the buyer for stationery, where he stayed for the best part of three years prior to a two-year stint in the general inspectorate, examining various parts of the business. In 1965 he went to join Max Baker's small central trading team to oversee buying, and two years later, when Max retired, he took over from him as trading director for the whole of John Lewis. That was quite a rapid rise to the top of the John Lewis tree, but nobody felt that his family tree had anything to do with it. It was achieved purely on merit. He was clear-sighted, with a forensic intelligence and a keen eye for the logical flaws in an argument – as