

James Michelsberg, director and owner of Michelsberg Tailoring

My day starts rather differently from the movers and shakers who tend to get featured in the business sections of the broadsheet newspapers. There is no getting up at 5.30am, hitting the gym, checking emails and being whisked off in a Maybach to my offices for 8am meetings. Don't get me wrong, it's not that I'm unambitious, or, lazy. Far from it. I'm just not a morning person.



I rise at 7.30am and after dressing in the finest threads available to humanity, head downstairs to the kitchen. I fire up the laptop and Gaggia Classic and after a serious caffeine injection and breakfast, enter the world of Outlook heaven whilst the rush-hour into Leeds, West Yorkshire, where my business is based, dies down.

After dealing with emails and making a few calls, it's into town for my first appointment with customers. If it's a new customer, more coffee is consumed and we have a good chat about what he's got in mind.

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The Michelsberg brand is 'dapper, dashing and will turn heads,' but that isn't always appropriate for the managing partner of a law firm or someone who likes to remain understated. As bespoke tailors, it is our job to give people what they want, and most of my customers look to me for guidance. It's my job to put them at ease, get on their level and work out what is going to work best for them.

Initial questions I ask include 'what's the suit for?'; 'how often will it be worn?'; and 'what is your budget?' Then it's out with bunches of Huddersfield's finest and a crash course in cloth. If the chap in front of me is 18 stone with an arse the size of Canada, I gently explain that even though he can afford a Super 200's with vicuña, cashmere and qiviuk, a more durable mid-weight worsted cloth would be more suitable.

After further discussion of the relative merits of peak lapels, velvet collars, working cuffs and forward pleats, it's out with the tape measure. Twenty measurements later, and noting down any figurations such as a drop shoulder or

sway stance, I have everything we need to start making a suit. The next customer might have come for a 'try-on,' or a 'forward try-on.'

Unlike many of the made-to-measure operators who send off cloth to factories overseas, all our garments are cut and sewn in England and the process is truly bespoke with proper fittings. This means that after my appointments, I'll jump in the car and within 20 minutes I'm standing

next to Rod, who cuts for me, and the fittings are 'ripped down' (taken apart). We discuss together what needs to be done to move the suit forward. Then it's off to the pressers to pick up work-in-progress and back to the office in Leeds. I talk with suppliers and customers, update production schedules, pay bills, chase late payers, keep the VAT man happy, and dedicate time to moving the business forward and winning new customers.

I'm currently building bridges within the Yorkshire textile community, and also developing a range of Michelsberg accessories which has taken me to the silk mills of Sudbury and Macclesfield. I'm also about to start researching how to produce and market an off-the-peg collection.

My background is commercial, with a degree in business studies, but textiles and clothes are my passion and I am always looking to improve my tailoring credentials. I recently completed a tailoring course at Batley College of Fashion and Design and made my own coat from scratch. As much as I enjoyed it, sweating over a sewing machine full time is not what I'm about. I've got a baby girl on the way and I hear they are expensive, so the plan is to build on the Michelsberg brand and become the next Paul Smith!

To say the company has only been going three years, I think we're doing OK. We recently made it into the finals of the Golden Shears tailoring competition in London and won an award for Best Yorkshire Collection at Yorkshire Fashion Week.

I'll often work late doing fittings, and then drag myself to the David Lloyd gym, swim for half an hour, have a sauna and leave the place with my body invigorated and my mind relaxed.

Work is great but the most important things to me are family, friends and my wife, Nikki. My other love in life is surfing and the dream is to sell a chunk of my business to the likes of LVMH, buy a place on the beach in North Devon, and start each day sitting on my 9'3" McTavish longboard, catching a few waves before breakfast.