Conditionals: if you went …

a) Form

The second conditional is formed by using if + past tense and would ('d) + bare infinitive:

If + past tense   **would/'d + infinitive**

If had his mobile number,   I would phone him.

Common mistakes: We do not use would in the if part of the sentence:

wrong: *If trains ~~would be~~ more reliable, more people would use them.
right: If trains were more reliable, more people would use them.

The if clause can come in the first part of the sentence, or the second:

If I had his mobile number, I would phone him.
I would phone him if I had his mobile number.

b) Imaginary situations

We can use the second conditional to refer to an imaginary situation now or in the future.

1 If Liv was here, she'd know what to do.
   (But she is not here at the moment, so she cannot help).

2 If I lost my job tomorrow, I'd move to London to find another one.
   (I don't think I will lose my job, but I understand the possible consequences.)

In 1 we are talking about the present, and imagining a situation that is different from reality.
In 2 we are talking about a possible event in the future; however, by using the second conditional we make it clear that we do not really think it will happen.

c) Variations

It is also possible to use might and could instead of would:

If we had the finance, we could expand much more rapidly.
If the terms of the contract were different, we might accept it.

In the if clause, we can use were instead of was for the verb to be. This is very common when we give advice using the expression If I were you ...

If I were you, I would call the technical support helpline.

d) First or second?

If we think that a future event is reasonably likely, we use the first conditional:

If my investments grow at 6% a year, they will be worth £20,000 in ten years.
(This is reasonably likely and realistic.)

If we are talking about something that is unlikely or impossible, we use the second conditional:
If the stock market grew by 500% over the next two years, I would be able to retire. (But this is extremely unlikely.)