

# CAN YOU LEARN TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?

In last month's magazine we introduced readers to Julio De Lafitte, the businessman taking a group of entrepreneurs to Antarctica with the aim of developing innovative business ideas or as he calls it "getting to the future first". The article generated much interest and we asked De Lafitte back to explore further just what goes on inside the mind of a man who wakes in the morning and spends \$1.2 million on the an idea of getting 117 entrepreneurs to the bottom of the world to "hang out"?

**W**hile a business trip to Antarctica may sound like a novel way to conduct affairs, finding fresh approaches to business is nothing new for the successful CEO who showcased his propensity for accumulating wealth from a young age in Brazil. At 15 De Lafitte decided to produce his school swimming team's uniforms, despite knowing nothing about garments or manufacturing. After finding a dress maker and having 30 pre-orders he started his clothing label while he was still in high school. By the end of the following year, five independent gyms and over eight different sport clubs were selling his garments. At 16 he was making more money than some of his peers' parents and at 18 the young man was ready to start his first restaurant.

An expensive marina in Barra Beach, Rio de Janeiro was the location for his next venture, a café that would become "the place" to be. This time though his endeavour proved to be a bit more complex with permits and building costs just about running the teenager out of money before opening. But his entrepreneurial nous kicked in and he pre-sold over 1000 tickets to the biggest party ever in the marina at his café. It was a resounding success and the place became a local hot spot ensuring the youngster had two businesses to leverage from.

De Lafitte arrived in Australia in 1988 and he could not understand when people tried to tell him that Australia was in a recession as Brazil was experiencing 300 percent inflation at the time. All he saw was pure opportunity and a country that was "wired" for success. Though economic times expose gaps in financial understanding for what to do in the search for certainty, Julio realised that all the lessons he learned from his father in how to position a business in any economic environment came to play very well in Australia.

Today, the Founder and CEO of JDL Strategies, now a national company, is ready to make moves to New Zealand, Canada, Singapore and Malaysia and he has made it his endeavour, especially with the upcoming Antarctica trip, to teach others to claim their entrepreneurial spirit and place.

#### **What do you mean by getting to the future first?**

Imagine if you could go back 20 years ago and be fully aware of mobile technology, Google, Apple, Flight Centre, Dick Smith, Boost Juice or even some of the current mining spots in Australia. What would you do? Imagine knowing that those opportunities were on their way. You would position yourself to play full swing.

Now consider this, up to 30 percent of the jobs in 2030 do not exist today! So how does one get to re-live the opportunities like the introduction of mobile technology years ago, going forward?

I want to position my thinking and thus the opportunity to create similar, if not greater, opportunities by the gathering of brilliant entrepreneurs and business leaders to ask the profound questions: What is seeking to emerge? What are the trends you see that we can zero in on? I believe it takes an entrepreneurial mind to look at

a problem and not only solve it but make money in the process. This means more jobs, more opportunities, returns to shareholders and the problem gets fixed.

#### **Why are you taking 117 entrepreneurs to Antarctica?**

Ha! No magical number here. We want to create an exclusive charter to Antarctica; as soon as we found that Quark was one of the best expedition companies in the world, we moved and secured every berth on their boat for our guests. 117!

When you look at "disruptive technology" and the reality that almost everything we know is being challenged, one can just start to imagine and perceive the amount of real opportunities that are coming at us. The beautiful questions are: How do we recognise, capture, deliver and profit from them?

They are not pie in the sky. In the 50s we got TV and in the 60s we saw mankind land on the moon. Now the mobile phone I have in my pocket has more computing power than the computers that got us there. The integrated services that these little smart phones will bring is very exciting and highly profitable.

Connect the dots, look at your phone, look to the immediate future, start to imagine how financial transactions, insurance purchasing, book keeping, kids' school reports, heart failure prevention, eye sight testing, booking anything by voice command, security and precision applications; music or math lessons, just to mention a few, are changing. What about 5 years from now?

Entrepreneurs know that for every new idea there has to be channels of distribution, sales, investors and consumers. Being ready, that is, proactively getting to future first, is worth a lot of money in anyone's measure. So the vision is to take people with the entrepreneurial mind or the leadership bug to a pristine place, away from the noise, away from the rush and get them to consider their business and own personal play in the emerging future.

#### **Are you looking only into technology?**

I have interests in quite a few different spheres. I really believe in hanging out with people from completely different industries and interests. Every time I do I learn of some innovation for my current businesses. If entrepreneurship was a disease I would be in a terminal condition.

However, if you want to become super aware of the future in the area of technology you should seriously check a couple of friends of mine. Sebastien Eckersley-Maslin from Blue Chili; awarded EY Australian Entrepreneur of the Year; and also the visionary man Stuart Fox from Artesian Invest and you will realise that these guys are literally in the future looking back at you and me from where they stand.

#### **What else are you looking at?**

The rise of consciousness is obvious and yet amazing; "That is the way we always did it around here" is fully morphing to: "What is the new and better way to do it now?"

It doesn't take long to see the divide of the two camps, that the second one is growing exponentially creating a multitude of real, big, low-hanging fruit – multimillion dollar opportunities. That is happening more and more.

However, there seems to be an age correlation to which group one would tend to belong to. The older you are from 40, the greater the propensity to belong to the first camp. "That is the way we always did it around here" may cost literally millions and even be the demise of successful companies in no time at all. Boards where the average age is 56 and people are still getting around multi-media is a real lagging issue. The digital age is not coming, it is almost done. So what is next? Teaching and inspiring those powerful, high-end and lagging behind individuals to re-invent their perceptions and perspectives would be a very exciting movement to be part of.

Perhaps there are a lot of influential (and some of them are very wealthy indeed) people losing their personal relevance fast because of their hold of old paradigms. To get this picture in full just imagine how "safe" the stakeholders of Kodak felt one week prior to the invention of the digital camera. Now also imagine two kids deciding to create a "search engine" to "help" people to find what they are looking for... they came up with an interesting name and it is now a verb. If you don't know what I am talking about... Google it! How old is Google? What is its value? Companies like this will happen more and more going forward.

So how are you positioning yourself? What if you where to realise that mobile applications will replace most dieticians, book keepers, insurance sales people, bank tellers and the list goes on and on? You start to see that the industrial revolution, for all of its significance in human history, is, in comparison, nothing but just a small blimp.

The challenge we are addressing with The Unstoppables is to provide dynamic forums where those with great ideas could show investors (pioneering wealthy people ready to invest) new versions of the future, while investors could mentor those with great ideas how to maximise their returns. So Titans of industry will come together to engage with what is new, while highly capable people will be found to drive forward new technologies and trends.

If you are in business now and see the occasional news story about "printing" real objects one starts to get that the game of life as we knew it is over. There is a new game now. In other words, it's 100 percent about what you can learn, integrate, teach and purposefully profit from by fully engaging with designed change. Or just choose to stay as you are.

#### **Is there a mantra you go by?**

Get to the future first, find the niche, build the pathway to the customer with elegance and conviction. Success has to be paid upfront.



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#### **So what will happen in Antarctica?**

We will go to a pristine place so that the passengers can see and remember how beautiful our planet is and realise that we are slowly killing it. Thus, new business models are a must going forward; and I sincerely believe they are going to be even more profitable, not just for the companies that hold them but for the community and country.

It is my personal belief that people will come out of the trip to Antarctica with ideas, connections, new friendships, access to investment funds and, upon returning to Australia, seriously start implementing the future.

#### **Could you give us some insight on business ideas that we could go implement today?**

In the "ready to retire" age bracket the majority are not ready to do so. Be it financially, emotionally or simply the fact that governments are also not ready for supporting millions of people in old models called pensions. As they keep healthy and keep earning they will also keep spending.

What kind of services do you think a 58 year-old male or female, with another 20 years to go, fully engaged with life, will need or want? Go implement it. Hint, 50 percent of them are single, smart, looking for companionship, experiential entertainment and in general they would rather have their domestic tasks done for them.

If you still don't know what to do, just ask any of them, they are everywhere and they are very easy to spot. They are keeping fit, they look trendy, are sexually active and they often go out for the pure joy of socialising. The most important thing to know is that they are nothing like their parents; they are younger at heart and they want to live their lives to the full.

In the 80s the trend was to build retirement villages and people came from their mid-60s. A lot of money was made in this sector then. I am not saying that this sector is disappearing but I am inviting you to see what is seeking to emerge here. Now in 2014 there is a very fast growing group of people that will not see this as their future. Yes they are in their 60s and yet their view of life is not the same as their parents in the 80s.

Right here there are three or more highly profitable possibilities. Two sides of the same coin: services to support governments in keeping people active and healthy and thus not pension-dependent, and services to the individual helping them to keep employed, life active and thus not pension-dependent from their own perspective because it is "not worth it".

This is not very hard to take from here. One could simply go off and easily list 50 scalable services from this insight alone. What do they want? Ask them and give it to them.