

Chapter 9

Now You Are Off the Wheel, Sometimes You Have to Slide On Your Tummy!

“Struggle is a decided advantage, because it develops those qualities which would forever lie dormant without it.”

Napoleon Hill

During the week, the young man put his new time management knowledge to work and despite the week passing very quickly, he found he was much more productive and fulfilled. His grandfather’s parting words kept filling his mind, what could they mean? He could hardly wait for his next meeting and early that morning he set off once again for his grandfather’s house impatient to find the answer.

The old man was standing at the opened door as usual; his eyes sparkled because he knew his grandson would be keen to know the secret of tummy sliding. “Good morning my boy,” he yelled as he waved his hands energetically, “how was your week?”

“Another great week Grandfather,” replied the young man as he followed the older man through the open door and

they headed towards the familiar burgundy leather chairs. “I’ve really been working on the things that would bring results for me this week; you know the quadrant 2 stuff and I have really achieved a lot. But my mind has been playing on your last comment to me,” he said eagerly as he took a seat. “What did you mean sometimes you just have to slide on your tummy?”

“What comes to your mind when I talk about sliding on your tummy? The older man asked.

Tobogganing? The young man replied with a questioning tone in his voice.

His grandfather continued, “Does that make you think of any particular animal or bird?”

“Not really,” replied the young man.

“Have a look around this room and see if anything comes to mind,” said the old man with an enormous grin on his face.

The young man quickly scanned the room and noticed a picture on the wall. It was of two emperor penguins nurturing a young chick. As he continued his scan he noticed another picture of a lone penguin, then another and another. A penguin statute on the book case caught his eye and another on the table. The more he looked, the more penguins he saw. Even the coasters on the coffee table where he placed his cup each week had penguins on them.

Why hadn't he seen them before he thought to himself? Because they were all discreetly positioned in different places all around the room and blended in naturally to the room decor.

"The Emperor Penguin!" exclaimed the young man, "I think they may slide on their tummies."

"That's right," commented the old man, "and as you see, I'm a bit of a fan of the emperor penguin. Take a look over there in the corner."

The young man glanced behind him to where his grandfather was pointing. There he saw a blown up, four foot high, inflatable penguin camouflaged against the black velvet curtains. "Wow!" exclaimed the young man, "I never noticed your great collection of penguins before. Are they important to you or do you just like penguins?"

"They remind me of the challenges that small businesses face everyday," replied his grandfather. "One Sunday afternoon, about 10 years ago, I watched a documentary about the emperor penguins in Antarctica and I suddenly realised how similar these wonderful creatures are to a small business project."

"How's that?" asked the young man.

"Let me tell you all about the emperor penguin," replied the old man.

“The emperor penguin swims so fast and gracefully in the water but then suddenly shoots out of the water with great speed like a torpedo to land on its feet on the ice. Then an endless caravan of hundreds of emperor penguins begins a trek of more than one hundred kilometres across the ice in step, and in silence. They move at a very slow penguin pace because the penguin is a very poor walker on land.”

“Yes, I’ve seen pictures of the long procession of penguins moving on the ice,” interrupted the young man, “is that when they get to slide on their tummies?”

“Sometimes,” continued his grandfather. “Thanks to their webbed feet, the emperor penguin is also able to toboggan on the ice at speeds which can reach 4 to 5 miles per hour and that does make their journey a little easier! Anyway, let me continue. They reach their mating ground, mate and the female produces one relatively large egg. Breeding for them is a race against time and if a snag occurs in the process they will have to wait another before mating and breeding can occur again.

The penguins then transfer this egg to the male in a very delicate, hazardous and well coordinated operation. If it touches the ice the chick inside would die. He places the egg in a special pouch at his feet and stands in these harsh Antarctic conditions of minus seventy degrees Celsius with strong winds racing around them while the egg incubates and the baby chick starts to grow.

For the next two months thousands of males stand in these terrible conditions, where blizzards cover everything including the penguins in a blanket of white snow. The winds of over 200 kilometres per hour can push the temperatures down below minus 100 degrees Celsius. If they didn't all keep moving around in a spiralling circle, the ones on the outside would perish but they all work together, keep moving and survive.”

“I hate the cold,” said the young man pretending to shiver, “I can’t even imagine those horrific conditions, but what happens to the females?”

“Well,” continued the old man, “as the female has already lost one third of her weight during the egg producing process, she has left the area and fought her way through equally arduous conditions for several weeks to get back to the sea to gather food for herself and the young chicks. The females return about two months later and in another challenging operation take the small chicks from the males who can now return to the sea for food. But they still have to travel that long and hazardous trek back at that slow penguin pace. By the time they reach the sea it is now over four months since they have eaten and they are only half the body weight they were when they left the sea.”

“Do they ever come back to their chicks?” asked the young man, leaning forward intently.

“Yes,” replied his grandfather. “For the next few months as the chicks grow they are left at the nursery among

hundreds of chicks. The mother and father will take it in turns to go back to the sea for food to feed their chicks but a chick can only be fed by its own parents”

“That must be a challenge,” commented the young man, “finding the right chick among hundreds that all look the same!”

“That brings me to another interesting characteristic of the emperor penguin,” replied the old man, “its capacity for vocal identification and recognition. Before the father leaves the first time to go back to the sea for food he has to teach his own song to his child. His chick must memorize this pitch because when the father returns, the chick will be in the nursery among hundreds of chicks. He and his father will have to recognize each other by the sound; this lesson has to be effective, because as I said previously, a chick can only be fed by its own parents. However, not only can a chick recognize its parent from just two tenths of a second of song, but it is able to do so when six other parents are singing around it at up to six decibels louder than its own parent.”

“Wow,” said the young man, “it must have been a good training session, as his chick’s life depends on it!”

“Very true,” continued the old man, “and we’ll talk about that a bit more in a moment. But just to finish off the story, when the baby chicks have grown, and by the way, less than fifty percent of the original eggs produced have survived, they leave the mating ground for the sea.”

“Do they have that long treacherous walk?” inquired the young man.

“No,” replied his grandfather, “because the ice has been melting over the previous months, they don’t have to make that long journey; they simply just have to jump into the sea. It is five years before they return to mate for themselves and only twenty percent of the chicks actually return to mate, the others have perished over the five-year period.”

“That remarkable penguin is certainly a great example of perseverance,” said the young man when his grandfather had finished, “but I’m not sure why you feel it is similar to a small business.”

“Think about it for a minute,” replied the old man, “initially when we start a business, we tend to push the business idea very fast, very excited then we land on the ice so to speak, the reality of it all hits us and we start to get cold feet.”

“Sounds interesting,” interrupted the young man, “sorry, please go on.”

“Then that long slow penguin pace begins, as we try to establish the business, continued his grandfather. This is followed by a challenging incubation period in a very hostile, difficult, business environment where if we don’t all work together as business owners, our businesses may

die, and you know, it does not matter which country in the World we are in, the small business environment will be very harsh and challenging, because that is just the nature of small business.”

“You’re certainly right there,” interjected the young man, “but what do you mean by business owners working together?”

“Well,” continued his grandfather, “we have already spoken of the value of networking functions. Some of these functions provide a wonderful forum for sharing ideas, experiences and solutions with one another to help each other to succeed.”

“I see,” replied the young man, “are there any other similarities between the emperor penguin and business?”

“Yes,” continued the old man. “During the business incubation period, our resources physical, mental, emotional, health and relationships are all drained, similar to the penguin as he loses his body weight. Finally the business is established and we can start to grow. But wait; remember that less than forty percent of the eggs produced actually result in a grown chick and then only twenty percent of the young penguins return to mate after five years, this is about the same survival rate for small business over similar periods.”

“Intriguing,” said the young man, “I can see why you like the penguin so much. Do you see any business lessons we can learn?”

“Well firstly,” replied his grandfather, “I think the fact that they walk so far into the ice to mate is important because they know the ice will melt enough for the baby chicks to just jump into the water. This shows the importance of planning ahead for the challenges and situations which will arise in your business. Even if you only do a cash flow budget and a series of action steps to achieve the desired outcome, it provides a much greater chance of your success in the demanding business environment.

Then there is the unique call that each penguin uses to identify itself. As I said earlier, recognising that unique call is vital to the survival of the young penguins. Every business has something unique about it. The uniqueness you have must stand out for everyone to see, if your business is to survive and prosper.

Finally, I think the greatest lesson we can learn is focus and persistence. The emperor penguin is totally focussed on growing that baby chick despite all the obstacles. In business we must be totally focussed on building and growing our successful business.”

The old man pointed towards the inflated penguin in the corner. “I call him *PERCY* for perseverance and that is what you will need if you follow the tips we have spoken about over the past few weeks.”

“While you were talking Grandfather,” said the young man, “I wrote down these nine points,” and he passed his note pad over to the old man. “I think I’ll put them up on my wall in the office to remind me!”

His grandfather took the pad, glanced at the page and read the following words quietly in his head:

Success Lessons You Can Learn from the Emperor Penguin

1. Maintain a positive attitude to suit your ever changing environment.
2. Results require your total commitment and hard work.
3. Planning ahead will increase your chance of success
4. Working together improves your survival chances.
5. Sometimes you must slide on your tummy.
6. It's easier when you swim with the tide.
7. Make your unique brand stand out.
8. Follow your instinct.
9. Persevere.



“Well son,” he said when he had finished, “you’ve certainly grabbed the essence of my penguin story here. So what do you think I mean by, *sometimes you just have to slide on your tummy?*”

“I think you mean that sometimes you have to take the easier course of action,” replied the young man. “As you said, the emperor penguin can move along much faster and easier when he toboggans. So I am going to look for the opportunities to take the easier road sometimes.”

“Excellent!” said his grandfather. “So do you think that you are off that treadmill you spoke of when you first came to see me?”

“Getting there,” replied the young man. “You’ve certainly given me a lot to think about and take action on over the past few weeks and whilst I have done a lot of what you suggested there are still a lot of things I still need to do. But it is getting easier and the wheel is definitely slowing down. I am more passionate again about my business, I’m sleeping better and more importantly life with the family is really great again.”

“So where do we go from here?” asked his grandfather.

“If it’s alright with you Grandfather,” responded the young man, “I’d like to keep visiting you every week. I can keep you up to date with my progress and you can keep me in check. I need those one-minute praisings each week and of

course those one-minute reprimands to help me do the things I know I should be doing. I'm sure we've only just scratched the surface of your knowledge, I'm dying to dig deeper and discover the rest. Have you ever thought of coming out of retirement to help mentor other businesses?"

"I think I have my hands full with the challenges of your business," replied his grandfather with a big grin on his face. "Next week I want to see your cash flow budget for the next twelve months and an action plan on how you will achieve it."

"Thanks Grandfather," said the young man, "I knew I could count on you to keep me going!"

*"Moving over tough ground is not always easy,
but the destination is always worth it"*

Donna Hockerby