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As part of the Café Insights series of interviews with insightful speakers, The Insight Bureau recently caught-up with Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson, a former international rugby player-turned adventurer, explore and professional speaker. He shares the key traits of the explorer's mindset, and how teams in business can better make the crucial decisions required to achieve the right outcomes.



- Andrew Vine** Hello and welcome to another in the series of *Café Insights*. I'm Andrew Vine, CEO of The Insight Bureau, and today, I'm in conversation with Grant Rawlinson. How are you?
- Axe Rawlinson** Very good. Thanks, Andrew.
- AV** Or I should call you Axe really because I don't want to be the only person -- apart from your mum -- who calls you Grant, right?
- AR** Absolutely. You nailed it. Most people call me Axe.
- AV** Okay, Axe, right. Well, Axe is from New Zealand, a former international rugby player-turned professional speaker, and speaks on developing the explorer's mindset. I have a little chuckle sometimes when I see people call them 'explorer' because I always wonder. But I suppose after doing 50 explorations and expeditions and challenges, you kind of qualify! So, I'm interested to hear, what are the things you've done?
- AR** Yeah. So, I really, for the last 25 years, have loved challenging myself in the world's more remote areas. So, I've walked across countries. I've cycled across continents. I've rode my boat across seas, and I've climbed some of the highest mountains in the world including Mt. Everest, and really, the common theme that's come out is I like to do all my expeditions completely, 100% by human power.
- AV** Well, that's a fairly unique thing to do, isn't it?
- AR** Yeah. Well, there's a lot of temptation to use sails and engines. They make things a lot easier these days, but I just get a lot of fulfilment and satisfaction out of increasing the challenge just by using my own human power.
- AV** Right. And so, these days, you've turned to speaking and conducting workshops for organisations on pretty much a full-time basis. But beyond just motivating people towards greater levels of performance, you touch on a number of different things in what you do. Tell us about that.
- AR** Yeah, that's right. I mean, what I have really developed through the last 25 years in my adventuring life is this whole idea, this whole concept of being unique. In the world of adventure, the people who are unique, that people who do things for the very first time, they get deemed a different term. They get called explorers. And explorers have a different mindset, and the explorer's mindset is really the

key theme that drives both my adventure life and my expeditioning life, and also the business that I run as well. I really inspire, encourage, and coach business leaders and teams to develop the explorer's mindset. And my definition of the explorer's mindset is being number one, but being number one by being unique, by being different, rather than playing in the same field as everybody else. That means being creative. It means stepping outside of the box. And the journeys that I make around the world, they may have been made by people in vehicles and sailing boats, etc., but they've not been done by human power.

AV

And the things that make or break in terms of success comes down to good planning and making good decisions. And they're the two very important things that you touch upon.

AR

Absolutely. The key thing that I teach, really, in my keynotes and my workshops is around the decisions, the critical decisions that we have to make to drive the explorer's mindset. Specifically, around sharing how to think strategically, how to think critically, and how to think collaboratively to really take on these bold, unique journeys.

AV

And another key thing, of course, is resilience because you don't always succeed. You don't always achieve what you set out to achieve, but you have to change your plans. You have to change your mind.

AR

Yes. Well, that's a great point, Andrew. I mean, one of the biggest factors that stops people adopting the explorer's mindset is the fact that it's scary, and it's risky, and it is a massive step into the unknown. If you want to be the first to do something, if you want to be the first to try something, literally, there is very little data to go off. There's very few attempts that people have tried to do this before, so you really are taking a step into the unknown, and the possibilities of failure, the possibilities of things going wrong is very, very high. Ever since I adopted the explorer's mindset, and I started making unique expeditions, instead of following along in the tracks of what other people had done before me, my failure rates definitely increased. I had more setbacks. I had more challenges. I had a lot more things that went wrong. So, one of the keys with the explorer's mindset is, how do you deal with failure? How do you deal with setbacks? How do you motivate your team, and how do you have that resilience and develop that strength of character and that belief that, yes, things are going to go wrong? If they do go wrong, what is a way that we can limit the amount of damage and learn from those mistakes, learn from those opportunities, and get straight back out there, take what we've learned and be stronger and try again?

AV

Excellent. Right. So, tell us a little bit about the latest of these adventures that you've been doing? It's about getting home to New Zealand from Singapore ...

AR

That's right. So, my latest expedition was really a massive 12,000-kilometre journey in an attempt to travel from Singapore, my current home for the last 20 years, all the way back to my original home in New Zealand completely by human power. So, I took three years of planning for this expedition, raised a very substantial budget of half a million Singapore dollars. And many parts of the route on this expedition had never been attempted before by human power. So on January the 3rd, 2017, together with a teammate, Charlie, we set off from

Singapore in our ocean rowing boat, and we rode for 78 days and nights through the archipelago of Indonesia, through East Timor, until we became the first people to ever row a boat from Singapore to arrive in Darwin in Australia. At which point, I then got on my bicycle, and I rode across the continent of Australia for four and a half thousand kilometers in 45 days until I reached the east coast of Australia, where I then got back in my rowing boat and attempted to finish off this final stage of the expedition, which is to row across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand.

AV Wow. And to people who don't know what this sea is like, it's an enormous challenge. And has it been done before?

AR Yes. So, the Tasman Sea has been rowed solo by two people before, but it's had about another 12 attempts, which have all failed. The Tasman Sea is just a very volatile, uncertain, angry part of the world. It doesn't have a prevailing wind system. It doesn't have very steady weather systems, and for the amount of time that it takes to cross the Tasman Sea by human power, you are definitely 100% going to be smashed by some very, very bad weather...

AV I've seen some of the clips of this, because I know with your speeches you have a lot of immersive videos that goes with it, and it's just an amazing sight to see in terms of the conditions.

AR Yes, it's an amazing sight to see from video. I've spent 32 days out alone in the Tasman Sea in the last one and a half years, and on a good day, it can be one of the most enjoyable and beautiful environments that you've ever experienced. However, on a bad day, it's an extremely intimidating part of the world to be in, in a small boat by yourself.

AV Yes. I'm sure. And so, unfortunately, the last attempt wasn't successful, and you had to abandon that. But you've taken stock of the situation, and I think you're designing a new boat now.

AR Yes. So, in a summary, Andrew, over the last one and a half years, I've made three attempts to finish the expedition. Three attempts in my rowing boat to cross the Tasman Sea. Each one of those attempts has not been successful for various reasons. The wind pattern mainly has been against me, or it's been too strong, or I've been caught in bad weather, and the boat's up-turned and capsized multiple times. So after my third attempt, which was not successful just six months ago, I basically had to make a very important decision that was whether to give up on this project or, option B, was to take everything that I've learnt and really apply the explorer's mindset to it, and see if there's an opportunity here in all this chaos and all this madness to cross the Tasman Sea and come up with a new way of crossing the Tasman Sea which had never been attempted before. Rowing had been attempted by a couple of people before. And so, I am now designing a brand-new boat which will also be human-powered but will not be a rowing boat. That's being designed, and the building will start next month in the UK, and I'm really looking forward to getting back out there for the fourth attempt across the Tasman Sea in hopefully the end of next year.

AV Wow. Well, that *is* resilience.

AR It's a great point because resilience to me really is the ability to get up the next day and go out there and repeat what you just did the day before again. And I'm really excited to have this opportunity to get out there, and I'm also very glad that in my life, I have something like the Tasman Sea which forces me so far out of my comfort zone. It pushes me to really grow and develop and take on these massive challenges.

So, when is the likely next attempt to be?

AV A likely next attempt would be towards the end of 2020 or early 2021. It takes 6 to 12 months to get the boat built and get it tested and get it into position. So, there's a lot of preparation work.

AR Well, all the best with the preparations for all of that, and we look forward to seeing what all the results are.

AV Yeah. Thanks very much, Andrew. Yeah.

AR Terrific. Thanks very much for spending some time with me. All the best.

AV

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson is an explorer and professional speaker from New Zealand. A former international 7-side rugby player turned adventurer, Axe has now undertaken over 50 expeditions across the globe, walking across countries, cycling across continents, summiting Mt Everest and crossing the seas – completely by human–power. Today, he delivers motivational, interactive keynote speeches, and conducts powerful decision–making workshops for business clients around the world. He shares with his audiences the key traits of the explorer's mindset, and how your teams can better make the crucial decisions required to achieve your goals. Axe never stops dreaming and undertaking bold, unique and committing human-powered exploratory expeditions, which makes him one of the most authentic, unique and inspiring speakers.

To learn more about Axe Rawlinson's experience and insights, please visit:

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To hire Axe for a briefing or conference

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