

**Inspiring stories of wisdom, truth and growth
from charity and business leaders**

RIPPLES



Find those disguised as ‘losers’, and help them to become winners



ROB BROWN started life surrounded by social dysfunction in one of the toughest parts of Glasgow. This gave him the lived experience and skill set that make him passionate about what he does today: running a social enterprise that creates chances for people impacted by the justice system, to reduce the rate of recidivism. For more than 30 years before this he held senior business roles with blue-chip companies across Europe and the Asia-Pacific. The diversity of people and cultures he was exposed to from a young age have been key to forming his values of honesty and integrity, on which his social enterprise is founded.

The title of this piece was the result of a five-day forensic investigation into my ‘true north’. It might sound a bit like a five-step scientific process—until you realise that the first thing you need to know about someone is what their definition of ‘winning’ actually is. It’s a bit like ‘happiness’, or ‘fairness’—it doesn’t mean one thing to all people—everyone has their own interpretation, depending on their life story and circumstances.

Helping others to succeed and find their own skills and natural talents has in fact, now I think about it, helped me in many ways on my own life’s journey.

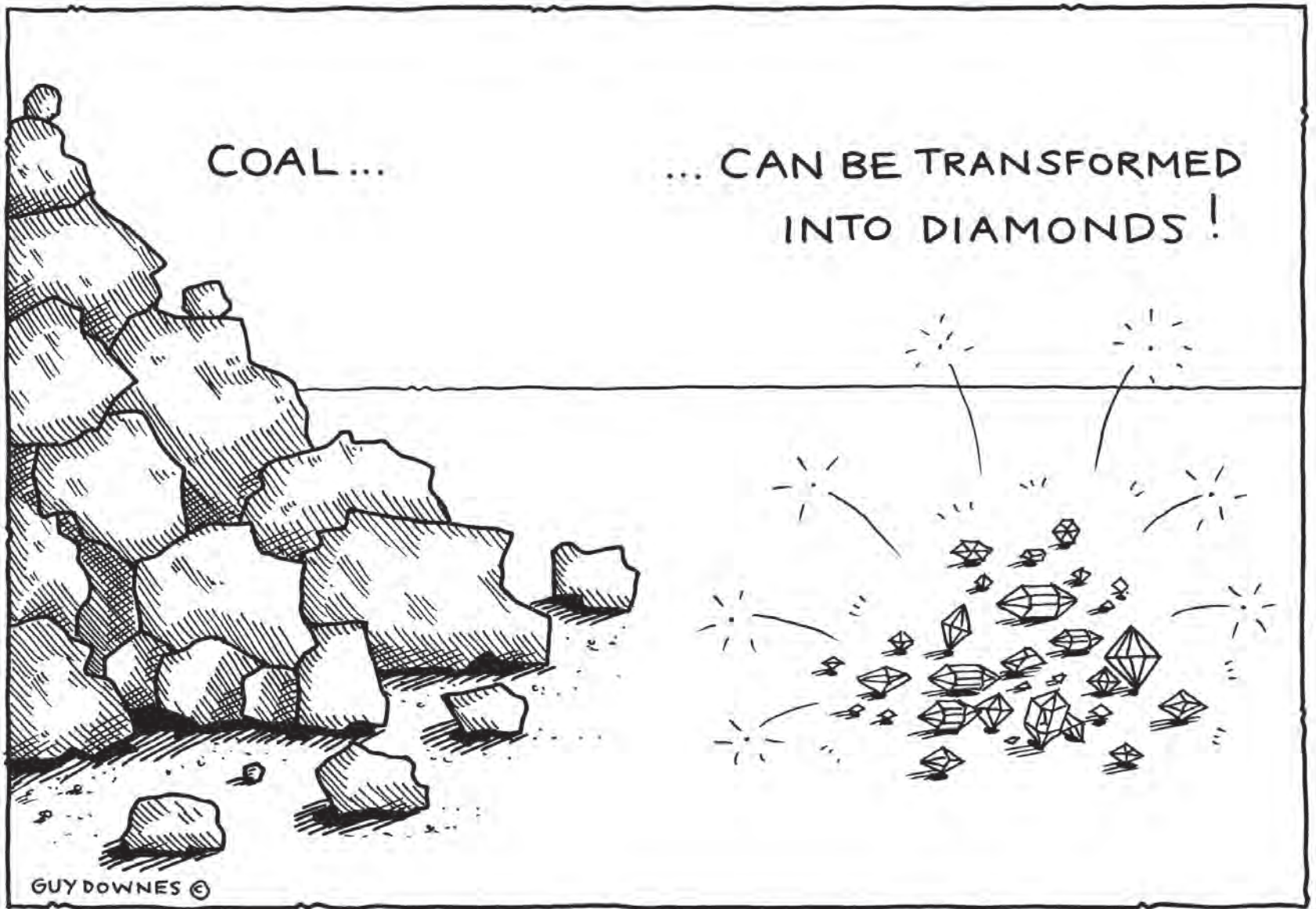
I always thought I would eventually write a book—not about myself; the world doesn’t need another memoir about a boy from Glasgow—but about all the interesting and quirky people I’ve met. I always find it easier to talk about someone else’s story and what they’ve achieved, rather than recounting tales from my own deprived childhood, which in my opinion would bore everyone to tears.

This passion for seeing people monumentally exceed their own expectations stems from the belief and drive that others had for me as I was growing up in Glasgow with a chip on both shoulders (I was a very well-balanced ‘victim’ of the difficult cards that life had dealt me). Those chips could have defined me as a person and determined the path I would take in life. This was the case for many of my childhood friends, with more than 80 per cent of them now either serving long prison sentences, dead, or living in the same conditions they were subjected to as children. I look at those friends and truly believe they could have achieved more, if only someone had told them they could be ‘winners’ and weren’t ‘losers’—the stigma with which society had labelled not only them but also me, at a young age. One of my original mentors told me that people rarely rise above a poor expectation.

I was lucky, in that I discovered two things. The first was a self-development process called MindStore, which taught me early in life that everything happens for a reason, no matter how tough or unfair it might seem, and that if you can think something then you can do it. That’s not a happy clappy mantra, but a proven technique of subconscious mental programming. Much of life is determined not by what happens to us—the universe takes care of that—but by how we respond to the situation. It’s not just about how we physically react to the things that happen to us but about how we think about, internalise and analyse their meaning.

The second was the inspirational mentors I have had the honour of meeting—sometimes in the most unlikely of places. Not all mentors are Fortune 500 CEOs or millionaires; some of the most inspiring are hidden in plain sight. YL Chew, a Malay-Chinese guy I met at a bar in Las Vegas, taught me that Western and Eastern cultures are not right or wrong, they’re just different, and that in order to build a bridge from one to the other you have to find common ground. Another unlikely mentor I met in an unlikely place has lasted 25 years. These people were willing to take time to convince me that I had more talent and capability than my circumstances would foretell, and supported me to achieve my goals.

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The confidence and belief that others had in me gave me the fortitude to grab opportunities as they appeared, taking calculated risks while knowing that with the support of those mentors, I had a safety net to fall into or even fail onto, with the confidence of knowing I could get up and try again.

Those early advisors were no doubt what led me to the ethos behind establishing Fruit2Work—something I would never have foreseen 30 years ago, when I was driven by the corporate rat-race. That ethos can be summed up in two words: ‘creating chances’. Fruit2Work focuses on people impacted by the justice system by providing transitional employment opportunities. Not first, not second or third chances, just chances, because it doesn’t matter how many chances you’ve had—you always deserve another.

The magic of Fruit2Work is the culture that has been created to allow those who want to take the chance to grab it with both hands. This culture is underpinned by the principles of:

- putting purpose first
- humility and humanity
- trust
- suspending judgement
- negating stigma
- accepting flaws
- accountability for oneself.

During the five years that Fruit2Work has been operating, I have seen these principles transform people who not only were disguised as ‘losers’ but believed that was all they could be, into some of the most effective individuals I have had the privilege of working with in 30 years. Whereas society had labelled them as coal, Fruit2Work knew that coal can be transformed into diamonds, and that by creating the right environment for people to thrive in, they can be transformed into one of the most sought-after gems in the world.

The right environment—as well as peer mentoring and the right amount of pressure—involves many of the self-reflection and self-development tools that I was given access to all those years ago. Clearly they are techniques that have stood the test of time. The fascinating thing is that despite understanding these techniques, we had struggled to deploy them effectively—until I was honoured to be a part of the magic of The Growth Project, where I was partnered with Kane, who created and runs The Power in You.

The universe conspired to bring Fruit2Work and The Power in You together to co-create The Power of Getting to Work, which is already up and running and now provides people with not only the chance to work but the opportunity to access a unique 10-week program of self-development that combined employment with self-reflection and development techniques to change all aspects of life.

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To return to my point at the start of this litany, what has allowed me to live the blessed life I have is not the positions I've held or the fancy letters I've had on my business cards, but the inspirational people I've met, the relationships I've built with them and the things they've taught me—not only about themselves but about how to use my own lived experience to guide my own path. This means not hiding my past, but letting it empower me to be the person I am today. The Growth Project has proven yet again, to quote Kane's mantra, that your vibe attracts your tribe, and that what can be achieved by unreasonable people with passion, is limitless.

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THE GROWTH PROJECT: MY EXPERIENCE

My first conversation with Larry at The Growth Project must have been more than five years ago now. I knew I would end up involved, I just wasn't sure how or when it would happen. But persistence beats resistance every time, and this year I was granted the opportunity to join the Ibis cohort.

By the time I joined I had jumped the fence from my corporate lifestyle into the for-purpose sector, which in fact allowed me to bring a more rounded perspective to the table than I would have when I originally encountered The Growth Project.

Yet again the universe conspired, and I was paired with a young guy (truth be told, everyone was younger than me) by the name of Kane Nuttall, who created and runs a program called The Power in You in the Geelong area of Victoria.

My initial thought was that I would bring 35 years of corporate wisdom and feed it to Kane through a firehose for the next 10 months. Little did I know that it was me who would be getting the firehose of learning.

It became clear from the get-go that due to our lived experience we had a lot to share, but what I didn't realise was that we would end up creating something new from the combined impact of The Power in You and Fruit2Work: The Power of Getting to Work.

This is the kind of magic The Growth Project produces. Without it, this collaboration would never have been formed, and Kane and I would still be ploughing our own smaller furrows in an already overpopulated field, without the differentiation we now have by working together.

This piece of magic aside, the opportunity to be involved with such a diverse group of people—who, although like-minded in their desire to do good, had myriad approaches to doing so—was refreshing, and reinforced the need for networking at this level to be practised more widely in the for-good sector. In fact, structured networking—something I believe is missing in this sector—is a win-win for everyone involved.

The Growth Project has proven to me that it does what it says on the tin. It has allowed previously disconnected, yet effective-in-their-own-right people and programs not only to connect but to collaborate and grow into something incredible and powerful that would never have had the opportunity to exist without the support of The Growth Project.



GUY DOWNES is an *illustrator who helps individuals and organisations to connect with the audiences that matter to them, using a range of visual techniques including illustrations, cartoons, graphic recordings, journey maps and animations. He believes that simple cartoons can open the door—whether wide open, halfway or even just ajar—to fresh ways of thinking, new conversations and questioning about important topics.*

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