



60 Seconds with...

JAMES HARCOURT



Last time we spoke, you were training for a 150km fundraising bike ride. How did that go?

It was really hard. We'd just had another baby the month prior... (say no more - ed.). Jamberoo Mountain was incredibly steep so there was as much walking as riding! Right now I'm training for a 230km road race.

What work stuff are you excited about?

Variety excites me. I'm working with groups in PNG, individual executives, some strategy in Melbourne, and a leadership program with an engineering consultancy in Sydney.

PNG is always interesting. It's a million miles from Australia in terms of culture and infrastructure. I'm also working with a global web services company: they're very smart people - it's been a privilege to see the world through their eyes and support their development as leaders.

What strikes me is the diversity in what you do.

Yes, I love it. When you do the job properly, people let you into their world. It's a very privileged position and incredibly rewarding. There's an old saying - 'A problem shared is a problem halved'. Somehow the very process of sharing allows them to move forward. This is often where major shifts take place - rarely is it about using some whizz-bang tool, it's usually more about listening.

Hmm, I think we're talking here about a lifelong attitude.

I've always enjoyed taking in what's unique about people. I think my coaching style is all about the other person - I try to put myself in their shoes. When I appreciate their challenges, I can support them to move forward.

You have a military background. What lessons do you take from that experience into your corporate work?

Just yesterday I was talking about 'leading by example', and the importance of consciously thinking about what

you put into the 'shared space'. The military focusses heavily on 'dress and bearing' - how you present yourself and the energy you bring to your work. It shapes how people see, think and feel about you. Leaders have to set the right tone. It also links into the military saying that 'Officers don't run', because if an Officer is running, it's an indication that things are getting out of control and can induce panic amongst the troops!

Poise is a key word here, conveying a sense that things are under control. It's a small thing, but often it's the shift in these small things that makes a difference in focussing a company or its culture. Not every business I go into is in crisis. Often it's a fundamentally good business with a sound strategy and capable individuals, and it's about attending to the small things that will make it an excellent business.

I think trust is the most important element in a coaching relationship. They need to know that the coach has enough experience to support them through change. I'm very transparent about myself and my experience. Sometimes I'm not sure of the answers! So we can have a conversation about 'how do you think we should approach this?'

Do you have a specific area of expertise within coaching?

If I had a particular area of expertise it might be (I'm told!) helping technical experts transition into leaders. I've worked with a lot of engineers over the years, and appreciate where they're coming from. My role is to help them adjust the lens they're looking through.

Are you still learning?

All the time. As adults, we tend to over complicate things. My 4-year-old often reminds me of this when I try to explain things: Keep it simple as less is usually more.

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