Profile

Gary Bertwistle

Tackling challenges with a whole-of-mind approach is a no-brainer for this motivational author.

By Lucinda Schmidt

When Gary Bertwistle's uncle was dying from cancer, he told his nephew a cure would never be found. That just made Bertwistle more determined than ever to do something about it.

"It was like a red rag to a bull," says Bertwistle, 47, a co-founder of the cycling cancer fundraiser "Tour de Cure" (a fundraiser of the same name operates in the US supporting diabetes). A month after his uncle's death in 2007, Bertwistle and 25 others cycled from Brisbane to Sydney, raising $400,000 for cancer research. In 2008, the group rode from Melbourne to Sydney and last month 45 riders raised $830,000 cycling from Brisbane to Cairns.

"That's close to $2 million in two years from three events," says Bertwistle, who switched to recreational cycling from marathon running after knee problems.

For next year, he is planning Australia's first "million dollar ride" of a marathon 1500 kilometres from Sydney north through NSW and Queensland.

Although the cycling project is not his "real job", it's typical of Bertwistle's approach to life and work – think of creative ideas then act on them.

Indeed, for the past 12 years he's been coaching, speaking and writing about how to think differently – and the barriers that stop many of us from challenging traditional thinking and unlocking new ideas.

Brisbane-born Bertwistle (he now lives in Sydney) says that throughout his corporate career in marketing and promotions for shopping centres, department stores, rock bands and radio stations, he has kept coming up with left-field ideas that displeased several of his more conservative bosses.

"I don't want to die wondering so if I can see the possibilities I'll have a crack at it," he explains. Bertwistle says there are several factors holding people back from more creative "right brain" thinking. Many of us are too busy emailing, texting and talking on mobile phones. "The world is not thinking enough, we're too in-the-moment doing stuff," he says. "People need to disconnect from technology and talk to each other, or give themselves time to ponder – or even be bored. The brain works best when it's relaxed."

He practises what he preaches, cycling and thinking for two hours from 5am most days and walking his two husky dogs for an hour at night.

Bertwistle agrees that innovative thinking is instinctive for some people but says people can learn to re-establish connections between the left (logical) and right (creative) sides of their brain.

Outside work, he says we all need a creative outlet, such as painting, cooking or writing poetry.

At work, he says, many companies make the mistake of having a separate section for innovation, when ideas should be encouraged from everyone.

"People have got this amazing resource that they are not using. They're too busy doing and not thinking."

What Made You Think Of That? by Gary Bertwistle (Allen & Unwin, $22.99).

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Biggest break Going to a conference in Sydney in 1995, where one speaker asked us where we saw ourselves in 20 years, 10 years, five years and next year. I was 33, with a goal of living to 100, and I thought: 'Bugger me, I'm almost one-third of the way through and I'm not doing what I love.' I resigned the next day.

Biggest achievement My little girl, Charley [age three]. I've never loved anyone so much, or been so inspired or had anyone else have as much impact on me as a person.

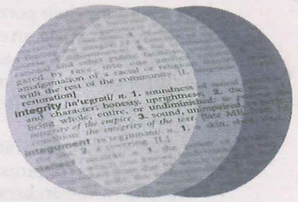
Biggest regret Not doing my own thing earlier. I put up a lot of bullshit excuses to myself of why not to do it. I should have had a crack at it maybe three years earlier.

Best investment The house I bought across the road from my home in Brisbane. I was the first person in my family to have an investment property – my dad believed in buying one home and gradually paying it off.

Worst investment ABC Learning shares. That cost a fair bit but it was a really good lesson for me.

Attitude to money It's there to be enjoyed. I follow [Scott Pape's] Barefoot Investor approach with money in different buckets.

Personal philosophy As a man thinketh, so shall he be, which I first heard from [US motivational speaker] Dr Wayne Dyer. It's originally from the Bible. And the other thing … was a quote I read from fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld: I live by the philosophy that I never compete and never compare.



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