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Creation Road Interview

Ci 2012 Edition #2— Jason Drew

Creation Road is presenting a series of interviews with influential speakers in the 2012 Creative Innovation Asia Pacific forum.

This year's theme is Wicked Problems, Great Opportunities—Leadership and Courage for Volatile Times”.

The forum will share bold ideas that represent real business opportunities, sparking a revolution for courage and change.

The only forum of its kind, Ci2012 is an interactive community where participants can learn techniques and strategies, share ideas and gain empowering experiences. Ci2012 will give delegates the opportunity to expand creative understanding and leverage their often hidden 'right-brained' creative capabilities to help alter traditional mind sets and open the doors for new ways of thinking.

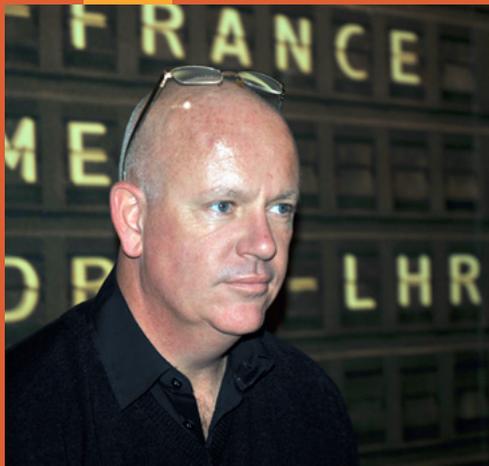


**28–30 November 2012
Melbourne, Australia**



**“WICKED PROBLEMS, GREAT OPPORTUNITIES!
Leadership and courage for volatile times”**

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Jason Drew

Environmental capitalist and entrepreneur

Born in the UK, Jason Drew studied at the European Business School in London, Paris and Frankfurt. Jason held leadership roles for companies including General Electric, BUPA and Egg among others.

Jason has now started investing only in environmental companies that busy repairing the future.

He continues to apply his strategies and ethics to his business alongside his passion for the sustainability of the environment.

What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?

I love making change happen. To do this quickly one needs the freedom of either working in an entrepreneurial business or creating one yourself. When you get the right idea with a great team and a clear cash generating model, you can drive explosive growth, which is as exciting as it gets.

Working for others you receive a salary and perhaps a bonus. When earning a salary it is very hard to accumulate capital. The best way to make capital is to create and sell a business as I have now done many times. Without capital you cannot be a capitalist and play the capitalist game.

How many businesses have you started and what were they?

I have started over a dozen businesses in the last ten years. Some have done very well and others failed to take off. For the last decade I have always worked with my brother—he has complimentary skills to mine and is a great business leader.

The businesses we started together ranged from an outsourced call centre and disaster recovery business that grew from four of us to a staff compliment of over 3,500 staff in five countries in under five years. We then started and grew a substantial satellite communications business in Africa and Europe that we

built very quickly and then sold.

I now only start and invest in game changing green businesses. Two of these are unusual and worth mentioning. The first, AgriProtein, my brother and I started a few years back and he now runs. It is leading the creating of a great business and a new industry—that of nutrient recycling. We take waste from slaughterhouses and feed the blood and guts to the eggs of flies. We grow the eggs into larvae and sell this in competition to fishmeal as an animal feed for fish and chickens. It is what they would naturally eat. It is why trout jump out of streams and why chickens scratch in the fields—to look for flies and their larvae!

AgriProtein and my interest in flies led me to invest in Oxitec—a business that now grows and exports 200 million male mosquitoes a year to a number of countries. The company developed two genes—one that dies the protein (meat) of the mosquito red under ultraviolet light so that they can be identified and another that renders the male effectively sterile. Instead of using clouds of pesticides, customers now release the Oxitec Mosquitoes in areas affected by Dengue fever. They mate

with wild females but there is no further generation, as the offspring never hatch. This resolves the Dengue problem near human settlements. And instead of killing off whole ecosystems—from ladybirds to spiders—only the pest is taken away. It cannot run out of control because the one thing you cannot inherit is sterility—otherwise you would not have been born!

I much prefer working in and investing in green businesses as everybody wants you to win and if we do not get busy repairing our future we are all in trouble!

How important is the ability to see opportunities when no one has previously identified them?

It is the key to an easy start. Sometimes it is lonely and you wonder why there is no competition and is there an opportunity at all! The fact is that there is opportunity everywhere, it's just that most of us cannot see it most of the time as we are constrained by our thinking and a lack of time to see things as they really are. You can just set up another me too business but you are then always joining the race towards 'normal' profitability. Unless you have got to scale by then you have no competitive advantage.



How do you come to the 'aha' moment when a new business idea comes to mind?

It feels like you can see the pattern in a join the dots drawing. Things make sense whichever way you look at them. It gives you a feeling of comfort and a sense of completeness just like looking at a great picture in an art gallery—it looks right!

When you then socialise the idea with friends and you watch the lights go on for them, it's then you know you are on the right track. When other people understand your vision is when it gets exciting. My first boss said to me never keep your great ideas to yourself. If they are great people say wow and join you. If they can do it better then find out early and let them do it or join them!

It is as hard to start and run a small business as it is a large one. Business is just a game; if you are going to play the game it has to be one worth winning as well as one worth losing. For me it is only worth playing or starting a business in a new industry if that business can become very big because the industry can also become very big. Then you will make a worthwhile enterprise out of the game.

Tell me about an 'aha' moment that came when you least expect it?

The possibilities for entirely new ways of doing business, seeing the end of the Industrial Revolution (some people

have not seen it yet) and understanding the beginning of the environmental revolution was fully a life and business changing 'aha' moment for me.



It came because I had moved to live on my farm to recover from heart problems and for the first time slowed down enough to see what was happening around me. Before I had only arrived for long weekends at the farm and my mind was still elsewhere.

I understood with real conviction that what I need is to do is to sell all of my Industrial Revolution businesses and interests and reinvent myself and my

business career and define my future in terms of the environment. It was at that moment that I decided to become an environmental capitalist.

During the Industrial Revolution, being an environmentalist and the capitalist

was an oxymoron. I understood that the environmentalist and the business person in this new era and revolution was both natural and necessary.

There are almost no examples of people and workers moving from a society to a communist society. Yet still today there are over 115 Communist parties in countries around the world, but not one party that is happy to call itself a capitalist party. We should be clear about what we are and therefore I have coined the phrase and termed myself an environmental capitalist. It is what I am!

Did you find you had an entrepreneurial mind when you were growing up or is this something you developed later in life?

I've always been very inquisitive. I like to find out what is behind a closed door, what value there might be in a room full of junk or how things really happen at the grass root level of any business.

I have always enjoyed the game of business, from playing 'shop' as a young child, to bunking off school to mow people's gardens and earn money. I would not spend my pocket money but save or invest my earnings. I bought my first shares at the age of 16—I had a few hundred pounds to invest—and thought it normal when, with my 'fortune' to invest, my father's stockbroker took me to lunch. We remained friends until his

death. He often said it was the best lunch he ever invested in!

How do you find people to bring into your organisation who truly care about it the way you do?

Often people come to you, if you're doing fun and interesting things, people talk to each other about them. People are attracted to businesses that suit them. In my last business my brother and I hired over 5000 people in less than 4 years. There was always one of us directors present at every hiring to explain what it was like to work in an explosive business. This put off some people and attracted the right people to join a very flat open dynamic and boundaryless organisation.

One always has to hire the best. Great people not great processes make businesses work.

How important is it to allow staff the opportunity to contribute creatively towards the development of your organisation?

Contributions come from most unexpected places, but most importantly from your staff and not just your managers. Innovation and creativity in delivering your service or product should be a key focus for any business. When that stops happening your business will die. You have to get staff to innovate and be part of the joy of creation—and reward them.

Who has been your greatest inspiration?

My greatest inspiration has been Jack Welch [Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of General Electric]. I had the privilege of working at General Electric, one of the greatest companies on earth and the best free business school to those with an open mind. Great thinking



is pushed through the business as well as accountability, vision and performance. Working in any GE business helps you understand that anything is possible, and that the only barriers to you and your development are ones you put there yourself.

Has Jack Welch influenced the types of businesses you have created in some way?

Yes in terms of creating some unusual businesses by being able to join the dots, but mostly in terms of how the businesses operate and how the people in them interact between themselves and our clients. The positive thinking can-do attitude, inclusive and ideas seeking culture is one I have copied into every business I have started or worked in since GE. If you think you can and you think you can't you are probably right.

You will be speaking at the Creative Innovations 2012 conference in Melbourne Australia this November; what can the audience expect to come away with?

They will see some amazing joined up thinking, experience a series of 'aha' moments and I hope above all understand that our great problems are just solutions waiting to happen. ☺

