



Anton Smith: Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

By Guy Medd

Information Technology has transformed the world. It does though have a nasty habit of letting us down, usually at the most crucial times.

This is precisely what happened to Anton Smith, as he was about to deliver a presentation I attended earlier this year on maximising productivity in the workplace, under the brand name OPTiC, for [ROCBaSE](#), a Richmond upon-Thames based organisation, offering support and practical assistance for small businesses and social entrepreneurs.

As he struggled with his laptop, I was impressed by the aplomb and casualness he dealt with the situation as though it was all part of the act, he wasn't fazed and his calm, unruffled manner allayed any embarrassment we may have felt for him despite the start being long overdue and the imposed time restraints.

Of course I didn't know the man then, not well. But sitting with him a month later listening to his story I see why something so trivial as a computer malfunction wouldn't ruffle his feathers, compared to his journey and the reason why he does what he does.

The component parts of Anton Smith's work ethic, drive and belief in his current activities, were forged out of a maelstrom of family fall-outs, personal crises and breakdowns, chaos and tragedy in equal measure, some of it self-inflicted, most circumstantial - either way it made the man and resilience, I feel, is a developmental process along with (at least in Smith's case and perhaps paradoxically) a stronger sense of justice. It also seemed in some cruel way an encapsulation of the twists and turns of his Polish Jewish family history, where riches and bankruptcy, successes and failures were just part of the struggle in finding a place in the world and in new lands.

Since 1941, [DS Smith PLC](#) (Originally David S Smith Ltd) has been manufacturing cardboard and packaging for virtually every industry you can think off. Now a major company with a worldwide presence the firm was sold in 1983 but started by Anton Smith's father David and father's cousin (David S) from the proceeds of his Grandmother selling some much prized Jewels - there was even enough left to purchase a small flat in Regents Park.

Fast forward 30 odd years. All the lessons learnt about good business practice in both the good times and bad, both at a subconscious level and by hard bitten experience, Smith puts into his workshops (tutoring new businesses, start-ups and existing SME's) authenticity, in that he knows a thing or two and generously shares his knowledge. Taking an 'holistic' approach, he encourages his clients to engage and share and not be afraid of being vulnerable - because its only through our own depths that we can reach the depths in others: and yes, that's as important in good long term business relationships as it is in personal relationships.

On a far more practical level he guides us through and demystifies the rather dull but necessary disciplines of accounting, business planning and spread-sheets. All valuable stuff if you are thinking of starting your own business or growing an existing one, I even picked up a few handy tips myself.

All this of course doesn't come cheap, at least not if the usual routes of business consultants and accountants were pursued. But because of Anton Smith's genuine and sincere belief in business being done in a better way, his company [ROCBaSE](#) (Richmond Opportunity Centre for Business and Social Enterprise Ltd) offers an 'affordable to all ethos'. And the fun doesn't stop here. There are seminars, networking events, business counselling, marketing and finance training, all as on-going programmes so you could say a complete guidance service is provided.

If you are thinking of starting a business or are an existing SME, don't go in blind. Even as a serial entrepreneur and networking junkie, I learnt a few things and got to meet some new like-minded people.

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