

# DUE SOUTH

**Kim Macdonald** joins a floating think tank in Antarctica for a discussion about what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur



**W**hen Australian explorer Douglas Mawson saw the decaying soles peel from his wretched feet, he thought of a line from his favourite poem. It was 1913 and he was alone in the ruthless, white wilderness of Antarctica, many months into a 2000km expedition.

His fellow explorers and huskies were dead and his food supplies were virtually gone.

But he found solace in the poetic line: "It's dead easy to die, it's the keeping-on-living that's hard."

So he strapped his soles to his feet like thongs, put on some socks and walked hundreds of kilometres in search of another human being.

Though a far cry from modern-day corporate Australia, a new business network called the Unstoppables claims Mawson had all the hallmarks of a successful entrepreneur.

Extolling the virtues of dogged determination seems like an old-school approach in an era where

four hours counts as a work week and business empires are built on smiley-face emoticons.

But the group claims Mawson's expedition into the unknown, and his obstinate refusal to give up, comprise the very essence of entrepreneurialism.

The Unstoppables founder Julio De Laffitte says Australian businesspeople need to reignite this pioneering spirit if the country is to rise to the challenges of the modern economy.

More than 100 businesspeople recently took up the challenge, attending the Unstoppables week-long expedition in Antarctica, where they were tasked with creating 20 new businesses and finding profitable solutions to social and environmental problems.

De Laffitte says the so-called Fire on Ice expedition to Antarctica was about bringing together like-minded individuals in an environment that inspired a sense of endless possibility.

"Ice is the symbology of people being complacent," De Laffitte says.

"Right now, if we are not going to kid ourselves, there is a lot of complacency.

"Fire on ice is about the spirit of entrepreneurship getting reignited. There is a bright future for us. Let's bring it."

**I**t is two o'clock in the afternoon and two flights are en route to Antarctica, carrying the entrepreneurs to the ship that is set to become their floating think tank in the week ahead.

Bad weather has already put the trip a day and a half behind schedule and the participants are anxious to get to the frozen continent.

Excitement builds as the temperature drops and the rivers below turn to slush, then ice.

The first plane is 10 minutes from landing on the Antarctic peninsula and the second half an hour away when the flights are suddenly recalled to Chile.

The pilot explains it is too foggy and dangerous to land.

The mood on the plane is down but not out.



It is about the spirit of entrepreneurship getting reignited. There is a bright future for us. Let's bring it.

**JULIO DE LAFFITTE, FOUNDER OF THE UNSTOPPABLES**

"We are small business owners, we never count on anything going to plan," shrugs Alison Pilling, a youth financial coach.

The forecast is for several more days of heavy fog, though there is a small chance of a short clearing that evening. Unless it eventuates, the entire Antarctic expedition will be cancelled.

Rather than falling apart over the news, the first group to land at the airport form a riotous guard of honour to greet those returning in the second plane.

As the group waits nervously for a weather report, De Laffitte steps up to rally the troops.

"We will still go back to Australia to do \$1 billion in deals," he yells defiantly.

"That is what it means to be Unstoppable."

Moments later the fog — as if moved by the group's resilience — clears from the landing strip and the Unstoppables juggernaut rolls down to its destination at the end of the world.

Once the participants settle onboard the *Sea Adventurer*, discussion turns to what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur, and there is broad agreement that it requires hard work — and heart.

Paul Hawkins, managing director of a newly formed strategy disruption platform called *Crazy Might Work*, says there is a change afoot as corporations, including mining companies,

increasingly build community returns into their core business models.

"I think the traditional models of capitalism and socialism are both dead," says Hawkins, who has acted and advised on \$20 billion in bids, mergers and acquisitions.

"They are polar opposites and both are defunct, in my view, in the same way profit and not-for-profit are no longer relevant.

"What we need is a hybrid that sits across those political and business spectrums and gives people both purpose and profitability.

"That's the challenge for society and for us, as Unstoppables, because people want to make a difference and make a buck, not just make a buck."

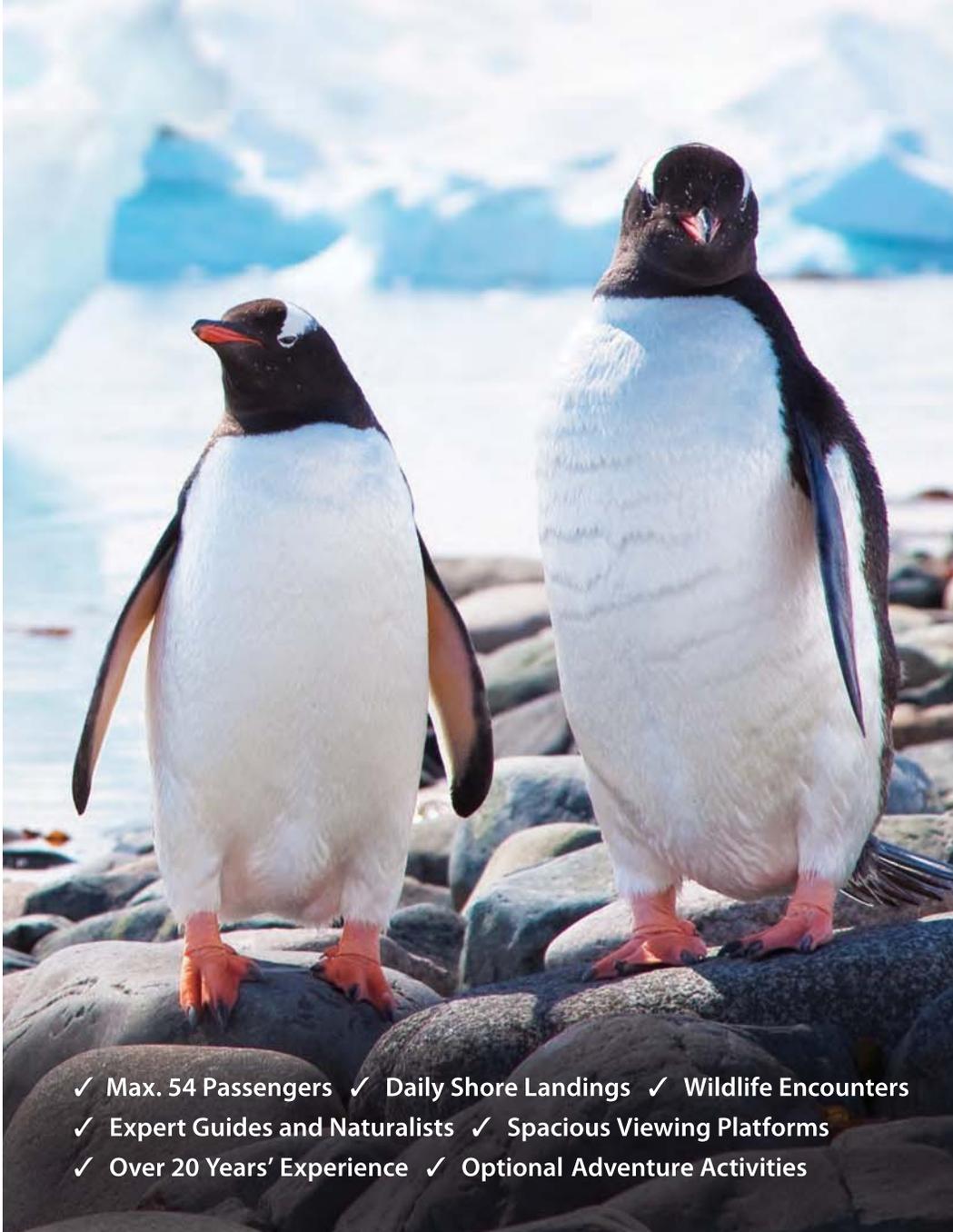
Former Young West Australian of the Year, Holly Ransom, who was co-chair of last year's global Y20 Youth Summit, says her generation has strong interest in "businesses with purpose" that

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E X P E D I T I O N

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seek to benefit the community as well as shareholders.

The former Young WA Volunteer of the Year expects this will result in increasing collaboration between the profit and not-for-profit sectors.

The trend appears underway already with the rise of social entrepreneurialism, where charities make money rather than fundraise it. On the flip side, many profit-driven corporations are now releasing free online open-source software and intellectual property.

Despite the emerging convergence between profits and ideals, she says money remains a key driver behind broad, lasting change.

"I think commercial solutions are critical to long-term sustainability . . . because if you can harness a market opportunity, you can create a self-sustaining engine for change," Ransom says.

Business analyst Barry Urquhart agrees today's entrepreneurs are no longer solely focused on the bottom right hand corner of the results page and no longer exhibit an insatiable desire for total control.

"In the 1960s, the typical four-on-the-floor WA entrepreneur had control of the major shareholdings, as managing director and chair of the board," Urquhart says.

"The entrepreneur had total, if not nominal control but in the new era the entrepreneur is a minority shareholder, who is perhaps the managing director but with an independent chair."

John Battley, founder of WA's Globetrotter Corporate Travel, believes the major change over the decades is the speed at which entrepreneurs must now develop. These days, he says, collaboration with other experts is necessary for early-stage survival.

"Globetrotters was 30-year journey, but you can't do it like that anymore because things happen much more quickly now," he says.

But even if the game has changed, he believes the players are still driven by the same characteristics — passion, persistence and perseverance.

Onboard debate moves — uncomfortably for some entrepreneurs — to whether spirituality has a place in the corporate world.

WA business doyenne Marylyn New believes it does, claiming a new paradigm is upon us with successful entrepreneurs moving into a "fourth dimension where manifestation happens."

The rich lister says she sold her sharemarket fortune a day before the stockmarket crash of 1987 on an intuitive hunch.

Speaking on the deck of the ship, New believes people will increasingly tap into their intuition with awareness and manifest their desires through the power of intention.

"The great doers, the great explorers, the great entrepreneurs . . . they know about manifestation," she says. "They know how to create."

**I**t is a mid-morning on day three on the ship and Robin McClellan, the former US consul-general in WA, is in a workshop designed to teach participants how to win over potential investors.

McClellan, who now works at Curtin University, has a panel eating out of her hand as she eloquently explains her clothing line of seven outfits that fit neatly into one piece of hand luggage.

Make as much profit as you can and don't be ashamed of that. Be ashamed of what you don't do with that profit.

**JULIO DE LAFFITTE**



She is pleased with how her pitch has gone. But on the other side of the room, another entrepreneur is in tears after a brutal advice to work on her “girly” voice in a bid to better inspire investor confidence.

De Laffitte warns the other participants not to mollycoddle the crying entrepreneur but to “deal with her as a mighty woman”.

“Our country needs entrepreneurs who are not full of fluff,” he tells the participants.

“All of us in the western world are going through a process of being dumbed down.

“Do not read what most people read, do not be entertained by what people are entertained by, do not have conversations about the weather.

“That’s not living your life — that’s repeating every Tuesday.”

The following day, local entrepreneurs, David Pettit from Advocate Private Wealth, and Anthony Wales from Aussie Fluid Power, make successful practice pitches to the panel.

While onboard, Pettit launches a self-written children’s book called *The Big Happy Life*, about Posey the penguin’s journey to happiness.

“A major purpose of this trip is to create a positive change in the world; we are contributing by increasing happiness through helping business leaders to become more financially organised,” Pettit says of his financial services firm.

Wales appeals to the panel for mentors to help expand his engineering firm abroad.

It is a bold plan for a local company facing cheaper South East Asian competitors, but Wales says Australia can emulate Germany’s success in innovative high-end engineering.

Progress in this field would address a major



**Craig Patterson**



**Robin McClellan**



**John Battley**



**Marylyn New**



**David Carter**



**John Elliott**

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obstacle facing Australian business, according to David Martin, a keynote speaker on the trip and the founder of US finance group M.CAM.

“Australia has the British sense of industry in terms of being meaningful and purposeful, and it has a lot of the Asian sense of trade and implementation, but it doesn’t seem to have the Germanic engineering influence,” Martin says.

“Australia needs to push hard and figure out how to make engineering elegant and precise.”

Many other participants also progress their businesses and develop new ventures while onboard.

Managing director of WA’s Cablelogic Brett Easton strikes three new business deals, including one with a green-friendly focus.

Austral Fisheries chief executive David Carter progresses his idea for a sustainability index, joining a sub-committee that plans to create an independent stamp of approval for ethical businesses.

Local project manager Matheos Venetis discusses plans for a new venture aimed at the sustainable reconstruction of Christchurch, while Geraldton earthworks boss Craig Patterson collaborates on a knowledge-sharing joint venture.

Queensland’s John Odlum, co-founder of ASX-listed Greencross Limited, says he has multiple offers and deals to follow-up in Australia.

A big winner is Maucir Nascimento, who attracts strong investment interest for his GOP2P venture, that reduces the cost of currency transfers between developing and developed countries.

The Unstoppables hit their target for at least 20 new businesses and in the process address some environmental and social problems.

**C**ries of joy and fear bounce off icebergs as 70 Unstoppables plunge, one by one, from the ship into the icy waters of the Antarctic circle.

Some jump, some dive, one backflips and many let rip with expletives, in what is perhaps the new millennium’s equivalent of walking on hot embers.

Later, at a superhero-themed costume party where Superman and Wonderwomen dine in the icy amphitheatre of Antarctica’s Port Lockroy, participants are encouraged to discuss their own special business powers.

But not everyone appreciates the focus on personal development. Some participants complain the workshops have been hijacked by the “loony left”.

One person claims conversations about “moving mountains” come at the expense of business talk.

He is critical about the content of the workshops but says some speakers are excellent and concedes the real business on such trips usually takes place on the snowfields and at the bar anyway.

Most of the participants, however, are happy with the trip and sign up for the Unstoppables next event in Brazil, including WA’s John Elliott, director of Elliott Insurance Brokers.

Elliott reflects on his week while sipping Ron Zacapa rum with 25,000 year old ice he sources from an iceberg, claiming the trip has been personally and professionally life-changing.

“I came here because of something I heard Julio (De Laffitte) say,” Elliott explains. “He said, ‘Make as much profit as you possibly can and don’t be ashamed



**Ship to shore: Entrepreneurs return to the Sea Adventurer after an expedition.** Picture: Scott Petrie.



**All onboard: The Unstoppables Antarctic expedition.**

of that. Be ashamed of the things you don’t do with that profit’.

“It was a game-changer for me.”

The idea is to use those unashamed profits to make a difference in the world by addressing social and environmental problems.

Elliott uses some of his profits to fund his charity, Health Hope Zambia. While on board he raises \$500,000 in donations and sponsorship.

He expects his business will also benefit under his newfound mentors and lessons from the Antarctic.

But what can Antarctica teach an entrepreneur? What can the world’s windiest, coldest and most inhospitable environment possibly teach anyone about running a profit and loss enterprise?

Queensland-based adventurer Geoff Wilson, who set a record for his 2013 solo crossing of Antarctica, says the frozen continent is a brutal master but it can teach survival in any environment, including the corporate world.

“To be an unstoppable, just don’t see the end of the road as the end of the road,” he says.

“Don’t see lack of opportunity as a blocker but smash through that. This environment will teach you the skills to do that. This environment is here to kill you, it’s here to stop you, it’s here to discourage you.

“If you can stay optimistic, have endurance, have imagination and above all have patience, then you are going to be unstoppable.” **I**

*Kim Macdonald travelled as a guest of the Unstoppables*



**Whale: And the tale we will tell.** Picture: Natalie Decorte



**Chilly: David Pettit backflips.** Picture: Sean Tully