

# This is Benjamin's Journal.

*And not only did he learn by experience, but instincts long dead became alive again.*

- Jack London, *Call of the Wild*

Welcome to the Global Enterprise Experience.

That's how it starts.

Actually, it starts - for me, anyway - about, oh, five months earlier. From my number I was the eighth to enroll, and that's pretty much proportionate to my enthusiasm for the program - although... well, sadly, this year it didn't really happen for me. Thing is, I think I learned more from the troubles I had this year than I would have had it played out any other way.

Problem one? Tomorrow I'm flying north to join a tallship, the *Young Endeavour* for a ten day berth. Opportunity of a lifetime, and I'm completely ecstatic - except that there will be no contact, not even mobile phones, and I'll be away from my team in the crucial final phase of the competition - the phase where all the work is done, and where the team either sinks, or finally learns to swim.

Last year, my team swam marathons; I had such an incredible time lending as much time as I could and learning entirely new skills to give my team the best possible run of it. Last year we used a real-time platform and we had six of us working on a document at once. There's nothing quite like the experience of editing the first half of a paragraph while two brazilian teammates rearrange the sentence order of the second half.

This year?

This year I realized that the lessons I took away from my first time in this competition were pretty much all wrong, wrong, wrong.

See, when the last round of this competition finished up in 2011, I did a debrief. I noticed that there's this ... latency period. A slow warm-up phase where no one really talks; then, halfway through, activity gets jumpstarted and you settle on a direction- and then, in the last days or hours of the competition, the work comes together, some people assemble the report, and you submit and then, you know, exhale.

Last year, I thought to myself that the best bet for grabbing the advantage in the competition would be to grab it early. To cut that latency period and jumpstart the team so that you could get to the content production stage that much faster.

As it turns out, the reason the competition falls into that pattern of gradually building up steam before finally sprinting to the finish is because it's natural. That flow is reflected all over the place; it's like an inevitability of deadlines. I talked about my frustration with a close friend of mine who also happens to be a martial artist. He told me something interesting:

"In martial arts, we study fear; how humans react to fear. The thing about humans is that when we are confronted by an attacker, when we are suddenly confronted by fear, we freeze and our minds go blank. No amount of training can destroy that blank, helpless, frozen moment of fear; the very most a martial artist - or any human - can hope for, is to take that moment of terror and squeeze it down, compress and harness and bottle it down, until it takes up barely any time at all. Minimize that blank, useless, fumbling moment, get over it as soon as you can - and then start thinking again."

This friend of mine saw a parallel between his thoughts about our response to fear and mine regarding the response of the team to the competition. I've learned that no amount of energy or enthusiasm or work is going to penetrate the distance - both physically and mentally, I suppose - that separates the members of Team 1 in the Global Enterprise Experience. The slow buildup of steam is a natural process that has to be respected, and maybe, possibly, minimized - but never removed altogether.

This year, our New Zealand captain - well, you know, disappeared. I was sad about it, but the silver lining was that I had the chance to step up into the role of team leader. I wanted to be challenged in new and exciting ways this year, and being put in charge certainly did that. It's an entirely different ballgame when you're the one that's meant to push and prod the team into action, and to be honest, I wasn't good at it. I've always felt that a good team leader creates a situation where the team members can thrive and be inspired and produce stunning work, and I was stuck in team member mode. Instead of patiently inspiring my team, I flooded the field with ideas. In my enthusiasm to get the project underway, I drowned out the team. I want them all to create something amazing, but I'm going away and I'm so afraid that it won't come together, because I dominated the team and stopped them getting invested, and that's not what a team leader is supposed to do.

Missing the last part of the competition will mean that I can't contribute, I can't push - and I'm worried, because I want my team to be incredible. On the other hand, it's funny how karma works; I've certainly had more than my fair share of impact on my team already. I know they can get the job done, now it's down to seeing if they WILL get it done - and the thing is, I don't think there's a value judgement there. Either they make it or they don't, and that's okay.

It's a funny lesson to take away, I know - all my life I've sort of thought that, you know, there's no value if you don't cross the finish line. Well, turns out I was being naive. Turns out the 'finish line' is just an arbitrary point to pause and reflect, maybe share a snack on the road with the people that you met along the road.

**Bring on next year; I'm ready.**