

Transcription - Matt Wenberg Part 2

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today, we're continuing our discussion with Matt Wenberg about his journey, his education journey, particularly from an apprentice aircraft mechanic to his current studies in MBA. He's also going to talk to us about completing the Kokoda Challenge, which I'm particularly interested in. So let's now pick up where we left off with Matt.

We've talked a fair bit about teamwork and relationships in teams and producing high quality work. I'm interested now in the customer service side of things. I guess, for the most part, your customers have been internal in the organisation you've been in?

No, I've dealt with a lot of external customers as well. A lot of internal, it's obviously a lot of internal customers, but now I've had a lot of external customers where they've asked us to do a specific job. I've had to complete those tasks, sometimes not to their requirements, but you've got to sort of convince them, if that makes sense.

Can I just clarify, when you say external customer, would that be somebody who owns an aircraft and brings it to your organisation for repairs or maintenance?

Correct. There are actual companies out there, especially the aircraft sector, that are just based on maintenance, whether or not you own a fleet. Some operators run their own maintenance to do some kind of cost saving, obviously, it makes great business sense. But there are other companies that rely solely on just being a maintenance organisation without a fleet of aircraft, that rely on external customers to bring in stuff in.

So true mechanics, really?

Oh, glorified mechanics in terms of what you do.

Now, just be very careful Matt, because my oldest boy is a real mechanic, on real cars. He would be listening. And the second son is a real pilot.

Oh, there you go. So I should tread very very carefully!

So Matt, back to Kim's initial question that I interrupted, sorry, was in relation to customer service, is it different when you respond to a request and a service to an external customer to an internal one? Is there a difference in the way you would operate?

Yes, with the internal, just the way the aviation industry works, where I worked especially, was that it was different because I was more on a timeline when it came to the internal customers. That was like a peak crew type thing. You get an aeroplane in, you try and fix as quick as you possibly can and then you send it out again. So everything was like very very very very quick. We had external customers where mainly what I dealt with was the components of things like that. So I ran the workshop with a component shop with internal customers to me, where those aeroplanes come into the hangar and sit there and say, "Alright, we need you to fix this component real quick." That would take a precedence over most of the other jobs. After that it

was more of a case by case manner. As everybody, as every maintainer knows, it's down to logistics. What parts you had at that particular time is what job you could finish at that particular time. There was a lot of juggling, especially dealing with the logistics side to it, the internal customer type thing.

You know, dealing with them was... there was a lot of give and take, where you had to be patient with them because technically it wasn't their fault that a part was coming in, that had a lead time. But then you had the customer on the other side telling you, "Come on, I need this really really quickly now." You had to be careful who you upset.

You had to manage the relationships across the board.

That's exactly right, yeah.

I'm interested in the customer service and the MBA study. Was that part of your MBA work?

No, it certainly helped. It certainly helped. It was more of the dealing with people thing again, you know, trying to network, good relationships, I found, especially when working with customers as well, was the best policy pretty much. It was really good to be able to build a very nice and very good rapport with the customer I found. But I found myself in a very fortunate position where I could very much directly relate to customers rather than having to go through a third person. Much to the detriment of my supervisor at the time.

He didn't really want that. We had to try and convince the people with answers. I found that I built a trust relationship, working relationship, especially with different customers, especially when you can ring up, they can ring up and say "Oh, what things do I have in there? What powers my airplane?" And you can sit there and run through, "Well, yes, it should be done by this because this, this, this, go together." And they're happy with that answer.

I found that my share of most customers got very annoyed when it came to the fake answer. So, the more direct, the direct line to the person doing the job, it sort of overloaded me a little bit, but I didn't mind doing it, and I know for a fact that the more direct line that I had with the customer, the more chances of repeat business, because of the relationship that I had, that you were building.

So, what you're saying is, you build a relationship, you understand your customer, how they think, how they like to be communicated with, give them the facts and give them to them at the right time, which continues to build their relationship.

A lot of that came, same again, was just normal human nature, but some of it came through the MBA as well, where once again, the experience that I had already done in customers, sort of made those parts fit a lot better, bringing it through after doing the MBA.

I have one more question about the MBA. Was there anything that you felt was lacking in the coursework, something that you had covered in your experience in business and being a manager that you thought should have been included?

I had Fulyana help me with a lot of the business stuff, especially when it came to case study. I'd said it to her, and she turned around to me and said, "Oh, she goes, it sounds cool, it's not the way we would actually do it in the industry, but because it's academic, and it's more about

being academic than it is about being practical in the business sense."

That's exactly the response I wanted to get from you, and you've done very well. There's still that gap between books and actually doing it, and that's what makes the question for that experience, that's why I found it a lot, not a little bit of experience helps marry it up.

We might take a complete break from the work arena, and we'll go to Kokoda. This was something that you always wanted to do, or the opportunity came up, and you thought, "Now I'll give it a go." Just talk us through from the time you made the decision to actually getting there.

This is going to be right back to the core of it. I did a basic fitness test for a particular job, and it was very, very basic. I couldn't pass it. Very overweight. I thought, "I'll get out there, I'll get fit." Sure enough, went out there, got fit, and it was always something that I've always been interested about. They talk about war history, Gallipoli etc I've always wanted to go and see those types of places. The other one was, that history, and how they performed in battle, and what defines why we have freedom today. So I got fit and I thought, "Why not?" I said, "I'm fit enough now that I can do it, alright, I'm going to go to Kokoda". I trained harder, became a lot fitter, faster, booked the trip, and just went, "That's sort of my reward for doing all of this training."

Treated as an incentive, you achieved two goals by getting fit. One is to pursue the initial reason you wanted to become fit. Secondly, it opened a new door for you in that doing the Kokoda, which is something you wanted to do, but wouldn't have thought about it if you couldn't finish it.

It was very, very demanding to do, and I said it's one of the hardest walks that you can do, and yes, it is very hard if you haven't trained. That's for sure. It was almost an impulse, I wanted to do it, so I did it.

The group that you were with, did you know anyone in that group, or were they all essentially a new team?

All people that I met, including the guide I met, pretty much once I arrived, nothing, but the importance of that, I booked a tour, like a tour group, as everybody should if they are thinking about doing it. Don't do it by yourself. It was sort of fortunate, and I was fortunate at the same time, I found that we had such a small group, it was good, they were very personalised, but towards the end of the trip, we were all sort of sick of talking to each other, as you are, the eight days living very close together with each other, and especially being strangers. We got to know each other very well after that.

It's interesting that you can see that in an environment where you are physically challenged, that you're also mentally challenged, not just in terms of the physicality of what you're doing, but the relationship stuff as well.

It's probably the most educational part of it, is recognising that work is probably not as bad as some other things that might present themselves. It was a very, very, eye opening experience, that's for sure. It's something I'd do again in a heartbeat, something I'd take my kids on, again in a heartbeat, when they get older, that's for sure. No-one really can describe

what the place is all about until you actually go there and see it for yourself. And once you get there, you just go, wow, oh my god, especially the soldiers back there, they had to do what, if they were here, you know. It was really fun, inspiring, a very emotional challenge too. I shared a couple of things, listened to the stories that went on back then in 1941-42 down there, very humbling, so to speak, very humbling experience, that's for sure.

How long did that sense of, the impression that you gained from that experience, how long did that stay with you?"

I didn't leave properly for another two weeks. After I got back, you know, I was still there. For the experience itself, yeah, no, I still remember it, I still remember it as a clear as day. You know, what they did back then, what the soldiers did back then, you just look at, you try to compare it today, like we're using it today, compared to the years that back then, even what I would do in certain situations that those guys were presented with, you know, I'd have absolutely no doubt that, you know, I'd be changing my underwear every five seconds. Just the thing that they did it, they had to do it, they had no choice, it was either to do that or die. These days, most teenagers would chuck a hissy fit.

It's quite feasible, and it's easier for us to understand, the way that so many of them returned with an inability to get back into the workforce, to relate to other people, to do a whole range of things. We can't look at it and say, "Well, why didn't they just, you know, pick up where they left off?" No way, no way, you couldn't, even to the soldiers of today, like, I'm not, by means anything, I'm not saying that I've never been in any battle zone or anything like that, but I do, I take my hat off to what they do, that's for sure. You know, past, present, and future, that's for, definitely sure that I would do. Like I said, there's been many books written about it, you can read as many books as you want about it, but until you go there and just see the environment, especially Kokoda Trail, like hot, humid, yes, there's other sections of the track where it's freezing cold, and then you're simply, "Oh, it's so hot, it's just very, very tropical." Some of the stories that came out of there, there was one particular story where they said that one soldier was shot through his ankles and had to crawl for two weeks, here we are beginning with a new day, it was hot and humid. We have to take our shoes off and we've got leeches. That's a saying that every force was, you know, past the track, they had to face the track, the distance through, the tide, the lack of food, and once they got through all that, then they had to face the Japanese. So, it puts a lot of other things in perspective, that we take for granted, that's for sure.

Are there any other challenges like that, that you are interested in trying out?

There's a couple other things, just typical bloke things, I want to go across the USA storm chasing. Things like that, you know, nothing, nothing major. Everyone says they want to go to America and see New York, Las Vegas, or anything, right? I want to go chasing tornadoes, that's what I want.

Living where you are now, you're just getting in some training with the cyclones, is that right?

That's right, yeah, that's it there. They're very temperamental, once again, the wife doesn't let me go out and chase it.

Strange that, very strange. Occ health and safety, I think.

I think it's more sensibility, more than that.

Well Matt, we've had a long and involved discussion today covering a great range of topics. Is there anything that you'd like to add, in terms of your advice for people who are working their way through the career challenge?

I think, advice I was given when I started by my dad, I don't remember walking out the door, he told me, he said, you know, "Remember son, everybody starts at the bottom."
It's always a bit of advice that's always stuck with me, the fact that you're not the CEO the first day that you walk through a door, especially when you're new. You might be the CEO, yes, you might be new, but just remember you are new. Yes, not that experienced within that company, as you might think you are. I guess the other bit of advice that I've always gone by is, do something that you love, you never "work" a day in your life.

Fabulous. It has been great chatting with you, catching up with you, and I haven't mentioned Parramatta the whole time you've been talking.

I'm very glad that you haven't.

I've been very strong and I'll let you into a secret, there's no point in mentioning Parramatta because I used to follow North Sydney, so there's definitely absolutely no hope for me.

Yeah, I was about to say, well, thank you for mentioning that, but yes.

We do thank you for being with us today.

Thank you Matt, really appreciate your contribution and sharing your experience with us.

You know, I'm honoured to be with you on this program, especially because the caliber of other guests.

Thanks, Matt, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, and this is Inside Exec.

(gentle music)