

## Building capacity to embrace Paradox

By Debbie Craig

*“Only you can take responsibility for your happiness ... but you can't do it alone. It's the great paradox of being human.” Simon Sinek*

I have just returned from my 6<sup>th</sup> trip to India leading a group to explore and develop our inner worlds for greater calmness, centeredness, joy, compassion, purpose and connection. We spend a week at a Retreat in a beautiful calm and soothing environment in the midst of the vibrant and chaotic noise, crowdedness, colourfulness and busyness that is India. Each day we spend many hours just being, breathing, witnessing, moving and connecting to our inner selves and beyond. We also spend time walking in the dusty streets, engaging and haggling with charming shop-keepers and tuk-tuk drivers, facing the thrilling challenge of crossing multi-lane roads and braving the delicious, spicy curries that India is famous for. We also spend a day being guided through a Mumbai slum area by a local student who shares the joys and sorrows of slum life, work, family and facilities and his own journey to university. Here we experience extreme poverty, cramped living quarters, communal toilets, back-breaking work 6 days a week AND a spirit of community, zero crime, friendliness, smiles, prayerfulness, recycling for zero waste, 96% children in school and many well-educated people supporting and building the community for the future.

These experiences have accentuated the paradoxes we face daily here in our own country and places of work. The haves and the have nots. The overwhelming demands in the day and the grateful respite into our homes at night. The different lifestyles and preferences of our younger and older generations. Personalities that blend or those that clash. The choice to scream and shout at the frustrations of life vs the choice to be quiet and watch and listen. Whether to contract or grow our business or trust or be cautious with untested talent and leaders.

So many of us feel buffeted by the extremes of emotion in a roller-coaster day. Just getting ourselves and our families to work or school in a day can be tough, and then there are electricity outages, desperate taxi drivers, narcissistic bosses, toxic cultures, health scares, financial stresses, cyber-attacks and relationship conflict. And the pace of change and expectations to increase speed and results is only increasing.

**How do we maintain our mental and emotional balance in times like these?** How do we embrace the dramatically shifting environment around us vs resisting and straining under its relentless pace? How do we stay healthy and energised to move steadily toward our goals vs collapse in a heap at night to just recover from the day, and feed our coping mechanisms with the bad nutrition, substances or mindless entertainment?

One thing that India reminded me of was the importance of **embracing the paradox**. If we wish for calm and yet experience chaos, our equilibrium is shaken. If we wish for excitement and experience only more of the same routine, our souls are restless. If we hope for progress and opportunity and yet feel thwarted in our efforts, our disappointment is tangible.

What if we could approach the magical continuum of life with open minds, an open heart and open arms? What if we could embrace each extreme moment and emotion of life with a knowing smile that “this too shall pass”? What if we could BE absolutely calm and connected in the centre of our being whilst the craziness of life dances around us? What if we could feel the fear and take the next step toward our goal anyway? How would that feel? How would that attitude empower us to have the self-belief and the energy to face anything that might appear in our paths?

***My few tips and intentions for immersing back into life in the fast lane are the following:***

**Connect:** find that inner core of yourself that is eternal and wise and calm and stay connected with it as often as possible through the day. Practice differentiating between your ever-changing thoughts, feelings and physical sensations and the always constant, calm, ever-present aspect of yourself, that is connected with your version of divinity or spirit.

**Calm:** Spend a few minutes every morning before rushing into your day, to calm the mind and remind yourself of your centre. (the “CALM” app is really an awesome tool for this). You can also do some morning mindfulness practice such as yoga, tai chi, mindful stretching, walking or running. You can dip back into this experience any time for the rest of the day just by remembering your morning calm experience.

**Embrace:** embrace the paradox of life with an attitude of openness and acceptance of what life brings you today...with the self-belief of knowing you can deal with anything, and that this too shall pass (including the amazing moments, so that we don’t cling to them either). Just a gentle shift in attitude from resistance to embracing can fundamentally change your experience of it. Learn to embrace that feeling of nervousness or fear and become friends with it, finding the message to be cautious where needed, but also the courage to walk through unnecessary fears to achieve your potential. Learn to not take yourself too seriously and practice laughing at yourself and life. You will be so much more fun to be with.

**Contribute:** contribute to and connect with others through an easy smile, an encouraging word, a shared experience or a random act of kindness. This keeps our hearts open and a sense of community. Give something because you choose to be a positive contributor. Give more than you take, make a difference in someone’s day because you can. Don’t wait for the return of favour. Life balances out in its own magical way.

**Compassion:** where there is frustration, resistance or conflict, practice looking beyond the obvious and the automatic judgement, and imagine the journey this person or group of people have walked. Dig deep for some compassion for any pain, sadness or fear that may be motivating some perceived “bad” behaviour. Most people do not behave inappropriately or cause harm intentionally. When others feel our genuine compassion, it can often shift perceptions and create potential for awareness and growth without the need for confrontation.

Just like learning to ride a bicycle or any new skill, building new neural pathways and mental, emotional or physical habits take practice, falling down a few times and dealing with frustration as we navigate the learning curve. Ultimately and often suddenly you will find that you are riding, or speaking a new language, playing a new sport or have learnt a new technology or program and it becomes effortless. It is the consistency of daily practice that pays off and the belief in the immensely positive impact it can have on your life when mastered.

***“To live fully, one must be free, but to be free one must give up security. Therefore, to live one must be ready to die. How's that for a paradox?” Tom Robbins***

**Contact**

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#### **About the Author:**

**Debbie Craig – a passionate adventurer, global traveller and mountain climber, curious dolphin swimmer and ocean lover, philosophical dreamer, hopeless romantic, dysfunctional over-achiever, compulsive seeker & sharer, courageous difference maker, patriotic South African, author, facilitator, yoga nut, wine snob, dog lover, guardian mom, step mom, wife and friend**

**Some interesting tit bits: travelled to more than 60 countries, hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp, over 60 swims with dolphins, over 5 trips to India to explore her inner world, facilitated over 50 personal transformational workshops, facilitated business workshops with people from over 30 countries in 5 continents, written 3 books, guardian mom to 3 kids, step mom to 2 kids**

**Also: adventured through life's darker parts including divorce, unhealthy relationships, sequestration, retrenchment, loss of loved ones, betrayal, broken bones and inner struggles to over-come self-doubt and be our best selves**

#### **The usual stuff**

Debbie has over 20 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, South America, Mexico, China, Canada, Europe and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company (now 21 years old). She is also the founder of World Alive, a personal empowerment and transformation company. She is a registered Master HR Professional through the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP).

Debbie has published 3 books "I am Talent", "I am Alive" and "Accelerated Learning", written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows, presented at conferences and does public talks. Debbie is a warm and down to earth facilitator, leader and life coach. She has many real examples in her own life and in many of her delegates on creating a fulfilling life of abundance. She is an engaging presenter with practical advice and information that is easy to apply.

#### **Some unusual stuff**

Debbie is a regular hiker and has hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp. She swims regularly with dolphins in the wild and resonates with their playful, sensual, energy, their intelligence, their focus on protection and survival and their complex yet fluid social patterns. She looks after 3 guardian children and 2 step kids. Debbie is passionate and deeply committed to her own personal development journey, reads extensively and has participated in numerous in-depth transformation experiences including many trips to India where she has studied mindfulness and living a life of fulfilment, abundance and flow including meditation, dance, yoga, tai chi, art and experiential workshops. Debbie has designed and facilitated over 50 Personal Transformation workshops. She is passionate about South Africa and making a difference to People's lives.