



CAREERS

Bruce Poon Tip: 'I always went into things thinking there was no option to fail'

G Adventures founder says he didn't always think everything was going to be all right

CYNTHIA MARTIN

THE LADDER

Bruce Poon Tip, 51, is the founder of the travel company and social enterprise G Adventures and its non-profit partner Planeterra Foundation, both based in Toronto.

I was dying to turn 12 so I could get a paper route – the ultimate way to make money in the early eighties – my first business. Other motivated 11-year-olds couldn't qualify for routes so I applied for four, subcontracting them. When kids are motivated like that now it's considered heroic; then it was weird and nerdy. I was breeding rabbits at 13. My parents asked, "Why do you work, why not play hockey like your brothers, do after-school programs?" Businesses were my after-school programs.

I got fired from Denny's, too embarrassed to tell my parents. I pretended I was going to work, then got a job at McDonald's, fired during training. That was a catalyst because I was devastated, at 16 thinking, "I've got blemishes on my resumé, no one's going to hire me."

I thought the natural thing was to take business [courses]; it was going to be my enlightening moment surrounded by people like me. I quickly realized people in business school in 1986 didn't think like me. I was an odd thinker, constantly the opposing opinion in class. No one called me an entrepreneur until dot-com billionaires became popular.



CHRISTOPHER KATSAROV/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

I was born in Trinidad and Tobago; our family moved to Calgary when I was three years old. I loved travel and music. I moved to Toronto at 22, in 1989 with \$800. Was going to start a record label then decided to follow my travel passion. I founded the company in 1990, struggling, living on top of the office, missing employees' paycheques. I got an offer to sell the company for \$1-million. That was a lot – I could have just walked off. In 2008, I got a \$100-million offer. I always went into things thinking there was no op-

tion to fail, even though I hit dark moments.

Sometimes people don't understand, when you're an entrepreneur you're passionate. People ask, "How do I know if I'm ready?" You know. If you feel you don't have the wherewithal or a high tolerance for risk, don't. People say it's been easy for me: The truth is, I didn't always think everything was going to be okay. My parents didn't – they had seven children, six "normal."

We have almost 2,500 employees, almost \$600-million sales, offices in 28 countries. We're market leaders; the world's largest small-group travel company. Our first tour connecting with a social cause was in 1996, in conservation. We had a hard time working with non-profit because they were cautious, adverse to risk – everything we weren't, so in 2003 we started Planeterra, community and social development projects intersecting with tourism partnering with local groups, currently 70 projects.

There's no greater way in this world for poverty alleviation than to educate women. I get criticism that we don't fund climate change projects. We create projects that protect the environment and empower local communities; we pick the best strategies because we're bringing in people paying us thousands of dollars for vacations. That doesn't mean I don't believe in other good causes. They're just not my causes.

My favourite place is my last. I love everywhere. I'm attracted to remote spaces, Mongolia, Galapagos Islands; places where I'm more removed, unwired. If you asked 10 years ago, Marrakesh markets and Cusco [Peru]; the hustle, bustle and energy of towns and cities. Younger millennials are travelling for the right reasons, with meaning motivated by experiences. They don't want to party on buses with tons of teenagers. Boomers are trying to knock things off their bucket list.

Love what you do. It doesn't have to be some unifying idea that's going to change the world. You're finding your place in the universe and not everyone's place is to re-define industries. To my younger self I'd say, "Don't worry, everything's going to be all right."

What's made us successful is how we've become the global leader – an international brand exporting tourism to a global market – being Canadian. Someone in Germany just booked an African safari. That's most extraordinary, our brand a purpose- and culture-driven business model on the global stage. Canada is only 9 per cent of our business.

Special to The Globe and Mail

This interview has been edited and condensed.

How to work with almost everyone – even those you don't respect

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

A client, co-worker, employee, or even a boss for whom you have little professional respect makes it difficult to stay motivated and get things done. But the reality is that you may have to work with, or for, people that you find difficult, distasteful or downright unbearable.

While it is certainly easier to work alongside those you like, don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can only do a good job if you respect your workmates. You can function effectively with (almost) anyone if you keep just a few things in mind.

First, it is okay to not like everyone: Start by accepting (at least to yourself) that, while you disagree, holding back your own judgments on right versus wrong can lessen the strong emotions tied to this difficult relationship.

Acknowledge that you both can have different viewpoints on the same situation.

Don't disengage: A natural reaction when you don't respect someone is to reduce the level of interaction with the person, but that's the opposite of what you should be doing. If this is a co-worker, an employee, or particularly your boss, then it's still necessary to maintain a continuing relationship. So, continue to interact at an operational level – ask questions, communicate information, meet as required – but know deep down that you don't have to achieve a meaningful or long-term connection.

Maintain your professionalism: Don't let your dislike reflect badly on you. Remember, this is not high school, it's a workplace. Talking trash about a client or your boss at the water cooler will only make you look immature and unprofessional. Far better to vent your frustration to a spouse,

trusted friend or adviser outside the workplace. And keep the witty asides to a minimum. You may think they're amusing, but all you're really doing is devaluing your credibility and your impact. Making the effort to be pleasant will do far more to build your professional reputation.

Whether your co-worker is a jerk or just inept, some people are just not worth your energy.

Widen your perspective: A broader view can often give alternate insights. Ask yourself why this individual behaves or acts in ways that causes contempt. What situation or internal shortcoming might cause your boss to always fly off the handle? Or your staff member to always get defensive? Or your client to immediately expect the worst outcome? Often, other people's objectionable behaviour is more

a reaction to their own circumstances than to something you might have said or done. Whether your co-worker is a jerk or just inept, some people are just not worth your energy. So step back and focus your effort on yourself and your job.

Choose the hill to die on: When you have to work with someone you don't like or respect, every clash seems critical, but be thoughtful about picking your battles. Not everything is worth the same time and attention. Always ask yourself – do I have more to lose than win? It may be in your best interest to tolerate a person if it serves you better to let the situation slide.

Create a support structure: Speaking of picking your battles, don't go to war alone.

Seek out trusted individuals you can vent to, who will offer perspectives and brainstorm alternative solutions about your difficult person.

Dependable advisers can bolster your confidence and resilience. Ideally, you want people who are outside your immediate work environment, or else you run the risk of being viewed as a complainer or a gossip.

Focus on the business at hand: At the end of the day, respecting the people you work with (or for) is peripheral to getting results. You are there to get a job done, and so are they. So focus on the outcome. When you stay connected to your own sense of purpose – what you do and why it matters – it makes the interpersonal relationships secondary.

The reality is that sometimes you're just going to have to work with people you don't like and respect – it's all part of being an adult in the world of work. Accept it, prepare for it, handle it with poise and equanimity, get your work done, and move forward.

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capabilities in the areas of finance, investment, branding, marketing, intellectual property, legal, entrepreneurship, logistics, sales channel, customer psychology and product insight. As well as these functional credentials, we are seeking backgrounds in a variety of settings including emerging technologies, clean energy, sustainability, academia and start-ups.

As one of 6 – 8 incoming Committee Members, you will advise the GRE&T Centre on pilot projects, demonstrations, partnerships, community engagement activities, accelerator operations, recruitment of cohorts and other related activities, including the general progress of the Centre. The Committee will be chaired by an Alectra Board member appointed by the Alectra Board. The Committee term is two years. The expected time commitment is 6 hours per quarter.

Meetings may be held in Guelph or the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

In accordance with the AODA Act, accommodation will be provided by both Odgers Berndtson and Alectra throughout the recruitment process to applicants with disabilities.

Alectra Utilities Corporation serves approximately one million customers across a 1,921 square kilometre service territory and 17 communities. It is part of the Alectra family of companies, which also includes Alectra Inc. and Alectra Energy Solutions Inc.

To express your interest in being considered for this position, submit your resume and other supporting documentation to alectra.great.centre@odgersberndtson.com. Deadline to receive applications is Friday, February 22, 2019.

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