

## **Blind visualisation**

*There is no doubt in my mind that the best way to achieve results is to be thoroughly prepared. By anticipating various scenarios and by taking control you are indeed responsible for reaching your goals. In order to motivate yourself you need to think positive and acknowledge that it is not what you already have that motivates you, but what you dream of having.*

Everything is possible! But it is your own responsibility to make things happen, I just go about it a little bit different than most people.

The general attitude in our society is that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things, but because of the challenges due to the lack of sight I often go about doing things my own special way.

You are your own best resource

## **Limitations**

It is all about not being limited by anything, because that is too easy. Instead you need to deal with what you have got and make the best of it. In my case it would have been far the easiest for me to accept the pension I was offered when I was diagnosed with my eye disease, but where would that had left me today? I have always had a poor eyesight and in retrospective I can see that as a child I had to struggle much harder than the other kids to achieve the same results at school or playing football, basketball, bicycling or playing. I found my resources within myself, because I did not know that I was different from the others, and I thought that everybody felt the same as I did.

Limitations are usually put upon you by others and too often people focus on all the things that are not possible instead of focusing on the

possibilities of being able to achieve something or experience something fantastic.

A fine example is the story about the frog climbing up a tall tower:

Once upon a time there was a group of frogs competing about who could be the first to reach the top of a very tall tower. A huge crowd gathered beneath the tower and none of them believed that the frogs could climb all the way up to the top. So while the frogs began to climb the crowd kept yelling that it was much too difficult. The frogs gave up one by one except for one little frog, who kept climbing. The crowd was shouting louder and louder: You cannot make it, it is too difficult - but the frog just kept climbing until it reached the top. At the foot of the tower everybody looked at each other and wondered how the frog had managed to do it, and the answer was quite simple:

The frog was deaf. That is why it did not hear the crowd shouting that it could not make it.

Opposite the frog I am able to hear, but I have chosen not to listen to the limitations others try to put upon me, because I am blind. Instead I focus on what I have going for me and not what I cannot do.

When I look at the labour market today I see that ordinary and competent people are limited, because they constantly are met with the attitudes that they do not have the proper education, that they do not have the proper attitude, that they are too fat, too thin or something else. It is not just me as a blind man, who is being met with limitations, it is everybody. It is just easier to limit me, because it is so obvious that I have certain challenges.

The best way for my boss to drive me to success or to reach my goals is if he tries to limit me by saying that he does not believe that I can do it. It has nothing to do with my absent eyesight, but rather with the way I drive myself to achieve even more results within sports, my career or personally. It always provokes and motivates my competitive

side and I believe that if I can I want to move the boundaries that develop me and my surroundings, and that is why I need to try.

But - not always. It totally depends on the issue. I.e. if somebody says to me that they do not believe that I can carry through a marathon it does not provoke me to try. I know that if I want to, I can carry through the necessary training, so it is not always I am provoked to do something.

Another obstacle in business is that many people unfortunately are having difficulties asking for help, because in the nature of our society it is considered a sign of weakness. The same applies when it comes to trying something new where there is a risk that it can go wrong - no thank you, most people would say. They would rather do things their usual way, but that does not make us any the wiser, so instead I try to seek new ways and methods and if I fail at least I have learned something and next time I might succeed. Instead of solely focusing on all that might go wrong I focus on how to succeed. I learn from everything I do and that helps me to become stronger and better and continue my development so I can grow and so life keeps being an exciting challenge.

In 1999 I was employed by Debitel (now: Call Me) as an operations supporter and one of my tasks was to develop supporting programmes and answering the help desk phone. Four months later I was promoted to head of my team and a year later I headed a newly established operations department. Sometime later the management decided to combine the operations department with two other departments and as a consequence I was moved to the development department as a programmer. For me it was a very tough degradation and in the beginning I felt that it was because I was not good enough. After a while when I had gotten used to the idea I took a step back, and it became clear to me that I had become a key figure in the development department and at that time I actually did not have the competences

to handle the function as manager of the two other departments as well.

It was hard for me that my status changed from manager to employee, because it was important for me to be a manager. I was so young and inexperienced and it was actually more important for me to be a manager than in fact to be able to perform the tasks of a manager. Even though I was very skilled at human recourse management it was, retrospectively, the right decision taken by the management, because I had absolutely no knowledge of the two other departments.

It did not take long before I was on my feet again and when I had accepted my new status I began focusing on establishing an employee club, and I ended up as chairman of the club. It was non-profitable and voluntarily, but we put a lot of effort in setting up several events. Each year the management organised a summer party and a Christmas party and one year just before the summer party a truck arrived with the rental tableware. I offered to help carry it inside and into the canteen, but the woman in charge turned me down explaining that I would have to go down a few steps. She probably thought that if I had to walk down the stairs carrying something I would be sure to fall. She chose to limit me without any foundation for this assertion. She assumed that because I am blind I could not walk down the stairs.

Limitations are often  
caused by others

One word I often hear repeated when I meet new people is traumatic. I am often put in a situation where people assume I have been through a very traumatic experience, that it must be very traumatic for me to be blind, well, my whole life must be traumatic. But that is not how I feel. I feel that I have the best life. I am happy, I have a

beautiful wife and gorgeous children, I am challenged business wise - and I cannot see, so what? To me it is just a practical problem. Obviously, I would prefer to be able to see, but as this is not an option I do not see any reason to focus on it. Funnily enough, most people tend to forget that I am blind when they discover that behind my blindness is a real human being with a family, who goes to the cinema, plays with his children and on top of that holds a job like everybody else.

I think that people find it traumatising for me, because they close their eyes and imagine their own lives as blind and then they transfer their own imagined limitations to me.

But that is not how it is for me, because I have 20 years of experience and my eyesight disappeared gradually. It did not happen overnight, but during a long period of time enabling me to adjust.

Perhaps that is why many people overlook my white cane that I always carry with me. You should not think it was that easy to overlook - it is 1.32 meters long and white with red stripes, but still it happens. Once I was waiting for a train and I asked somebody if the person could tell me which train was due next, he answered: It says over there (understood: you idiot). He completely overlooked the reason I asked and when I told him I was blind he gave me a long and apologetic explanation about how he had missed seeing my cane.

Another time I asked a person the same question and the person confirmed that it was the train I was waiting for. I called my wife from the train to tell her where I was and that I would be home soon. This time my white cane came to my aid, because next to me stood another passenger who had overheard my conversation, seen my cane and, therefore, interrupted my conversation by telling me that I was on the wrong train, which I obviously could not see.

A third train experience was actually quite funny. I had just entered the train and I asked a woman if she could direct me to seat number 32. She said it was 'over there' and she probably pointed in the right direction. I told her I was blind and that I needed her to be

more specific. Her only reaction was to repeat 'over there', but this time she said it very clearly - O V E R T H E R E - and then I gave up and asked somebody else.

Another time I asked a bus driver which number his bus had, and he just replied that he hoped the sign on the front of the bus said it. I assumed that he did not look at me, because I had my white cane right in front of me.

To me it is a question of how you approach life, and I chose not to let these incidents get to me. Instead I try to understand why people say and do, as they do. Obviously, the bus driver did not act maliciously and to me that is the whole point. I see it more as an expression of a somewhat misguided helpfulness or ignorance. I.e. I was in a shop and asked for help to find a Diet Coke and was told that I could find it over in the corner. So sometimes it is to my disadvantage that I do not look blind in the sense that my eyes look normal and the fact that I am very good at keeping eye contact with others.

I often need to ask directions and recently I was on my way to a meeting at a restaurant. I knew I was getting very close, but I was not quite sure exactly where it was. Therefore, I asked a woman for directions and she told me that I had to walk a further 30 meters to a nearby corner. I knew for sure that the restaurant was not on a corner, but I had no alternative than to trust her, so I began counting 30 meters or steps. Having gone 30 meters I realised that I must have passed the restaurant by far, so I tried asking another person for directions. This man confirmed my suspicion and since he was going my way, we walked together. It turned out that the first time I asked for directions I was only about 10 meters from the restaurant. It just goes to show how difficult it is, because it does not matter for a seeing person if it is 10 or 30 meters, but I have to take it literally and then count my steps. Another time I asked somebody for directions and the man told me that my destination was 100 meters ahead. When I told him that it did not sound right to me, he replied that he usually drove

his car and the trip counter only showed distances per 100 meters. I gather that it must be difficult for people with normal eyesight to estimate distances. Nor does it help me when kind people start telling me street names, because I need to know whether to turn left or right, not if it is Main Street or High Street. It is good practice for me, though, because it challenges my communications skills and my abilities to express my needs more precisely so the people I ask for assistance and I have the same frame of reference.

My white cane consists of five parts held together inside the cane by a rubber band making it easy to fold when I do not need it. Naturally, the cane is of great help to me and it is the reason I am able to go about the streets in safety, but sometimes my cane gets me into trouble. I was on my way home from work on a very warm summer day, and there had been several cancellations so when my train finally arrived a lot of people boarded the train and we were packed like sardines in a tin. Wearing my nice business suit I had placed myself in the gangway, folded my white cane and put it in my bag. I always place it at a slant in my bag so it is easy for me to grab it. As we pulled into my station I grabbed my bag on the floor and began to lift it until I noticed that I could not lift it any higher, because it was stuck on something. I tried to pull it, but suddenly there was an 'ehhh' from the woman standing in front of me. My cane had grabbed her dress and as I lifted the bag I also lifted her dress. I was so embarrassed and immediately began apologising and explaining my blindness while I feverishly unfolded my cane in order to show everybody that I actually was blind and not up to anything immoral or wrong. She was really nice about it, though, and her only comment was that she was glad she had chosen to wear tights that day.

The white cane is my prolonged arm and I can feel all naked without it. On a trip to Slovenia with my goalball team I discovered exactly how important it is to me. We arrived by train to Hamburg in Germany where we needed to switch to the train for Munich. As we

arrived at the station and stepped out onto the platform I began unfolding my cane as I always do when leaving a train. And at that exact moment the rubber band in my cane chose to break. I am used to hearing 'plop, plop, plop' as the parts fall into place, but instead I heard 'clink, clink, clink' and my cane was all over the platform. It is probably one of those moments where I have been closest to panic. Fortunately, my teammates offered to share their canes with me.

However, as important my white cane is to me as little do I feel that I need a guide dog. Guide dogs are fantastic and well trained and a lot of blind people enjoy their aid. Maybe one day I will need one, but right now my white cane and my GPS-function in my phone cover my needs.