

If you feel that the economical and psychological pressure on you is getting unbearable, there is help: Ben Nogradi, renowned Hungarian speaker and author of the bestselling business books *Sell it, Today!*, *When will you be a millionaire?* I-II, *Rhino Selling* and *Ordinary Warriors* has already assisted thousands of people to get through their tough times. Bea Gyenes recently interviewed him for *Self-Improvement* magazine on what an inspirational speaker can do to help people to perform better and achieve business success.

www.bennogradi.com

PRODUCTION IS THE BASIS OF MORALE

Excerpt from interview with Ben Nogradi

The biggest judgment on motivational talks is that they have a short lasting effect. What do you think of that as a speaker who gives inspirational seminars?

It is not untrue. Motivation, which comes from the Latin world “*movere*” or to move, is not supposed to keep the energy for long periods. If I tell someone “Just do it!” it has value only if that person needs one “push” or a little encouragement. A good motivational book or seminar ignites the hidden energy we all have in ourselves. It is a hidden standard that motivation should have long life span. In fact, I prefer motivating people who needs to move faster, then people who needs to move faster, than to “beg” for someone to start moving.

How do you see yourself – are you an author or a speaker first?

I realized a few years ago, that my “personality” is that of an author. See, speakers tend to write books to promote their seminars. I do the opposite: I see myself an author, who promote his books through his seminars. I consider books a man’s very first step on the way to change his life or business for the better.

Why is that?

A book is a test or reach. If one reads a book, it’s a sign that he really makes the effort to get better. There is nothing more powerful than someone reading a book for himself. A seminar can never match the effect of it. The only reason I am doing seminars and lectures is because there are people who just can’t or won’t read books.

As a speaker and business consultant, what do you think people need right now to get into “better shape”, whether if it’s their business or their personal life? Is it motivation?

Motivation has a key role, yes, but I don’t mean the “Rah! Rah!” type seminars, which were so popular in America thirty years ago. People need help to build some *ambitions*. I meet many people who either have given up on their dreams or have way too low standards in life. The world is going through a major transition, a stressful season, so to say. Every generation goes through tough times. My grandmother was born in 1921. She was only eight, when the

world's economy crashed. She was 18, when the Second World War broke out. She was 26 when the value of money in Hungary was so bad, that we had the world's worst inflation and prices were being raised as often as ten times a day. She turned 30 in the worst communist era, was 35 when the Russians took power in 1956. Then came socialism forty years, which was a constant nightmare, regarding freedom of thought, freedom of speech. Then came the "revolution" and the beginning of a "new world order", which she understands nothing about. Now if you look at my generation, people who were born in the early seventies, you can see that this group is not only going through a stressful time, but we are completely unprepared for it. And it is especially true in my home country, Hungary.

What do you mean "unprepared"?

Well, people who were born in the 70's have had a pretty good time so far! We grew up in the last decade when the world still held some true values and morals, computer games were absence and people read lots of books. It was still fairly stable, and we still had a mutual enemy: socialism. The only problem with my generation is that we were still too young and poor to get advantage of the possible turning points of our era: in 1989, when the Berlin wall came down, then too young for the stock exchange boom and the yuppie era, then too poor for real-estate boom in 1997-1998. The biggest advantage of the European Union – the fact that now Hungarians are free to apply for a job anywhere in Europe remains a dream, mainly because we don't speak any languages. So now, here are quite a lot of people between the age 30-40, who feel that if they don't do something fast, they will never be able to come out of the constant financial mystery. Most of us have kids, or still trying to have kids, most of us don't have property, and those who do, pay their asses off for the mortgage. And of course, very few of us have jobs that provide a secure living. The thing is, that we haven't experienced such enormous pressure as we are experiencing right now. Because over the past twenty years, we always had a hope, that it is going to get better, we are going to have freedom, wealth and happiness. But people of my age don't see it happening, and now this generation is scared of the future. The realization also shocked us, that by the time all these dinosaurs we inherited from the socialist era become extinct, we are going to be grandparents. The confusion comes from the fact that although we had a relatively safe life so far, with the wealth came no security.

And now we are seeing adversity?

Those who never lived under communism will never really understand what opportunities my generation has right now. When my father was 33, he bought the very first automobile in his life, which was an East-Germany product called "Trabant", known to be the worst car in the history of auto manufacturing. And he had to wait five years to be able to buy it. At the same age, I have three cars, all of them Japanese. My parents lived in a basement of 20 square meters; my mother was 50 when she got her own room for the first time in her life. I was 23 when I bought my first flat. I was only 17 when I travelled all around Western-Europe. My parents could only travel in every three years, if they got a passport. But instead of being happy about the incredible freedom we have, what do we see: prices are soaring like hell, jobs are scarce, the politicians openly rip the country apart, the government is a joke. If one lives in insane times, it is not unexpected that he becomes a bit insane too.

You have lived in South Africa for years. Have you experienced similar situations over there?, Africa is such a beautiful place that as the saying goes: when it is bad in Africa, it's still good to be in Africa. And strange enough, I experienced that the poorest blacks seemed to be the happiest. Africa gives me the greatest motivation that life is beautiful, that it is worth

fighting for your dreams. If you go Africa, you will immediately feel a major change in your emotional condition, the minute you step outside the airport. It's pure magic!

Would you consider emotions to be a key element in performance?

It's everything! The word emotion comes from the word motion, which, once again, comes from the Latin "*movere*" – to move. Performance is strongly connected to emotions. People are usually stuck in an emotional state, and that's their reaction to everything that happens around them. If someone is generally angry, he will use anger as a solution to problems. If someone is in fear, he will see danger in everything. We need to change our focus, in order to find our way out of these turbulent times. I am not saying it is easy, I say it can be done.

Let's talk about solutions. How would you go by to improve the state of your nation, from a psychological point of view?

Speaking from experience I say that to get a group into a better condition, you first need to raise the morale of the group members. That is also true for a nation. Because when you succeed to raise the morale of an individual, you will see a major improvement in his environment. In other words, you may only educate one person, but you better the life of a hundred.

When you say morale, what do you mean exactly?

In military sense, it means the spirit of the soldiers, as exhibited by confidence, cheerfulness and discipline. It's a sense of common purpose or a degree of dedication and competence. It's also referring to a mental condition. So when you raise morale, you raise the willingness to perform assigned tasks and to endure hardship. Now, what do we have to do if we want to raise morale? We need to raise the level of production! Why, production is the basis of morale. And when you want to raise production, the first step you got to do is to *change focus*. I strongly believe that the greatest problem with us is when we put our focus on the negatives all the time. As the old Buddhist saying goes: "What you expect, you will get." It's like going to a party, where a great time is had by all. But there is one couple fighting in the corner. Now you have a camera, and you focus on that couple, and you will say what a shit party it is. But if you see the big picture, you see it is a great party indeed. That's why one shouldn't watch TV, because the media concentrate on making the environment dangerous, so we keep channelled on the news. It's the wrong focus! So having pointed out the challenge we are facing, I also see a major opportunity for a boom. We are armed with tools that generations before us never even dreamed of: the internet, the freedom to travel, the freedom to learn anything we want. True, we live in times when people tend to be pessimistic, but I believe this can be a benefit for the positive thinkers, because while the pessimistic stay low and stiff, the optimistic can move up to the top. There is a sign on my office door in Johannesburg, saying "No whining!". That's my business philosophy summed up in two words.

I like the way you look at things, but tell the person with two kids and a wife who is trying to survive on welfare. It's tough to look outside from your misery and look for opportunities!

How do you teach people to get over the edge, to get out of a pessimistic state? I don't think the American „You can do it!“ kind of motivational talks will help, would they?

I would say yes and no. Motivation alone won't change much, as you can't win a war on enthusiasm only. On the other side, to get people to do something you have to get them into a better emotional state so they can successfully overcome the obstacles in their lives. In order to do something successfully, you need two things: the willingness and the ability. The problem is that both the school system and the adult education concentrate on the ability,

lexical knowledge, techniques, but not on the willingness. I believe people basically know what they should do, but our lives have become so instable that most of the people consider “staying low” and unproductive to be safe. In my profession, business education, if you go onto the internet and look for technical training, you see that the market is full: you find thousands of companies or individuals who promise to train you on sales, marketing, entrepreneurship, technical skills and so on. But you won’t find too many seminars which say: I’ll teach you how to get yourself into a mental state that you can tackle your problems. And those that do usually connected to organized religion or psychology – neither of which enjoys widespread approval these days, so people tend to stay away from those sources.

They say Hungarians are known to be pessimistic, that we always complain. You have lived in Africa for years. How do you see our nation?

I wouldn’t say we complain more than, let’s say the Russians or the English. However, knowing the history of this country, and not only the last sixty years, but also the last 1,000 years, the question is not why we seem to be pessimistic, but how come we are still here in the first place? In every century, Hungarians were butchered, raped, killed, mutilated, suppressed by either the Turks or the Tatars or Mongols or the Austrians, or the Germans or the Russians, you name it. And we are still here. I think it’s a bloody miracle! No wonder there are many Hungarians who achieved incredible results in the world. I am talking about Erno Rubik, Harry Houdini, the photographer Robert Capa or the conductor George Solti. They were all Hungarians! So is the man who invented the safety belt in cars and who invented the ballpoint pen. Why all these people reached extraordinary goals? Because their emotional states and their surroundings changed when they changed the environment, and so did their focus. Once you are able to get yourself „uptone”, so to say, you will see that opportunities will open up around you, you will see that your flows will work much better, miraculously.

So you say the psychology of focus is the key to success?

I say it’s the first step to succeed. For example, when something bad happens to you, what do you focus on? Like when you lose your job or when the doctors detect a tumour in you? You say „why is this happening to me?” or you say „Okay, what am I gonna do about it?”. I mentioned my grandmother before. When she was 18, she was taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp with her sisters. Her whole family was killed, but she survived, because instead of sinking into depression about the situation, she was constantly focusing on how to survive. And she was so strong, she is still alive! Or look at one of the most famous Hungarian sport phenomena of modern times, Judit Polgar. Judit and her sisters received constant attacks from the press, from the chess association when they began their chess careers. The communist regime didn’t want to accept the fact that small girls should be allowed to play chess, instead of going to elementary school. And instead of giving them financial and moral support, they were suppressed left, right and center. The Polgar girls had all the reasons to give up and “go back to be a wife and mother”, as the society would have expected them to. Instead, they focused on getting results, and they have become the best female players in the history of chess.

What is the first step you recommend doing?

The first step is to educate people on how to overcome the emotion of fear. Fear of not being able to support our family, fear of becoming losers, fear of not being loved, fear of not being good enough to live up to our own expectations. And the way to do that is to help people understand what fear is exactly and how do deal with it. Then we have to teach people on the fundamental laws of Life, with special attention on goals and purposes, and how to overcome obstacles. And motivation, yes, that too. It is very important to understand the basics of

motivation. Because there is only one person who can really motivate you 24 hours a day: YOU.

Who is your “target market” – those you write your books for?

I believe that right now, my own generation; the people between 30-45 are the key demographic group that is able to change the future of the world. We are the people who have the responsibility of helping the next generations, our children to grow into healthy, powerful adults, who got the willingness, the self confidence and the ability to make things go right. We need to give back the self-confidence to people, so we believe that a bright future is possible to achieve.

Are you talking about giving back hope?

I am not talking about hope. Hope is for those who don't believe in themselves and in their abilities. If you *know* you can do something, you need hope no more. Because you know things will happen as you want it. I don't like the overuse of the word “hope”, because it implies I let control slip out of my hand. I am the kind of person who likes to have the control of his own life. Jack Nicholson says in the Martin Scorsese movie “Departed”: “I don't want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be the product of me.” That's my kind of view on life.