THE BUSINESS OF DANCE
By Farooq Chaudhry

What does a Ryanair flight and myself have in common?

Please don’t say cheap and cheerful and good value for money! The answer is that as long as we are up in the air flying our companies are doing well. And that’s where the comparison ends.

A Dance Producer and His Business

So what does that actually mean in the Akram Khan world? It means that I call myself the producer, keeping one eye on the art and one eye on the money. The role of the producer is implied in the name itself. The focus, priority and responsibilities lie with the production and not the organisation. Someone more organised and efficient runs the company.

I consider my role to be creative, visionary and pragmatic. My main responsibilities are to:

• Be involved in the conception of the project
• Help source and assemble the creative team
• Manage communications lines between creative team
• Be the chief negotiator with all stakeholders
• Scout for future projects
• Find the right investors for the work
• Find the right distributors for the work
• Find the right platforms for performance
• Protect/ensure integrity of artistic vision/priorities
• Be an architect of ideas that further artistic and company growth

My deep understanding of the industry in which I work combined with my previous experience as a professional dancer influences and guides my judgment and decision-making.

Our business is dance making.

I often ask myself where does the word business come from?

Does it work in the same way that:

     Happy becomes happiness
     Lovely becomes loveliness

So,

     Busy becomes business

With this logic, business is associated with industry and hard work! It is a human activity that is about an exchange of services to the mutual benefit of both parties. It
is what we human beings have been doing since the moment we developed the skills that we recognised as having value and could be traded for other skills in order for us to survive and to make our lives better and safer.

There is a tendency in the arts world to consider the word business as the evil empire that has little or nothing to do with the arts. They do not mix like oil and water. I disagree with this assumption. Many of my heroes, such as Steve Jobs, are visionary businessmen who are crazy, foolish and passionate enough to build their companies by taking creative leaps into the unknown. They changed the world with the sheer audacity of their ideas. Tell me how is that any different from any great artist!

Our Beginnings

So how did we begin? I like to believe that what you eventually become is often shaped by the rhythm of your very first steps.

I met Akram in 1999 after I had retired from a professional dance career of fifteen years. I had just completed a master’s degree in arts management and was working as a trainee manager for a small arts organisation in London. The job was temporary and I was obliged to find my own personal artistic portfolio which I could continue working with once my job in the agency had expired. In the summer of that year I saw the young Akram Khan perform on a stage in London and was immediately attracted to his unique way of moving. I knew without question that I had witnessed something special. It excited and inspired me and I wanted to know more. We spoke. There was a very good chemistry and in a matter of months we started working together. I said to Akram that I was confident I could take him somewhere new but equally important he could also take me somewhere new. I needed an artist who could challenge me as much as I could challenge him. That was our first promise to each other and on this basis we started our adventure.

At the beginning, like many young artists and, might I add, young producers, money was hard to come by. We worked unbelievably hard and used any money we earned from performances towards setting up a company. My first advice to Akram was that he needed to get out of the UK and develop a global perspective. I managed to secure him a place on a European-funded choreography course in Belgium called the X-group. At first he was reluctant to leave home and travel and live in Brussels but he recognised the value of the opportunity and went for it. He came back after six months with his eyes shining with a massively increased artistic appetite. I then asked him what his dream was. He said he desired to create a small company work with original production elements and have the time to explore his ideas deeply. As he was speaking my inbuilt calculator was working out the value of this dream. It came to about £60,000… money we did not have. My only option then was to sell my flat to fund this project, which I did. It was at this moment that I realised that I was an entrepreneur! I was putting my money where my mouth is!

The project had a big impact and very quickly attracted attention from the global dance community. This in turn brought a large number of performance dates which generated revenue and with that began the process of converting talent, ambition, risk, belief and hard work into the three key drivers of any business – quality,
innovation and reputation. This naturally brought greater confidence, which was then used as fuel for even larger more ambitious projects. People began to like us very quickly and we were deemed successful.

Developing Our Brand

I have tried very hard over the years to steer away from notions of success as well as failure. They are both misleading. Success can make you feel that you are a lot better than you are while failure can make you feel otherwise. If anything, being comfortable with the prospect of failure can be a more potent force for success. If there is no fear of it when it happens, it can be incredibly illuminating. This is because failure demands more honest and focused questioning of yourself than success does.

So from our earliest ideas we had, without thinking about it too much, developed some core principles:

- Akram must always start every project with a dream
- I must always take risks and look for opportunities to make this dream happen
- There is an absolute commitment by us both to quality, excellence, innovation and the need to make ourselves better.

Our vision is: (what we do)

To produce thoughtful, provocative and ambitious dance productions for the international stage by journeying across boundaries to create uncompromising artistic narratives.

Our mission is: (how we do this and what we hope for)

By taking human themes and work with others to take them to new and unexpected places – embracing and collaborating with other cultures and disciplines. The dance language in each production is rooted in Akram Khan’s classical Kathak and modern dance training and his fascination with storytelling. The work continually evolves to communicate ideas that are intelligent, courageous and new, bringing with it international acclaim and recognition as well as artistic and commercial success.

It took a very long time for us to develop our vision. We initially grew by working out what we did not want to do or be.

Vision for me is dynamic and not a static concept because it speaks as much about where you want to go as much as what you have done and what you are doing. It is the shaping of identity. It ultimately becomes your brand.

What is a brand? For me it is a not just a question of a logo. It is a company’s personality, style, character and values. You build your organisation on your values, be they artistic, moral or financial. Without a brand, organisations can become faceless and soulless machines. Moreover, an organisation is not just a name with x number of people on the payroll but it is essentially a culture. Understanding who
you are (your brand) and what you do (your culture) demand self-awareness, reflection and the ability to stand outside of yourself and observe yourself objectively.

**Our Road Map to Innovation**

Innovation is a strange beast that simultaneously accepts and rejects a business structure. It is a free space within a confined space.

The most exciting and successful innovations begin without preset rules or structures. They begin from an empty space, and as they evolve they develop their own unique structures according to their needs. The act of innovation results in an innovation itself. The action becomes a thing.

Often innovations are created through collaborations. Collaborations are not just a marriage but also a marriage that creates a ‘child’. The child is then a third way which when most successful, is a product of the best qualities of both parents. It requires a certain process. In my experience it usually goes something like this:


If at any time any part of the chain is unfulfilled or the chain is broken it will most likely result in failure.

You may have noticed that I put the word *constraint* in my ‘road to innovation’ list. This was introduced just recently after reading an article that opposed the age-old idea that uninhibited freedom is the catalyst for new ideas¹. The article said the path to greater creativity and hence innovation involves recognising and working with the constraints that are inherent within your art form or area of activity. Obstacles ‘increase the possibilities of perception’ and ‘expand our conceptual scope’ (Lehrer, 2011).

Instead of seeing them as troublesome barriers that may cause us to quit or becoming overly pragmatic, they can, if embraced with an open and engaged mind, foster new thoughts and ideas and allow us to trespass on the boundaries of familiar thought to a better end.

> ‘The larger lesson is that the brain is a neural tangle of near infinite possibility, which means that it spends a lot of time and energy choosing what not to notice. As a result, creativity is traded away for efficiency; we think in literal prose, not symbolist poetry. And this is why constraints are so important: It’s not until we encounter an unexpected hindrance – a challenge we can’t easily resolve – that the chains of cognition are loosened, giving us newfound access to the weird connections simmering in the unconscious.’ (Lehrer, 2011)

In short we break out of the box by stepping into shackles!

What holds a collaborative team together? The first condition is that each party possesses a different and very distinct perspective or skill that when put together with other skills works for the common good and becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Each collaborator must sign up to a single idea and serve it with discipline and loyalty.

But how do they choose each other? Well, it is often quite simple – they choose each other because they like each other and have mutual admiration, trust and respect both personally and professionally. If you like someone there is greater desire to help him or her to succeed. It is an absolute fundamental in any human relationship or partnership.

**The Artistically Led Enterprise**

We consider our work to be niche/avant-garde and not mainstream, and our business style is entrepreneurial both in our art and leadership.

From the process of deciding what we did not want to do we were left with three things we did want to do:

- **Artist-to-artist collaborations** (e.g.: zero degrees, Sacred Monsters, In-I)
- **Ensemble/company work** (e.g.: Kaash, Ma, bahok, Vertical Road)
- **Classical Kathak solos** (e.g.: Polaroid Feet, Ronin, Gnosis)

As we started with a spirit of enterprise it was important to us that our artistic growth was underpinned by a robust and clear sense of business discipline. We were not seeking only to protect, conserve and consolidate value. We wanted to grow, develop and respond to change. We wanted to surprise ourselves as well as our audiences, to change at that point on the curve when people least expect it, and to make change happen with enthusiasm and clarity when organisational confidence and morale is strong enough.

We resisted the urge to follow the traditional business model of dance companies where dancers are employed full time. We felt this limited our artistic options because artistic ideas would be determined by the size of the company instead of an idea free of obligation to use resources. We felt it could limit ambition and place huge pressure on operational efficiency. It also brings with it the danger of the vision serving the organisation rather than the organisation serving the vision. We did not want the tail wagging the dog.

I would be lying if I said we had a strategy. Often we were making it up as we went along. *Strategy* is an odd word for me. Often it is applied retrospectively to make it look like you were a lot cleverer than you were, and that you knew what you were doing every step of the way. It conveniently forgets mistakes, luck, poor judgment, bad decisions that went well and good decisions that went bad.

In the beginning we had simple objectives and plans that we followed with passion and an almost naïve, blind faith. Now we are more grown up (perhaps in the teenager phase where you feel everything is possible but still a little bit sloppy) we do think a bit more strategically. I would say we are now an equal mix of plans and strategy. A *plan* is just simply something you want to do, while a *strategy* is
something you want to do plus some kind of predicted measurement of its impact on yourself and the outside world.

Our four organisational priorities are growth, independence, stability and security.

It does not sit well with the creative process for the artistic director to be overly concerned with financial and organisational matters. It is almost impossible to decide exactly what is needed in terms of raw materials before you begin. A sculptor will start with a lump of clay the same size as him but may create something no taller than his waist. This process is susceptible to a lot of natural and unnatural wastage, and requires careful and sensitive monitoring. It works best in a framework that is flexible and adaptable.

Artistic directors have more to lose – they lose their reputation. The producer, well, they only lose money!

Our Stakeholders

The people who make up our world are called stakeholders. What we offer them is intangible. We hope to enrich them. Though we are not strictly accountable to them they do and will judge, measure and expect. Outside of the arts we would probably call them shareholders.

Our funding sources and partners are the following:

- **Public subsidy**: My least favourite due to high levels of accountability based on social and political outcomes
- **Earned income**: My favourite. You have the satisfaction of spending your own hard-earned money
- **Co-producers**: They invest not only in produced works but also in the artist’s career. These are usually long-term relationships and they often participate in the development of the production by offering physical resources such as theatres or studios as well as hard cash. They are excellent feedback providers during the creative process.
- **Commissions**: Not so artistically satisfying. We do not set the artistic agenda.
- **Sponsors**: Usually comes when company value, reputation and quality are high and proven. It is a partnership that often based on the alignment of values, ideals, brand and reputations. With our current sponsor, the French road construction company Colas, we are bound together by our commitment to diversity and ‘connecting the world through talent’.

Promoters, presenters and festival and theatre directors are our gatekeepers/middlemen. Their belief in our work allows us to engage directly with our audiences. They usually end up being our co-producers. They are critical partners and these relationships need a great deal of cultivation and nurturing.

Our customers are the audiences! What do we want to give them? An exceptional, high quality artistic experience that inspires, provokes, surprises, excites, transforms and engages the heart and mind in an open and intelligent way. We offer experiences for the human soul. We, like many businesses, need loyal customers that trust us but unlike many other businesses, the arts offer beauty as well as
experiences that are going to throw their customers off balance, disturb and undermine existing perspectives and maybe even destroy them in order to create new ones. I once read that art and culture shows us what we don’t know about ourselves by showing us who we are. To achieve this you have to forget the audience during the creation process as great art is not customer-driven.

**Growing the Business**

In 2003 I met the director of the School of Social Entrepreneurs and he very bluntly told me that I was not playing to my strengths and that as long as I keep sitting at my desk I was losing the company money! It was a revelation and one of those eureka moments for me.

I very quickly changed my title to producer and hired a general manager. I then proceeded to act as a scout for Akram Khan whereby I was operating two years ahead of him looking for new artistic and financial opportunities. This involved a major expansion of our network across the globe. This is when my Ryanair comparison kicked in. I read books, saw shows, attended and observed dance classes, went to exhibitions, watched movies, avidly consumed newspapers, watched CNN and collided with new cultures and forms of expression. Not only did I expand our network I expanded myself. I became Mr Development and even ended up having my own budget line.

We are all familiar with the ‘second work syndrome’ where the heightened expectation after the success of the first bears down with great pressure on the artist or company. Without going into too much detail we almost succumbed to this pressure leading up to the premiere of our second work *Kaash* in France in 2002. We produced a work that was very underdeveloped which opened like a damp squib. We failed to impress the key people we needed to impress and after a crestfallen week we reinvested significantly to rework and develop this production. Thankfully, within six weeks we turned our fortunes around and put ourselves back on track. I managed to get those important people back to see the work and they have liked it and have liked us ever since.

Parallel to this, another potentially damaging scenario was taking shape. It is what I call the inability to ride momentum skilfully. When perceived ‘success’ comes quickly, you are suddenly bombarded from a multitude of sources. In addition the excitement of your own, adrenaline clouds your judgment. At this point it is easy to make the wrong decisions and the wrong friends. The runaway success gives you the sensation that you are freewheeling, or a ship at sea without sails or a rudder being pulled in all directions. It is a dangerous, and as I said, exciting feeling. It is a time that can completely destroy a company’s ambitions.

In the normal business world it is the time when companies are most prone to collapse as they are unable to maintain cash flow to support their unexpected growth. It is almost impossible to anticipate but I would advise it is wise to make provision for the best-case scenario as well as the worst-case. When it happened to us I slammed on the brakes and took on a six-month organisational review with a consultant. It focused us and disciplined our intentions. It was an excellent decision.

So after ten years of activity what do the statistics say?
• 14 productions (ten modern & four classical).

• 1000th performance took place on 8th June 2011 in Gent, Belgium.

• The company has toured to all 5 continents and at least 50 countries and 150 cities.

• Market distribution:
  o Europe 49%
  o UK 22%
  o North & South Americas 13%
  o Asia and Australia 13%
  o Africa and Middle East 3%

• Approximately half a million people have seen Akram Khan shows.

• Average attendance at over the past ten years is approximately 82%.

• AKC/KCP\(^2\) employed more than 300 people combination of artists and administrative personnel (2003 - 2010)

Statistics as of September 2011

Challenges and Dangers

It goes without saying that every business needs to take time to identify the challenges and barriers that they are likely to encounter. Here I share some of ours.

The biggest challenge is probably selling original work, which is not yet made, to promoters. This is where reputation is very important.

We work with a financial model where revenue generation is very limited beyond live performance.

We have to balance touring multiple productions without being in competition with ourselves.

Dance is an activity that cannot benefit from modern technologies to be become cheaper and more efficient. It still requires bodies, studios, ten hours of rehearsal space a day and on average 12-14 weeks’ total creation time. If anything, technology is integrated into live action and will only cost more money.

\(^2\)AKC stands for Akram Khan Company, and KCP stands for Khan Chaudhry Productions. See section “The Tools of Trade: Business Structure” to learn more about our ecology of company structures.
We have to satisfy audiences who are eager for the new. This is the basis of consumption of any experience that calls itself contemporary or modern – when does your version of modern stop becoming modern? How do you continue to be interesting and relevant?

We have to know and accept that we will not always be able to align artistic risk with reputational and financial risk at the same time.

We have to be patient and careful about choosing a committed board that understand, follow and add value to our vision. We don’t want people who are obsessed with accountability.

As essentially an export company we are susceptible to currency fluctuations. I take time to monitor global economic shifts. One of the best financial decisions I made was to change all contracts from sterling to euro when I sensed the pound was going to lose significant value against the euro. This decision alone increased our turnover by 25% over an 18-month period without having to do any extra work. This was the year when we reached a peak of £2.9 million in turnover.

Being an export company we also have to be culturally sensitive when we work with different countries. Ignorance and a lack of respect for different work practices can be very damaging and limit our international opportunities.

Dangers to us are:

Becoming poor decision makers. It strikes me that one of the biggest weaknesses in people is decision-making. People tend to sit on the fence for a long time before they decide anything if they ever decide anything at all. I have a theory of why this is. As we all know there is no such thing as a free decision. Any decision will involve a sacrifice, giving up something old to accept something new. But further still, once a decision is made one has to be responsible for it. So somewhere between sacrifice and responsibility people get lost.

Further dangers are becoming greedy, forgetting our core principles and values and not keeping our promises.

Understanding these barriers and challenges and managing them well is as important to us as the creation of artistic work. In fact they will ensure our artistic work is confident and better protected. You therefore have to know what is happening to you. This requires self-awareness, a quality that I hold very highly and the value of it can never be underestimated. I am not sure if many arts companies and those who run them pause long enough to do this in their busy day-to-day activities.

Self-Awareness

In the modern world I believe there is an overemphasis on being functional, scientific and linear in achieving targets and goals, and not what I would call self-aware. This is strange considering human beings are basically emotional animals. I suspect this approach to life and work has grown out of a survival instinct in order to bring control and avoid chaos. But to be complete we have to use all our faculties. I started to
think what is it that we need to be complete when we engage with the outside world and ourselves. I came up with these thoughts:

- Knowledge = pure information. Tells you what something is.
- Understanding = information + intellectual thought. Tells you what something is and also what it means.

Both knowledge and understanding are learnt processes, usually through a formal education process, and become learnt wisdom or more commonly known as intellectual intelligence.

Their opposites are:

- Instinct = pure feeling. Strong emotional reaction without knowing why.
- Intuition = instinct + human experience. Emotional reaction because you recognise behaviour you have previously experienced.

These two cannot be taught and are deeply personal to each individual. Experiential wisdom that is more commonly known as emotional intelligence. Both involve deciphering and looking for repetitive patterns and then connecting them together to make sense of them. Once this is done you have the choice to act or not act depending on whether you think that sense is useful to you or not.

I believe that in the world of formal education, which is preoccupied with measurement and information, instincts and intuition are deemed too unreliable when it comes to making judgements. Maybe it stems out of fear of being wrong and making a mistake. But to ignore the immense power of instinct and intuition one would be utterly foolish. If you can't trust yourself, how are you going to make others trust you? Of course I would also be foolish to ignore knowledge and understanding. They also have value but for me it is not enough.

**The Tools of Trade**

So far I have spoken about identity, innovation, principles, values, challenges, dangers, the need for self-awareness and the importance of different types of intelligence. We need tools to make the best of these. I have identified some that we use to achieve our aims and I would imagine pretty much what every hard working and ambitious company would also need.

1. **Leadership**

Number one on my list is excellent leadership. There are many combinations of leadership but in our set-up we have a form of dual leadership, which is quite usual in the arts. In our case it is the artistic director and the producer. It is, however, not that common in modern dance. Dance is primarily a young person's activity, and experience is calibrated by differences of five years – 20 to 25, to 30, to 35, to 40 – and often the management teams are no older. This is hugely different to theatre, music and visual arts where careers are considerably longer, bringing with them the benefit of balancing youthful idealism with mature wisdom.
Good leadership is able to absorb the complexities of day-to-day realities, and rather than reflecting difficulty back to the organisation, they reframe problems to make them simple and therefore manageable, without becoming simplistic.

Strong leaders expect high levels of performance from their people. It is not just about fulfilling one’s duty.

Leaders inspire, motivate, demand, manage, direct, ask questions, listen to answers, balance the big picture with the detail, protect and advance the vision. But they do not do this alone. In fact they cannot do this alone. They need talented people and what I have discovered is that most effective way to motivate people is to guide them to the source of their power. But this is only possible if there is a culture of pride and belief in the organisation – the simple, potent qualities that are so fundamental to us as people.

A young and very bright arts leader I am mentoring recently told me of a study that asked five-year old children to explore how many things they could do with a drawing pin. They came up with sixty possibilities. By the time they were ten it had reduced to thirty. At fifteen that number became a paltry twenty. What it indicated was that as children grew, conventional education and wisdom limited their imagination and creativity. No big surprises there! This young mentee had also been asked to do a similar exercise with a bottle with a group of older and more established leaders. She beat them hands down.

It made me think that apart from a loss of imagination, what possibly could be happening is that “efficiency” was kicking in. After all, eliminating the unnecessary is part of good leadership and it comes with experience. Efficiency requires presumptions and a pre-determined set of rules. While play or creative thinking makes no presumptions and more unpredictable and fragile, it allows you to make the rules as you create. The greater gains through play are likely to come with more wastage.

This idea provoked two questions in me. The first is: “Do we place too much importance and over reliance on experience?” In my opinion experience should provide core stability but not necessarily tell you what to do. The second question is: “Do we risk losing visionary thinking when we become preoccupied with saving money, time, energy and discarding what at first may not look useful?” As a result, could we call the ones who play and explore as “dream leaders” and the ones who save as “efficiency leaders?”

I suppose in the end good leadership should be a mix of both, at times one more than the other. I would hate it to be 50/50 and any denomination beyond this that is weighted more in favour of efficiency. If efficiency and experience deny us the riches of new thinking and ideas, I fear we will fall victim to the twin evils of good leadership – mediocrity and predictability.

2. Business Structure

Secondly, you need an efficient, effective, flexible and very responsive business structure. The arts tend to use a one-size-fits-all model that in my opinion does not work well with the four pillars of growth, independence, stability and security. Because of this I developed an innovative ecology of company structures that meets
all our needs. We have a company limited by guarantee (Akram Khan Company, AKC), a charity (AKCT, Advanced Kathak and Contemporary Training) and a company limited by shares (Khan Chaudhry Productions, KCP). They are designed to respond to commercial opportunities at one end and experimental urges at the other. Though legally independent, they are set up to support and serve each other’s interests without getting the money all mixed up in one pot. It is virtually the same talent pool maximising its value and assets without stepping on different agendas and confusing things. I am proud to say the London Business School studies us alongside Cirque du Soleil as examples of successful business models in the entertainment industry.

It goes without saying a ship cannot sail without a rudder. I would call this the business plan. In the arts we tend to see this as a boring procedural document that we have to present to our funding body and they are usually written like this. Instead I decided to turn it into a valuable opportunity to look at us and to make it the voice for our dreams and ambitions. I wanted it to be an explanation of our value and meaning to both ourselves and to those who wish, want or need to engage with us.

We spent six months asking questions to stakeholders about what they thought of us. We took time to research the competitive landscape in which we worked, to find the optimum staffing structures, to assess and project the value of our practice. Tough job when you don’t know what you are going to create but nonetheless very focusing for the mind. It became our road map and the intention of our journey. A point of reference. It created momentum and a sense of purpose.

3. Communications

Aside from leadership and business models and plans, there is the obvious need for clear and honest internal and external communication delivered at the right time and to the right people. Communication as we all know is not just talking to people, but also about listening. On occasion I do mentor managers and young producers. One word of advice I often give them is not to separate their abilities and qualities. Yes, be efficient, organised, creative and simple, but to express yourself fully and to have the greatest impact, this should be done with passion, audacity and flair. Making people feel that your thoughts and emotions are coming from the same source is more effective and enjoyable.

4. Networking

The network is a very potent business tool. A much-used term that implies an expansive web of partnerships and potential opportunities, indeed it is that, but for me it is less about hard-nosed sales pitches to new potential partners and more about developing casual exchanges of interests, thoughts, feelings and ideas. After all we don't want to work with people we don't like.

I'm often struck by how a majority of time during an important business lunch the conversations are casual – talking about families, football, places visited (well, that is what I talk about) but all the time the internal voice is asking: Do I like and trust this person? Can I enjoy working with them? If the answer is ‘Yes’, in the last ten minutes over dessert, the deal is done. You both walk away happy but unfortunately a lot fatter.
5. The Art of Negotiation

Last but not least there is the art of negotiation. Negotiation is not the old-fashioned idea that one person walks away from a deal better off than the other. It is certainly not haggling and it is also not compliance. People are generally quite weak at it. It requires confidence in your offer and clarity and honesty about what is realistic. Most importantly it is not the outcome of the conversation, but what comes after.

Negotiation sets out the parameters of the promise (the contract) and it requires sensitivity and respect to the needs of the negotiating partner. It can take time and should not be built be built on false foundations. No matter how much you try to eliminate uncertainty and risk it will always carry some. You can be positively aggressive as long as it does not become personal or a power struggle. You should say no when you mean no and be tuned in enough to look for clues about what is not being said. Screw it up and it can be very damaging. It requires mental strength, knowledge, emotional intelligence and acute sensitivity.

I was one of those young boys who ran away from home a lot. I often ended up standing at train stations begging people for money to get back home. I got quite good at it. Though I was not negotiating I learnt to be persuasive and how to read people. I became streetwise, a useful asset now in my job as a producer.

The most successful negotiations are not just the familiar win/win but what I call the win/win/win. The third win being the surprise benefits that neither party expected to achieve beyond their original expectation. This requires a willingness to enter into the negotiation with a more open and generous spirit and to partially suspend the target that was sitting in the back of your mind before you started your discussions. This is very exciting and the one I most strive for.

When we negotiate it is worth thinking that there is no single bottom line. There are moral concerns as well as financial. With AKC we have three bottom lines – artistic success, financial success and a happy company.

The biggest stumbling block of any negotiation is determining the value of your offer before you begin. Too often in the arts this is costed up as the break-even expenditure of your actual service (the thing you do). But it is far more complex than this. Your value is in fact broken down into three parts:

1. The value of your reputation
2. The value of the work itself
3. The value of the impact/success of the combination of reputation and work.

The profit margins are usually found in items 1 and 3. Don’t be shy when working this out. Remember to say to yourself ‘it’s because I’m worth it’.

Negotiating is often loaded with emotional personal agendas as well as business ones. A few years back I read an article in Time magazine about how a large Chinese company chose a contract that had inferior technology from a French company rather than a vastly superior technology offer from an American company. When asked about the rationale behind their decision the Chinese company said, ‘The French spent most of their time listening to us and did not make us eat their food’.
In business, as in life, we often hear the words ‘you need to recognise and seize your opportunities!’ and I couldn’t agree more. You need to use your nose as much as you can and if you like the smell, go for it with a good balance of impulse and intelligence. But opportunities don’t always exist outside you. They are not always seen from afar or accidentally collided into. They can be created if you have an appetite for ideas and leaping into the unknown with them firmly grasped in your hands. At this point you create momentum.

If I were to use an analogy with dance, it would be that the best dancers give the impression that their bodies never stop moving. The momentum they create keeps breathing, flowing, stays dynamic and carves the space around it with a lack of inhibition and fear. They enjoy where it takes them. They never become static or paralysed in a rigid form.

Keeping momentum in business is absolutely essential to ensure ideas arrive at their natural conclusion and fulfil their potential. It takes energy to create energy and as much faith as certainty. We can all sit in the pub tonight and dream up an amazing idea that can make us famous, rich or better still change the world but will we wake up the next morning and do something about it? In the evening we are geniuses and in the morning we are cowards.

What paralyses us is fear of ‘risk’, a word hardly used in this paper but it is the single most important thing that has governed my actions and decisions without exception. Ironically, I take comfort from this aspect of my personality.

Epilogue

Last year I was on a plane thinking about what qualities and abilities I need to become a better producer. In fact once I looked at the list I had drawn up you pretty much need these qualities and abilities to be a better anything. So here is my list:

- Love/passion
- Being a dreamer
- To work unbelievably hard
- Take risks and to enjoy them
- Be enthusiastic about change
- Endurance
- Will power
- Strength
- Grace
- Rebelliousness
- Patience
- Flexibility
- Consistency
- Optimism
- The need for high achievement
- The ability to recognise and admit to mistakes
- A good listener
- A good communicator
• A fighter
• Charm
• Luck
• Good taste
• Precision
• Good instincts
• Good judgment
• Honesty
• Sense of fairness
• Integrity
• Generosity
• Clarity
• Humility
• Sense of humour
• Not to panic in crisis
• Authenticity
• Pride
• Openness
• A good imagination
• Knowing that not all decisions will make you popular
• To be able to command respect at the moment when you are not popular
• Curiosity
• A sense of adventure
• Fearlessness
• Empathy
• Being grateful
• Avoiding ownership.

And if you don't have all of these then try to find them in your team!

Finally, I thought I'd share some quotes with you that have inspired me over the years:

*Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can play weird; that's easy. What's hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.*

Charles Mingus

*Poised midway between the unvisualizable cosmic vastness of curved spacetime and dubious, shadowy flickerings of charged quanta, we human beings, more like rainbows and mirages than like raindrops or boulders, are unpredictable self-writing poems – vague, metaphorical, ambiguous, and sometimes exceedingly beautiful.*

Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop*, p363

*You can only lose something that you have, but you cannot lose something that you are.*

Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose.*
I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.

Rosa Parks

A person is a poet if his imagination is stimulated by the difficulties inherent in his art and not if his imagination is dulled by them.

Paul Valery

I’m not interested in how people move but in what moves people.

Piña Bausch

It's not what the ego feels it can do but what it feels it cannot do which is a powerful driver for success.

Barry Gibbs, The Bee Gees

If you employ people with small thinking and small ideas you become a company of dwarves.

Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop

Let the dead have the immortality of fame but the living the immortality of dream.

Rabindranath Tagore

The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.

Apple, 'Think different' campaign

You have to spend money to make money, but never doing something in your business where the only reward is a smile and a warm sensation in your heart.

Farooq Chaudhry