

FROM ADVERSITY

TO TRIUMPH



Overcoming obstacles is all about courage, self-confidence and faith in a higher sense of destiny

Darn, that is going to hurt! Fourteen years ago I broke my neck in a diving accident that changed the life I had sculpted for myself, in an instant. Paralysed from the neck down, I not only had to cope with this change, but also had to resculpt my life. Everything I do today takes so much more effort than it did before, as I am confined to a power wheelchair for mobility, but impossible odds make achievements even more satisfying.

I am a tall guy and standard imported wheelchairs are not made for us big African boys! We need comfort and style – after all, ladies also like a good set of wheels! It was a struggle to find a decent

power wheelchair in those days and eventually I had to get one from Australia at great cost, which got me thinking that it was time for a change.

Sometimes change will be dictated from the outside and it will force itself on you. Like an illness that you may have been able to prevent, but now that it has

happened, all you can do is respond. Life mastery requires that we do more than *adapt* to change. We need to *create* change – and before we can create change, we need a motivating force.

I was in a wheelchair myself, so how hard could it be to grasp what other wheelchair-users needed?

My drive was to change the disability sector by custom-building locally manufactured radical power wheelchairs to enhance accessibility. In June 2005, the micro company Radical Mobility was born in a double garage, striving to become the next generation of power wheelchair manufacturers. Maybe my goals seemed too ambitious, or perhaps

even impossible. Well, the impossible is only impossible until somebody makes it possible.

I was in a wheelchair myself, so how hard could it be to grasp what other wheelchair-users needed? Not very, I learned – but making able-bodied people see my vision was not that easy. After I explained my concept, I needed to motivate my team to work together to achieve the goal of creating the ultimate power wheelchair. I used social motivation to make them see the pleasure that they would get when this vision was realised and lives were changed as a result. Leadership is not the art of getting people to do what you want – it is the art of getting people to *want* to do what you want.

Through vision, innovation and motivation, Radical Mobility is now the top power wheelchair manufacturer in Africa, and was the winner of the Small Business category in the 2010 Sanlam/Business Partners Entrepreneur of the Year competition. Winning such an award is encouraging and it is always fulfilling when your hard work and dedication are recognised.

"If I had a formula for bypassing trouble, I would not pass it round. Trouble creates a capacity to handle it. I do not embrace trouble, but I do say one should meet it as a friend, for you will see a lot of it and had better be on speaking terms with it." – Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935), American jurist. **DM**

• **Martin Brown is the award-winning CEO of Radical Mobility.**