

# How to think like an eight-year-old

Stop hating your job, and start remembering your dreams. That's the message of a new book which claims we can all fulfil our wildest childhood ambitions. Rhodri Marsden meets its evangelical author

The jacket of Malcolm McClean's book *Bear Hunt* poses the question, "Wouldn't it be great to never to have to work again?" and we only need a fraction of a second to respond – enough time to picture leisurely days spent doing very little, while our private income takes care of such irritants as paying the butler. At the same time, we're rightly suspicious of getting something for nothing. However, McClean isn't talking about a get-rich-quick scheme to turn our lives around – just a little bit of self-belief. His book also carries the subtitle, "Earn your living by doing what you love," and he aims to change our working lives.

"I enjoy doing what I do so much that I never think about having to start work at a particular time," says McClean, an amiable Northerner with an almost evangelical zeal. "And often it's so enjoyable that I don't want to stop. It is possible to build that kind of feeling into all our lives, but many of us don't believe that it is."

McClean's identity is inseparable from *Bear Hunt*; not only is it the name of his book and his business, he's even referred to as "Mr Bearhunt" on his website. The phrase is taken from the children's story, *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*, in which a family encounters various obstacles while in pursuit of a bear. At the end of each page, they say in unison: "We can't go under it. We can't go over it. We've got to go through it." McClean saw this as perfectly encapsulating his new approach to work.

McClean used to spend up to 100 hours each week working as a management consultant, but this resulted in a messy divorce, debts running into six figures, and no home. To get himself back on track, he wrote on a piece of paper, "I want to do great things with great people," and began acting on it. Since then, he has consistently turned the childlike, almost facile simplicity of ideas like this to his own advantage and, amid the encouragement he delivers in his book, tells stories of people who have turned their own lives around in a similar manner. But this is not a homily to downsizing; most of his examples have achieved considerable financial

success as well. "I'm proud of developing my new way of life without having to wear sandals or eat brown rice," he laughs.

Extraordinary tales in the book include a telecommunications engineer who became a vicar, and went on to transform one of the most run-down areas in London; and a man who decided that he was an explorer, and became the first to trek to both the North and South Poles.

These people have created magnificent successes and, reading these stories, one can't help feeling slightly overawed. Does every one of us really have the ability to emulate these feats? "Well, if you don't believe you can, then you won't," says McClean. But what if you have a mortgage to pay? Kids to feed and clothe? Surely having such lofty ambitions is tantamount to irresponsibility? "Again, this is the belief that we've built up. During the 1940s and 1950s, there was a self-sacrificing mentality left over from the war. Those attitudes and beliefs have been ingrained into us, too. They can be very restrictive, but it doesn't take much to break out of them."

The British may have cultivated a mindset where we don't believe that we even deserve to enjoy our working week, but McClean is adamant that if you can earn a decent living doing something you hate, then you should be able to earn more money doing something you're passionate about. "Look," says McClean, "most of us are going to change what we do four or five times in our lifetime, so why not take



control of that uncertainty? Grasp it, because in uncertainty lies a lot of opportunity – if you look for it."

In his book, McClean combines a series of eight ideas with the aim of destroying the grey, mundane canvas of our salary-accumulating lives. His background in management consultancy is betrayed by the use of brow-furrowing terms like "blinking into the zone" or "the sticky ball principle", but the ideas behind them are inspirational – not least the concept of "thinking like an eight-year-old", which in many ways forms the backbone of the book.

"Most of the truly great things that have happened to me over the past few years have been down to using this method," enthuses McClean. "There are things that eight-year-olds do with thoughts that adults have stopped doing, and rediscovering that can lead to new ideas." Once the ideas are there, he argues,

## McClean aims to destroy the grey canvas of our salary-accumulating lives

that's the time for the adult mind to take over, to convert those ideas into reality. "For example," he continues, "Sport England have spent £1.2bn in the past 10 years on trying to make people more active, and yet, over that time, activity rates have actually fallen. Now I'm helping them to find the imaginative possibilities they had as children, and applying them to the problem. And this idea is working."

McClean admits that successfully applying an eight-year-old's dizzy and random inklings to

**Flights of fancy:** Malcolm McClean, the man behind *Bear Hunt*, left; and Robert Swan, who became the first man in history to walk to both the North and South Poles, right



a business model requires bravery ("Get your courage to spill out all over the table," he advises), and a little bit of luck. But while he believes that courage cannot be taught, he also believes that the ability to be lucky certainly can; indeed, one of the chapters of the book is devoted to cultivating good fortune. "Everyone mentioned in the book gets out there and makes their own opportunities," says McClean. "And, just as importantly, they grasp all the good things that can come out of bad luck."

Chris Joyce is a former drummer with the pop group Simply Red, who jacked in his musical career in order to open an Italian delicatessen in Manchester. He is also a case study cited in *Bear Hunt*. Joyce was strongly advised by accountants not to proceed with his project, but he ploughed ahead regardless

### MALCOLM MCCLEAN'S EIGHT TIPS FOR A LIFE THAT YOU CAN LOVE

1. Rediscover your passions and apply your talents. Talents are not the same as skills and knowledge. They are the things we do naturally.
2. You are what you believe you are. If you believe you are a loser, it will come to pass. Use your imagination to create a new life for yourself.
3. Create a simple, powerful story about your new life, and then tell everyone all about it.
4. Use the science of luck. Lucky people do just four things that unlucky people don't – and they do them consistently: maximising chance opportunities; listening to their lucky hunches; expecting good fortune; and turning bad luck into good.
5. Develop your millionaire mind. Model the behaviour of entrepreneurs and learn from both the good and the bad.
6. Think like an eight-year-old. Become more creative every day.
7. Take responsibility for making yourself feel wonderful. It can be done in an instant.
8. Notice that small things can make a big difference.

...and, because eight-year-olds like to break the rules, here is the ninth of my eight tips...

9. Get your courage to spill out all over the table. We all have courage. It comes out in different ways at different times. You are going to need it, so get it to come out.

and came out on top. But can it really be like this for everyone? "I'm obviously not saying that people should ignore advice," replies McClean, "but Chris was lucky for a reason. He constantly does the things that lucky people do, trusting his instincts, and working around the subsequent obstacles – it's the typical behaviour of an entrepreneur."

McClean's dream is for his idea to catch on. "It would change the whole nature of society, and the way we view work," he says. However, while reading *Bear Hunt*, it's difficult to ascertain what McClean's business idea actually is, and how he earns a living. He laughs. "Well, that's deliberate," he says. "If I write down my job description, I start conforming to it. The idea of simply *doing* great things with great people allows me to do whatever feels right." He admits that the usual business obstacles – the VAT man, the Inland Revenue – never go away, but the idea of *Bear Hunt* allows him to be in the right state to deal with them, and hopefully to go on to achieve his dream. "After all," he says, "did Martin Luther King say 'I have a strategic plan'?"

*'Bear Hunt'* is published by Capstone, priced £12.99. To order a copy for £11.99 (including p&hp), call Independent Books Direct on 08700 798 897. For further information, visit [www.bearhunt.org.uk](http://www.bearhunt.org.uk)