

Learning Beyond the Horizon

Donald W. Mitchell

What makes some people love being where they are and want to stay there while others want to see what else there is? Clearly, curiosity must play a role. Beyond that, experience must reinforce curiosity by providing rewards. Like many adventuresome Australians, Bob Kudyba was born with the necessary curiosity and life has kindly rewarded him for acting to satisfy his curiosity.

From quite a young age, Bob Kudyba wanted to know more about the world beyond Melbourne, Australia -- the area where he was born, raised, and educated. After high school graduation, Mr. Kudyba looked forward to beginning his first job as a sales assistant for Australian Consolidated Industries. Unfortunately, that work wasn't to his liking, and Mr. Kudyba joined the Australian Army instead. In that service he worked hard for twenty years and retired with the rank of Warrant Officer after being awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.

His army experience gave him a chance to sample learning beyond the horizon when he was posted abroad to work with the United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team in Pakistan and later to work in the Solomon Islands. Mr. Kudyba also enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life. As he traveled; just listening to people was an education in itself.

He also took formal courses related to his military duties. He attended the University of Melbourne and completed a Bachelor of Education and Training during his final years in the army and later earned a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education and Training.

While in the army, he dreamed of becoming a teacher and looked into the possibility of creating a private tutoring business in Australia to help others make the most out of their opportunities. However, at the time of his retirement he decided to work and live overseas; believing this experience would give him additional knowledge and qualifications to consolidate his tutoring experience.

Because of his successful military experience, an opportunity arose to join a United Nations Mine Action program, which was then working on removing land mines (demining) and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) left over from armed conflicts. Currently, over sixty countries around the world are blighted with the scourge of landmines and unexploded ordnance so there will be demand for landmine and UXO clearance for quite some time. His demining work has taken him to Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Iraq. It's rewarding work, despite its danger, because Mr. Kudyba knows that many crippling accidents and deaths can be avoided while mine and UXO affected land can be returned to poor people for useful purposes.

The adjustment to working for the UN was an easy and comfortable one. Mr. Kudyba would now live far from Australia doing important work but return home regularly for vacations. It was a good combination for a man who wanted to learn beyond the horizon.

After joining the UN, Mr. Kudyba realized that experience would only take him so far in his new organization. Middle and upper level management positions are very competitive and those with advanced degrees such as an MBA are best placed for consideration for these posts. He quickly began to research how one might add such a degree while dealing with a very demanding work requirement in remote locations.

Online learning became the obvious choice because e-mail communications and Web-based research through the Internet allows people to learn beyond the horizon without traveling. Because work deadlines are so critical, his graduate education would have to be flexible. Mr. Kudyba was pleased to find that Rushmore University would allow him to adjust his workload and focus his courses in ways that let his work priorities come first while pursuing an MBA degree.

Some of his early courses helped Mr. Kudyba learn to be more organized in his schedule and studies. With the benefits of understanding better ways to organize, he was able to carry the heavy loads of being the operations officer for a demining mission for the United Nations while earning an MBA. The rest of his MBA courses focused on practical challenges he faced in leading the demining mission and provided him the satisfaction of seeing that he could successfully apply what he was learning.

Mr. Kudyba's grandmother used to say to him, "When one door shuts, another one opens." He realized the wisdom of this saying when earning a master's degree fired in him a greater desire to learn more and to add even more powerful skills. He told me that "I have found that I am never completely satisfied with what I know, and I am continually on a quest to learn more about many topics and their backgrounds. Learning also keeps the mind sharp and active which I believe is a very important requirement as a person progresses through levels of management."

Within a few months of graduating, Mr. Kudyba extended his learning to include the challenge of earning a PhD. He is studying management methods used for planning demining operations and developing ways of not only improving this important activity but also establishing habits that lead to further improvements in performance and safety.

Where will his curiosity take him next? Undoubtedly, the answer is over the horizon.

Copyright 2008 Donald W. Mitchell, All Rights Reserved

Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your effectiveness, visit

<http://www.rushmore.edu> .