

# Paul Cave - Bridge to satisfaction

Feb. 15, 2016



Challenge: BridgeClimb founder Paul Cave worked for close to a decade to get permission to let the public climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

**As a founder and chairman of BridgeClimb, you will be speaking at the Maitland Hospital Foundation business fundraising luncheon on March 7. What wisdom will you impart?**

If you have a good idea, and are committed and passionate about it, then go for it. Be conscious that success is *always* a multi-marathon that requires determination and self-belief.

**You went to Newcastle Boys High. What are your childhood memories of Newcastle?**

Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and Port Stephens was a great place to grow up.

I have strong Novocastrian roots and good memories, a favourite one being riding horses at Stockton Beach. Later there was four-wheel-driving there. We'd take the kids and they'd dig up buckets of pippies to sell to a local restaurant.

Other memories are the inspiring lessons learned from family. My father went from humble Newcastle beginnings, driven by ambition, to become the managing director of Australian Consolidated Industries (ACI), then amongst the top 10 companies in Australia. My uncle,

Milton Morris, (AKA Mr Maitland) turned one milk run into several then entered politics to become NSW's longest serving transport minister. (He's still going strong at 90 plus, and will be at the lunch).

### **What was your first job?**

At school there was pocket money made from buying and selling horses, and later buying and selling cars. The first "real" job was a cadetship with the Metal Trades Industry Association combined with university study. I flunked first year because there were too many distractions for a country boy in the big city of Sydney. The lesson was to get back on the bike and pedal harder in a better direction.

### **What led to you creating the Amber Group, Australia's largest tile and paving retailer?**

Watching the do-it-yourself industry in the US gave a sense of opportunity. As well as selling products, we provided lessons in how to lay them.

### **Your obsession with the Sydney Harbour Bridge was nurtured by your late father-in-law, who bought the first ticket for the first train ride over it in 1932. Why are you so taken with the bridge when there are many mind blowing architectural feats around the globe?**

Having a family connection to the bridge spiked my interest. The bridge is an Aussie icon and an amazing structure. The other mindblowing aspect is [Sydney engineer Dr. John Jacob Crew] Bradfield's vision, which was way ahead of its time, and how he convinced government to build it.

### **It took almost 10 years for you to get all government approvals to launch BridgeClimb. What were your expectations for it?**

A two-year business plan took 10 years to actualise. Sometimes it's best not to know how long it's going to take. Initially, we didn't know we were pioneering a world-first concept of the public climbing a bridge. But we did have a sense that if we could pull it off it would be humongous.

### **How many have now done BridgeClimb, and are you still planning to replicate it overseas?**

Since BridgeClimb started in 1998 we've welcomed more than 3.4 million customers from more than 130 countries. We still have international aspirations but terrorism has changed the face of the earth, and we have to work with that.

### **What does your average day entail as Clyde Bank Holdings chairman, Domino's Pizza director and Lovisa Holdings chairman?**

An average day for a workaholic is to constantly juggle and prioritise. My role is to spark and leverage ideas. It is about helping put together the right combinations of people and environment to make them happen.

### **You were lucky to survive a grade four melanoma. How did that change you?**

The diagnosis was a reality check, and acknowledgement that I am not "bomb proof". Fortunately, we caught it just in time.

The experience led me to meet the inspirational Chris and Gail O'Brien. Chris successfully operated on me three times. He then battled his own brain glioma. That led a group of us to devote time to raising funds to realise the O'Briens' vision of a comprehensive cancer centre. The Chris O'Brien Lifehouse now adjoins Royal Prince Alfred hospital. It was lovely to be asked to this month launch the fabulous book, *This is Gail*, written by their daughter Juliette.

### **What is the most important lesson you have learnt in your business life?**

There are five lessons. First, find something – ideally unique - that you are passionate about. Be clear about it and don't stray from that course. Second, focus on your offering and don't try to be all things to all people. Third, be famous for just one thing. At BridgeClimb, we seek to enable customers to make heroes of themselves. Fourth, let nothing fall between the cracks. And finally, celebrate when you receive criticism or a complaint.

### **What is next on your bucket list?**

We should always be thinking, dreaming and looking out for opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute. Watch this space!

Initially, we didn't know we were pioneering a world-first concept of the public climbing a bridge. But we did have a sense that if we could pull it off it would be humongous.- Paul Cave