



Brick by brick is the key

MICHAEL SHERLOCK
 Founder of Brumby's Bakeries and co-author of growth strategy book *Jumpshift!*

IF YOU ever find yourself retrenched, sacked, unemployed, out of work, rejected, feeling washed up, bitter and twisted, my advice is to take any job to get back in the stream, driving a taxi, stacking supermarket shelves or as I did as a 28-year-old – clean bricks. Too many people wait for their ideal job and still find themselves in the same position a year later.

In 1978, I returned to Australia after four years backpacking around the world. I had left in haste in 1975 to avoid the treadmill of the education system. I had completed 13 years of primary and secondary education, four years of university and was about to be compelled to serve a three-year indenture as a bonded teacher. I wanted a circuit breaker and attempted to take leave from the Education Department, but no go. The only option I could think of was jumping on a plane to Kuala Lumpur and going AWOL.

Things had changed when I returned at the end of 1978. I attempted to take up my teaching career, only to be told that I was “banned for life” and faced a hefty bill to repay my studentship to the “broken bonds” department. So after four years away, I was broke, unemployable and facing a big debt to the government.

I made my first visit to the CES (now Centrelink) to sign up for the dole. I first had to see what work was available. The only job the CES could offer me was cleaning bricks, payable at a piece

to building an empire

rate. I was desperate for funds and to re-join the workforce, so I signed up. I was warned that it was a dead-end job that nobody wanted. I turned up at 7am the next morning ready, willing and able to put in the big effort. Alas, the job was far worse than I imagined. I was confronted by a mountainous pile of used bricks with the toughest mortar stuck on them, which had to be removed by hand in the blazing hot sun and dust. By smoko the other two workers had walked, but I decided to stick it out regardless of the blisters,

sunburn and choking dust. I finished the day, looked at the huge pile and slept well that night, dreaming of better ways to get the job done.

I turned up day after day and saw more people drop out. At the end of the week, the owner of the brick pile dropped by in his flash new car, observed my progress and invited me over for a chat. We soon established a rapport and, as luck would have it, he also owned a record store that was having trouble moving stock. I offered to take the records on consignment and

sell them at weekend markets. Because he had observed my work ethic, he trusted that I would try to do the right thing. Before long I had built up a second-hand LP record store at four markets around Melbourne, making enough money to buy a Kombi van and set me back on the road to some semblance of financial security.

The lesson from this story is to take any job, no matter what it is or how back breaking, to get the discipline and respect for yourself, and to set the controls in your mind.