



Life lessons

Morné du Plessis captained the Springboks 15 times in the 1970s, was manager when we won the World Cup in 1995 and is now a successful businessman. What would the Morné of today advise a younger Morné if he had the chance?

THERE HAVE BEEN VARIOUS CHAPTERS

in my sporting life: these include playing sport, administering sport and my involvement in the charity of sport (if I can call it that). The proudest moment of my playing career was running out for the Springboks in my first Test as captain at Newlands, particularly since my father had also been a Springbok captain so I was able to continue that legacy.

In my second chapter, that moment was as administrator of the winning Springbok rugby team at the '95 World Cup. That, on balance, probably outweighs all my other sporting achievements. The highlight of my third chapter was to have the opportunity to contribute through the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, and be involved in the Laureus Sport For Good movement, to travel and see sport being used as a tool for social change.

My greatest achievement in the workplace is to have built a small business that I sold to Sail, one of the largest sports marketing and management groups in South Africa. I'm also very proud to have been involved in the establishment of the Sports Science Institute, to have played a small role in creating jobs and to have seen the people working alongside me grow in their own careers over the years.

If I had to tell a young Morné what it takes to be successful, I would say he should work hard and be in the right place at the right time. How do you get to be in the right place at the right time? Never turn down a journey. I have a motto that comes from someone I met early in my career, who said that no journey is ever made in vain. In business, it's so important to get out of the office and make the journey. The journey is literal and figurative; it could be a new project or physically going somewhere.

But the one thing I would advise, the one certainty I'd give any young sports- or business-person, is that you are going to fail; you must expect failure and you must deal with failure. The way you deal with failure is often more important than the way you deal with success.

I deal with failure by going through a simple exercise in my mind. I remember the last major failure I had (not family

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or life-or-death crises, I'm talking about business and sporting crises) and try to recall the anxiety and stress I went through. Invariably I can't. Not being able to recall this immediately indicates the non-importance of such events. It's an exercise I often take my kids through.

But it is important to treat failure with respect. You must not be dismissive about failure. You have to treat it with respect but put it into perspective to understand how important it really is. Take your time reacting to failure in the same way you should take your time when dealing with success. Both success and failure need to be dealt with at a slower pace. It's in between that you have to act fast.

Dealing with the media has certainly changed since my day as a Springbok. I often see sportspeople become defensive about their [personal] space. It's a natural reaction because a few media people won't treat you well. But in my sporting career the media have been reasonably good to me, because I believe I have been reasonably good to them. Without the media there is no sporting fame or brand building, and all sportspeople are brands of their own.

So my advice to anyone who enters the limelight is to manage the press relationship with sincerity and don't be false about it because, I promise you, they will find out.

Also, be prepared for whatever you say in private to be repeated in public. And be prepared to accept the consequences.

NOMINATION ITALY



While you're at your peak, make sure you are not taking things for granted

Young sportsmen of my day were a different breed; we went to university and played sport while getting ready for life afterwards, because we knew we would have to work sometime. Today, while you're playing sport, you are hopefully preparing something for life after sport.

It's one of my big concerns that we have yet to see the products of the new sporting professionals era. The first South African professionals are only now starting to come off the conveyor belt and move into other areas of life. The results are not always going to be happy because not all sportspeople will have made enough money playing to sustain themselves afterwards. In fact, if that figure is 10% of all sports professionals, it's high. The rest will have to fall back on something else. This is something we focus on at the Sports Science Institute with our life-skills training programme, making sportspeople aware of the opportunities they should take. These include making good contacts, networking and even small things like writing to someone to acknowledge something they may have helped you with. These things stick and at a later stage when you're in the workplace with everybody else, it's the small things that are going to make the difference. So my advice would be that while you're at your peak, make sure you are not taking things for granted, not taking people for granted, and that you're taking opportunities and learning and finding out about people.

Family has always played an important role in my life. When my wife and I were young and before we had kids, she was in the theatre while I was heavily involved in rugby, and we focused a lot on what we were doing. We've always been very family oriented. But perhaps it's now time to start thinking a little wider than that. I still can't get used to the idea that my kids are almost on their own feet. It's a relief but there's also a little bit of sadness because that's one area of your life that you lose forever.

Is there anything I would tell a young Morné to do differently? Anything I'd want to change? I've never really asked myself that question until now. Why ask a question when the answer is useless to you? ①

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