

There are lots of things in my life where I've used what could be regarded as a potential negative to instead be a springboard to learn and to get better. And to face uncertainty and demonstrate resilience. I'm not talking life-threatening stuff that others have had to face, but regular everyday difficult stuff. I suppose my life is a testament to that, too. I've never been brilliant at anything. Genuinely, my skillset is tiny, absolutely tiny. But I know what I can do, and I know how to use those elements to better myself. The point is that I've got this passion and absolute unwavering belief that whatever the situation you're in, you can find stuff and leverage yourself and come through it and be better and move forward and life will go on. We'll find a path, we'll wrestle, as long as we're not scared of suffering – as my good mate Micky Mellon says, 'You've got to suffer, if you're not worried about suffering, we'll be all right.' And that's how this book has evolved.

There has been a lot of good stuff throughout my experiences. There have also been some challenges. I would say my departure from the school I was headteacher of was one of the hardest. My first book, *Educating Drew*, covered a lot of those wonderful experiences, but not so much of the ending. The ending was the hardest because it didn't just affect me. Yes, there was a 'me' element to it, but

when something like that happens, you can see it is catastrophic. Harrop Fold in Little Hulton was my life – at the very least it was a major part of my life. I adored the area. I adored the school. I adored the staff. I was completely head over heels for the students. They were just amazing. And when somebody came along with what I perceived to be unfair accusations, it was an earth-shattering moment. It wasn't just a set of clouds that had landed. We were talking lightning, thunder, the full hit.

For me, the moment when it happened and the way in which it happened just didn't feel right – it didn't feel fair. It felt like I was a two-year-old stomping on the floor shouting, 'This isn't fair. It's not right.' But it wasn't so much that the issue was unfair; that was challenging enough. I knew I could get through that. We had made mistakes and mistakes can be overcome. It was definitely the following day, when the news of my suspension was leaked to the press and journalists were standing on the front lawn, and you see the impact of a life event on your loved ones and your significant others. That hurt. That is what was really hard to deal with. Of course, it was upsetting to me, but I guess I didn't even think of it at the time. The clouds, or storm, had arrived and I was only concerned about sheltering my family and loved ones from the downpour. It was that moment that was actually the most difficult. I'd had

my tantrum, and then I was left watching with utter helplessness; it was now hurting those I care about.

In the quiet of my office, I asked myself over and over, ‘How did this happen? How did I end up here?’ There are lots of things you can look at. You can blame people. You can start to point fingers all over the place, but ultimately, I’ve ended up here and ultimately, I’ve had a role to play in it because I was the leader and as a leader you take responsibility.

Amongst all the chaos and upset and uncertainty I had a moment where it solidified what I already knew. I wasn’t the best head teacher to have ever worked in a school, and was this the time to do something different? We’ve all got to provide money and help our family, but workwise, what is it that I loved? What was it that gave me work satisfaction? And, in that moment, I knew it boiled down simply to this: my passion is seeing people develop. Helping people to grow. Supporting people to flourish however is best for them; that is what I love.

As a leader in education, it was always about, ‘How can we develop this whole area to have higher aspirations, to do what they want to do, to gain the life skills they need to take them beyond the world of school and into the real world?’ Out of this whole horrible situation I realised something key in terms

of myself and it was that out of this mess there could be something positive. And I now understood that I didn't want to just focus on developing people in schools – I wanted to work with as many people, in as many industries, as I could.

While I've had some wonderful success stories in my life and in my career, I don't think these really help distil who you are. I think it is in the moments of difficulty when you get this clarity, this real clear awareness – this is what I am, this is my makeup, this is what I stand for, these are my drivers. So again, in searching for the positives, tough times give us this.

In life, some things will really hurt. Some things will make you think – a lot. Some things are a complete car crash. Some things are just a scuff on the bumper. I think you've got to go through these things to bring you to where you are now. Having recently contracted COVID-19, this absolutely magnified that to me. I was really unwell. At one point I felt like I was unable to breathe, and I genuinely thought I might die. People in hospital were looking very concerned; therefore, I felt very concerned. I think that the whole experience added to that feeling of 'I'm really glad I'm still here'. And it was a huge reminder to really enjoy the journey, much more than you do now. Too often we run and rush into the next thing and then the next thing.

Sometimes we sit and stare at the past and go red with embarrassment. Or we sit still and don't move forward. I'm not saying be oblivious of the past or ride roughshod over those things. But it's a balance. Sometimes we can be guilty of trying to look too far forwards into the future. Who knows what that's going to actually look like? And looking too far back can also stop you from moving. If anything, COVID has taught us all that life can change at the flip of a coin, at any moment, so we need to accept what has brought us here and look to find ways forward. If we are lucky, we get 70 trips around the sun. That's it. That's 70 winters, 70 summers, and I'm 44 now. So, I could be way over halfway through my journey. And I now look at that kind of fragility of life and I think, 'Why do I care about that so much?' It might seem impossible on some days, some weeks and even for some months but whenever possible we need to try to enjoy the journey more. We're not going to be here forever.

I would also say leave people better than you found them as much as you possibly can. And finally, while life is not always going to be easy, it's not a bed of roses, we need to be ready for those tough times and not expect them to just happen to us. Enjoy the good times but be ready for those difficult times. And always remember, you can find a way through it.