

Virgin UNITE shows us how to 'Screw Business as Usual'! Part Two

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Notebook - A selection of Independent views -

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With the first part of our trip to Sir Richard Branson's UNITE charity allowing us to meet the South African entrepreneurs of tomorrow; the second half gave us the pleasure of meeting some truly inspirational people who work to improve medical and education facilities in rural South African communities.

Our first stop started with an early morning flight to Ulusaba, Branson's Private game reserve set in the heart of Sabi Sand on the border of the sprawling Kruger National Park. The high-light of our time in the bush had to be the visit to Christian Slater's newly opened crèche in one of the surrounding villages. The whole village had come out to sing and dance and welcome Christian, Richard and the group. It was a vibrant display of community with all of us being touched by the young children's songs and their proud introductions. Everyone signed the walls with our hand prints, depicted as leaves on a tree to commemorate the opening of the crèche.

During the afternoon game drive everyone was on fine form with groups of entrepreneurs teaming up in different Land Rovers to view the big five. Sir Richard was true to form, jumping from his jeep and hiding in the bushes and leaping out with loud growls, to the freaked out group in the jeep behind us - never a dull moment in the Branson camp and practical jokes and tongue in cheek comments remain order of the day, lightening the mood and creating a sense of playfulness.

Following a spectacularly presented gourmet lunch on the terrace, 500ft above the game reserve overlooking the Sabi Sands with a view that was simply breath-taking - we were ushered into the grand lounge for a Q+A session with Sir Richard. This no holds barred session was a dream come true for seasoned and budding entrepreneurs alike. Sir Richard shared with us his secrets of success, and answered all questions with complete candour and the most incredible humility. What becomes abundantly obvious when spending any time with this business "mega-tycoon" is that his team absolutely adore him, and there is a kindness in his voice that demonstrates a really genuine admiration of his cohorts that is literally palpable.

Finally the most moving part of the trip was our visit to the Bhubezi Community Health Centre run by the inspirational Dr Hugo Templeman. The clinic was a shining example of progressive health care in rural South Africa. Seeing over 200 patients a day they test for TB and HIV, offering antiretroviral and other life-saving medicines. The clinic not only offers health care but also provides skilled jobs to local people in their medical divisions, making sure money is ploughed back into the community. Dr Hugo Templeman is a pioneer in HIV treatment and prevention, and is looking for critical funding to keep their clinic running after government funding pulls out next year. At the back of the health centre the Starkey Foundation Hearing Mission had set up tents and were fitting the community with free hearing aids. Having just returned from Indonesia, The Starkey Foundation group travel the world with their founder, Bill Austen, fitting over 400,000 free hearing aids to people in disadvantaged areas. Over the course of the day at Bhubezi they fitted over 400 hearing aids. It was truly emotional to watch a little boy hear for the first time and cry with his family and then to see an old man regain hearing after 20 years and get up to dance with joy!

This trip showed us that we are just at the beginning of our journey and that there is so much more that we want to do. We have already entered into discussions with some of the other entrepreneurs to start a crèche of our own in the Ulusaba area. In addition to this, we are looking to team up with members of the UNITE team to bring the Knowledge to Action Youth Leadership Summit to South Africa next year. The more we talked about it, we felt that this vital training could truly benefit the people who would later go on to be a part of the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship, as the training covers so much in the area of emotional management and self-worth. This, alongside their identity around making money, was one of the main aspects that we found the entrepreneurs were struggling with during the mentoring sessions held at the centre. ([Knowledge to Action Youth Leadership Summit video.](#))

What was amazing for Greg and I was to see how we are already on the right track with the work we are doing with The Knowledge to action Foundation, having found sustainable and quirky ways to raise money for our charity initiatives through our Flying Trader Missions, we realized that we have already started 'Screwing Business as Usual'!

