

Chapter 11

The Road from Morocco

The impulse for this book came in a small room in a tower on the roof of a Kasbah, looking out over the dry, dusty, snow capped mountains of the High Atlas. I was staying there as the result of a determination to do something totally different to create a more liberating approach to the way organisations regenerate themselves. I was seeking new ideas and places that would stimulate radical and innovative thinking: a place where people could think through what they wanted to achieve and let go of tired assumptions and prejudices.*

My colleagues and I had journeyed there shortly after the 9/11 outrage. Some people had been very cautious about our going – this was, after all, an Islamic country, and in their minds was no distance (rather than several thousand miles!) from the Middle East.

The financial markets were panicking and the frothy, silly party days of the dotcom boom were being replaced by a terrible hangover.

All of a sudden, instead of boundaries being broken down, caution, fear and uncertainty were busy building them up. That caution and fear has continued during the whole of the writing of this book. People and organisations have, after the excesses of the last ten years, become distrustful and even more cynical.

But where does this caution and cynicism take us? That was the nagging question. Wasn't it precisely in the uncertain, troubled times that we need greater audacity, not less, and a leadership to promote it? What was it that makes some people and some organisations able to respond audaciously, and others not.

And then I began to find out about the Kasbah.

Imlil

Imlil is a cluster of small, poor Berber Villages at the foot of Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in the region about 60 km from Marrakech. Electricity didn't arrive here until 1997. Access to the village is via a long, boulder-strewn road, really nothing more than the smoothing of the natural terrain.

The village is set amongst rugged, brown mountains in a valley where a broad, virtually dry river bed cuts a path almost the width of the valley floor. The area is prone to flash flooding and the floor is covered with the debris of these occasions. In winter, the peaks are covered with snow, for the rest of the year they are dry, dusty and bare, punctuated by small outcrops of walnut and fruit trees, juniper bushes and tiny parcels of arable land growing barley in pocket handkerchief sized plots.

Until a few years ago people survived here through subsistence farming and selling walnuts in the market at Marrakech for cash. More recently other cash crops have

* The inspiration for this book came from Steve Carter during a visit to Morocco. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the Road to Audacity.

been introduced such as apples and cherries, but increasingly the main source of employment has been tourism, providing muleteers and guides to a steady stream of trekkers heading off into the mountains.

The people here are Berbers, a proud and ancient people who speak their own language as well as Arabic and French. Most of the people wear traditional clothes – not for the tourist photographs, which they avoid unless they recognise that a level of trust and mutual respect exists, but because they are simply more comfortable to be dressed like that. The women wear clothes of a modest design but in the most vibrant colours, particularly red and yellow, while the men are more soberly dressed in long cotton or wool Djallabahs.

The villages consist of mud or cement rendered houses, usually haphazardly following narrow twisting paths up the hillside. The air is full of the smells of mules, mint and wood fires. The mint is for mint tea, which is hot sweet and offered everywhere to friend and stranger alike.

There is an innate respect and warmth for each other, people take time to stop, greet with a handshake and talk to each other. Bartering is common in all transactions but it is based upon mutually discovering the fairest rather than the lowest price.

The Kasbah Du Toukbal

The Kasbah lies at the top a 10-15 minute walk above the village. This book was first conceived as I stayed there in one of the little towers on the roof of a restored building that was once one of the houses of the local ruler. It is a place that inspires people not just for where it is, but also for its story and what it stands for.

The Kasbah looks ancient but in fact was only built in the 1940's. It is, however, the product of an earlier, almost medieval, world.

It is built on the site of small hamlet at the edge of Imlil. The local chief – the Caid – bought the people out, and ordered that the village be razed to the ground and the Kasbah built in its place. No one dared argue – the Caid had a dungeon built, could use it on a whim and was not afraid to do so. The Kasbah was a place of which you would be afraid. Villagers were ordered to close the shutters on their houses and not gaze upon the hill when the Caid was in residence, fear and history guaranteed that few disobeyed him.

In 1956, Morocco became independent from France and the Glaoui family who had ruled the country on behalf of the colonial power fell. The local Caid disappeared and the Kasbah began to fall into ruins.

Then in 1989 two brothers, Chris and Mike McHugo, travelling through Morocco with their mother after the death of their father, stayed in the village at the foot of Kasbah. Looking up at the ruin of the old Kasbah they decided to see if they could buy it. Then Imlil was even poorer and less developed than it is now, and this was certainly no rich person's conceit to buy an exotic holiday home – they had a much more audacious vision.

Mike and Chris are an interesting pair. Chris is very much the well-heeled consultant – formerly with one of the world's largest consultancies and Mike an educator, former bus driver and entrepreneur. They both share, however, a deep love of North Africa and have trekked extensively through the remote and beautiful mountainous terrain that is much of Morocco. In doing so they have built friendships and an understanding

of the local people including that of Omar 'Maurice' Ait Bahmed, a respected leader in the local community and mountain guide whose house they were staying in when the idea of buying the Kasbah first occurred. Omar went on to be one of the key players in creating and enabling the Kasbah to be what it is today.

From the start, the vision was to develop something upon sustainable principles that would benefit both visitors and local inhabitants. It was to be both a successful business and an experiment in social entrepreneurship.

The vision for this place I find astonishing in its motivational richness. It is quoted verbatim:

- To be a showcase, flagship development for sustainable tourism in a fragile mountain environment.
- To be a viable business involved in the development of the Moroccan economy and its growth.
- To contribute to the enhancement, viability and vitality of the life of the local community (biosphere concept linked with Gross National Happiness).
- To be a centre of excellence for academic work on the High Atlas Berbers and in Morocco.
- To be capable of being an exclusive mountain retreat providing exceptional privacy to almost anyone.
- To continue to generate a change in attitude / thinking in our guests through exposure to something different.
- To be able to modify our corporate behaviour by receiving feedback from the local community.
- To reward stakeholders and create a product they can be proud of.

In 1989, buying and renovating somewhere in Morocco was far from straightforward. The paperwork and processes were arcane and convoluted, inward investment was far from easy, not everyone understood what they were trying to achieve.

After months of struggle, they managed to gain the approvals necessary. A piece of major luck was meeting up with the architect John Bothamley. His pragmatism, building experience and sense of what possible in such a remote location made sure that the building was possible and beautiful, and could work within the challenging restrictions they had set themselves.

These restrictions were thoughtful. As far as possible local craftsmen undertook the rebuilding of the Kasbah rather than builders brought in from Marrakech. This both provided local employment and maintained local skills. Extensive and ongoing renovation and new building work was undertaken without power tools or modern machinery

The result is a place to stay for the traveller that feels unique. It has attracted visitors from all over the world including the British ambassador in Morocco. As a place to stay, it has been featured in the London Sunday Times and has won many awards.

The Kasbah is not a conventional hotel and the accommodation is a mixture of traditional Berber salons and elegant cool rooms with furniture and other objects reflecting local ideas and crafts. The food and hospitality is authentically Berber and local traditions and etiquette is maintained. It has become a place not just for the

wanderer going on up into the High Atlas Mountains but a place to stop, let go and think. The roof of the Kasbah on which you can sleep provides an environment of almost indescribable tranquillity. All this on its own would make the place remarkable. But the Kasbah is more than an unusual and exotic place to stay, and its commitment to the local community goes beyond providing work for local artisans.

The Kasbah taxes itself 5% of its revenue, which is ploughed back into local community projects. They also have acted as catalysts in the creation of a Village Association to help local people deal more effectively with regional and national authorities. They also underwrote the purchase of the village's first ambulance and sponsored a driver. Lack of local medical transportation to hospitals considerable distances away in Asni and Marrakech often resulted in unnecessary deaths, for example in childbirth.

Other plans include the provision of English lessons for Kasbah staff and assistance to set up a maternity programme. They have also worked to organise refuse collection. Refuse is a real problem as increasing tourism and the buying in of food and other things which involve large amounts of packaging impacts upon a fragile landscape, with no infrastructure to cope.

Larger projects include a safe drinking water system for all the villages of Imlil and a central Hammam (a steam bath).

Strategically, the Kasbah is very aware of the dangers of the growth in tourism creating an economic monoculture in which vagaries of world travel, such as those resulting from 9/11, can be disastrous. Therefore, the Kasbah directs much of their attention to those projects that will encourage diverse employment and a sustainable future for the villages.

And again, this is not done in a spirit of colonial paternalism but in genuine partnership with the local community. As Mike McHugo told me:

"I imagine such a project would not be possible without close and deep local ties. I also believe that hopefully by our correct behaviour and respect for the local population they have come to respect us and also accept some of our differences. One of the aphorisms we have on the tower of the Kasbah is: 'God shall know them by their deeds' which comes from the Koran."

Audacity – dreaming with your eyes open

The Kasbah is audacious. Its audacity is not born out of the huge resources of a large corporation but because it works at so many different motivational levels. To go there is to see all eight of Michael Apter's 'eight ways of being' expressed in tangible, positive ways. Perhaps the mixture of the McHugo's different worlds enables the Kasbah to remain commercially viable and increasingly successful. It is interesting as this book closes to compare this with the Eden project: both seem to thrive because they have wilfully defied conventional thinking, whilst retaining a sound business approach. At the heart of both ventures are values that address fundamental aspects of ourselves. They are richly appealing.

The Road to Audacity is essentially about re-discovering what it means for work to be based upon what it is to be human, and to make sure that our organisations address and create the conditions in which all its aspects can flourish.

The focus of this is not an argument about social responsibility but about motivational connection. This connection is the context and powerful underpinning for the undoubted good practice that surrounds us, all those strategic insights and techniques, and the potential for us to defy the uncertainty we try and pretend we can count.

As I mentioned earlier, this book was first thought of in one of the towers on the roof of the Kasbah. Although I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world, on that evening as the low glow of a long hot dusty day lingered on the sides of the hills, I felt as far away from the uncertainty and confusion of modern life as I ever have. Reflecting upon this, I think I was struck by the coherence of the spirit of this place. It was not disconnected from everyday reality, it was just connected in a different way – a way in which the dream it has of itself could be fulfilled rather than just wished for.

In this way, I started the Road to Audacity at its destination and discovered the journey that it might require. Mike Apter speaks powerfully of the values that lie at the heart of each of the motivational states: achievement at the heart of seriousness, enjoyment within playfulness, fitting-in prompting a state of conforming, and the spark for freedom that prompts rebelliousness. Mastery gives us access to the value of power and sympathy to love. Our need for separateness is met by the value of individuation and the need to merge ourselves with others' transcendence – to be part of something greater than ourselves.

Actions that help to meet these needs enable us to build meaning from our experience, developing our sense of self-worth. We are motivated to be audacious when we see that we can meet these values. Motivationally, what we value will change as we move between the states. The mystery of the Kasbah (and I am not the only one to be inspired by it) means that whichever motivational state you are in, you can see its intrinsic value being met in a special and more profound way. These places are very effective at nourishing, inspiring and appealing to the forces – the eight ways of being – that motivate us and affect our behaviour.

Organisationally, this level of inspiration may not be something that every organisation wants or need to achieve, although it is a curious thing for people not to want to be inspired. But organisations who want generally to develop a greater level of engagement with the people that work for them or buy from them, and specifically to become more audacious, might consider very carefully the climate or environment they create and how these fundamental personal values are nurtured. A light should be turned on the real organisational values that exist – how do they support and reflect the more individual values?

An audacious organisation in particular is a place in which the journey, the unknown and a struggle – possibly involving enjoyment, freedom and power – can all be achieved.

This is an ambitious vision. I hear a cynical laugh. Laugh again, but audacious organisations dream with their eyes open, and wouldn't you rather work for one?