

OCT 31-NOV 6, 2008

Friday



Ssh! It's a secret

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Sky's the limit

SCOTT RAGSDALE HAS TRAVELLED THE WORLD, mastered the Japanese language, run marathons, climbed Kilimanjaro... the list is long. But it's his events management company that drives him the most. **Veathika Jain** finds out more about his journey to the top. Photos by **Grace Paras**

Dressed in a black suit, Scott Ragsdale, CEO of events company, Naseba, welcomes me to his office with a firm handshake. Flags of different countries are framed in his office. I asked him about these to which he replied, "I am an American but I haven't lived in the US since I was 19 yearsold."

Prior to founding Naseba in 2002, Scott worked as a general manager for a global business information company in seven cities: Tokyo, Sydney, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Nice, Barcelona and London. "Some of these cities and countries are special to me and that's

why I have these framed flags," he explains.

Scott was born in 1971 in St Petersburg, Florida and has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California at Berkeley. While in college, he had a near-death experience which he describes as life-changing. "When I was a freshman, I loved to party. One evening during one such crazy party, I fell off a cliff, which was almost the height of a four storey building. I broke my arms, legs and damaged my head. I was in a coma for a few weeks and almost died. I had a metal plate in my

arm and leg. This experience definitely had a major impact in my life. It really shook me completely."

He was the first American to have founded a company in France and make it public on the Paris Stock Exchange. He has successfully managed people from many cultural backgrounds.

He has employees of over 50 nationalities working with him in his offices across the globe. He is an avid traveller and has visited over 80 countries.

Ayn Rand's books and characters have greatly motivated Scott. "Reading

A poster of a mountaineer that Scott laid eyes on before travelling to Japan has become his inspiration.

Atlas Shrugged had a major impact on who I am today and who I want to become. I don't want to be like Peter Keating but I do believe that a John Gault can exist. However, my character is as strong as John Gault," says Scott.

I never once thought of opening my own company. I was happy where I was working and had a good relationship with my chairman, but he somehow had a feeling that I would eventually start my own outfit. When he asked me at the time, I told him that I had absolutely no plans but he forced me out of the company, saying that he would invest in it as well. Until then I had no intentions of doing anything on my own. The turning point was when someone in the IT department stole my credit cards and 20,000 euros, which angered me tremendously. That was when I decided to branch out on my own. Looking back, I think it was a great move at a perfect time. I am happy that I was put in a situation where I had to take the step that has taken me so far.

I am a very competitive person. I hate losing which is part of the reason why I do everything to the best of my ability. Being competitive has an advantage as it doesn't allow you to slack off; you are constantly alert and I think this is the reason why Naseba has achieved as much as it has in its five years.

I don't want to sound boastful, but none of our competitors have achieved what we have and that's because of our competitive edge.

I have a strict nature. I believe in discipline. In office, my male employees have to come in clean-shaven, the office has to be neat and organised and everyone has to wear a suit. Some people say that's very demanding, but I want my staff to be presentable and proud of their work.

I always wanted to be a businessman. I did think of finance and sales as a career when growing up. But then I went to Berkeley. I started learning Japanese as I wanted to get into Harvard Business School and knowing an extra language would put me ahead of the pack. So I went to Japan, studied Japanese and lived and worked there. I passed the EQ which is a test for the

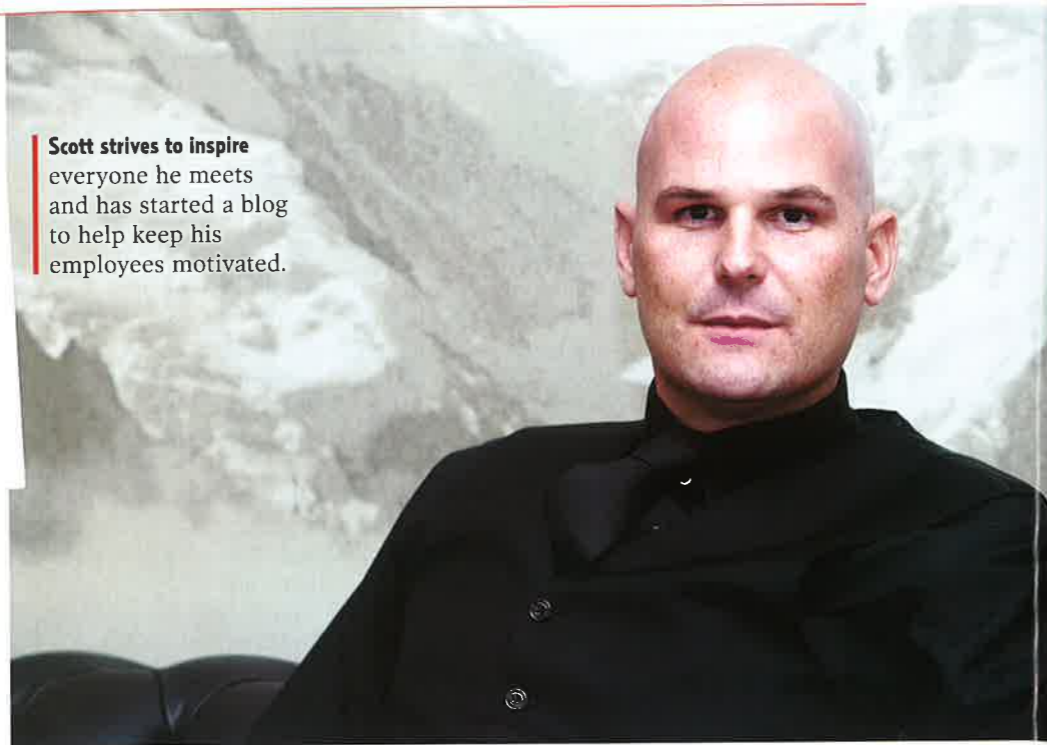
highest level of proficiency. Then I wanted to go to China - so I opened the newspaper and saw an ad for an office opening soon in Shanghai. I called the company and found out that they specialised in events. That's how I got into the field of event management.

I learnt a lot in Japan, both in terms of mastering Japanese but also in learning the ropes of business. I was fortunate to have a great chairman who actually formulated a business plan for



I, ME,

Scott strives to inspire everyone he meets and has started a blog to help keep his employees motivated.



...from the front who are hands on and know what's happening on a day-to-day basis. Then there are others who lead from the back. They like to delegate everything; they manage the company through memos and are not easily accessible. I personally think that the best kind of leader is the one who leads from the front - I am accessible to all my key employees. Being the chairman of a public listed company, I have to not only look after my staff but also my shareholders. I want to be accessible so that I make sure that I know what everyone's concerns are and how the company can be taken to the next level.

I didn't have a passport until I was 19. In America, most people don't have a passport and maybe that's the reason why I appreciate adventure. I have realised that the world is not what you see on television. I travel extensively and love to visit new countries. My first country abroad was Surinam in South America where my best friend stayed. I then went to Japan. Travelling opened my eyes to new cultures and countries. I have been to Lebanon three times and absolutely loved it. I feel I am fortunate to have had adventures in more than 80 countries.

I don't do anything which is dangerous. I don't do anything that risks my life. Be it in day-to-day life or when travelling somewhere. My best friend and I once drove from Surinam to the Amazon jungle and we were told to be very careful. We had a driver with a machine gun. We hiked deep into the jungle and came across a pool with a waterfall.

My friend dared me to jump into the pool. At that time I didn't think about the pradas (snakes) or any other dangers and jumped in fearlessly. I was rewarded with an electric shock! The source was an electric eel - dangerous enough to knock out a human being. That was the

only time I had put myself in danger unintentionally.

I want to have a positive influence on others. When people meet me, I want that meeting to make them feel better. I like to believe that I have helped the people who I have met to become the best they can. Be it my employees, family or friends, I want to push them, inspire them to take up challenges to which they can give their all.

ME

Me and my blog

My marketing director came up with the idea of a blog. My blog manages me now because if I say something on the blog I have to do it. I can't preach without practising it once it's out there and everyone has read it. The main purpose of the blog was to put me in touch with my team and to inspire them. It has now evolved into something of a cult following.

Maintaining the blog does take up a lot of time. I usually do it when I get up in the morning while having my coffee. I believe it's a very useful medium as we have sourced staff, business opportunities and even our clients look at it. I have started to enjoy blogging, as it helps me and the company.

Me and my Friday night dinner

While I was working in Japan, my general manager - who is now my best friend - started a Friday night dinner. We would work hard all week long,

accomplish the target set for that week and then go to this amazing restaurant in Tokyo and have dinner. At the first dinner, my boss paid for the meal but then I told him if I hit my target for next week we'd come again the following Friday. That's how it started. We would go to the same restaurant and have the same table every Friday and took turns to pay the bill. We expanded it in different countries. I was transferred to Australia and that's when we had one in Sydney. The next one was in Hong Kong. I then became the general manager and we had our Friday dinners in Shanghai and Beijing. All in all, we had Friday night dinners in 13 countries. It has become a ritual for me now and it keeps us focused. My friend now lives in Singapore and we collaborate to see if our meetings are at the same time so we schedule dinner accordingly. I really hope to have one in Iran.

Me and marathons

I have competed in more than 20 marathons. I have also climbed Kilimanjaro. In 2007, I successfully completed Marathon des Sables - a seven-day race across the Sahara desert in Morocco which is considered to be the hardest foot race in the world. Doing a marathon is a physical challenge for me. I was an athlete during school but didn't utilise my full potential. Running a marathon pushes me to see how much I can do. I look at life as one big adventure and I will run marathons or other multi-marathon races for the physical challenge and adventure. I use the number of marathon or adventure races as

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I, ME, MYSELF

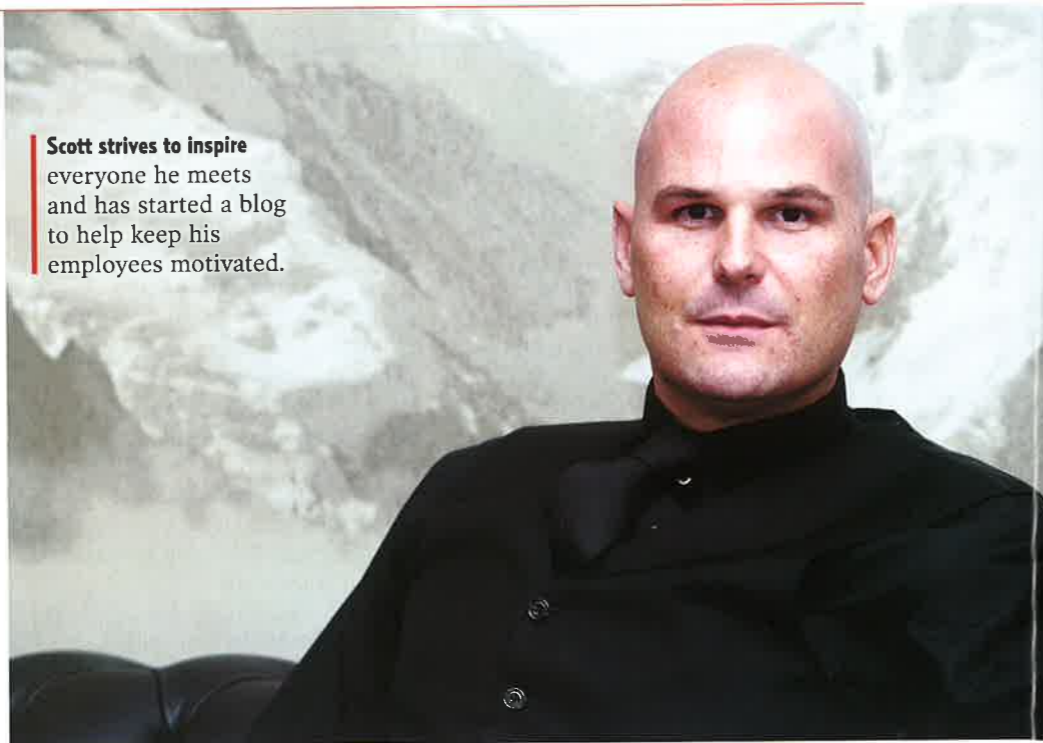
me so that I could learn on the job. I didn't have to go to a business school to learn as I got all the training while doing a job. I was dealing with people and problems and learnt how to do business firsthand. The learning process never ends, but I did get a solid background of business and people management in Japan.

I lead from the front. There are different styles of leadership – there are leaders who lead from the front who are hands on and know what's happening on a day-to-day basis. Then there are others who lead from the back. They like to delegate everything; they manage the company through memos and are not easily accessible. I personally think that the best kind of leader is the one who leads from the front – I am accessible to all my key employees. Being the chairman of a public listed company, I have to not only look after my staff but also my shareholders. I want to be accessible so that I make sure that I know what everyone's concerns are and how the company can be taken to the next level.

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I, ME, MYSELF

a barometer with which to gauge my success at living life to the full.

Me and my idea of life

Life for me is like a big mountain. Everybody is in a great hurry to get to the top of it, but I am in no rush to climb it. For many people, once they start climbing, the mountain becomes difficult and then they turn back; they try to find shortcuts to get to the top. I want to get to the top of the mountain too but I am still at base camp as my mountain is very high. It's challenging and that's what keeps me going.

I was a swimmer in my college days. The day I was leaving for Japan I went to say goodbye to my swimming coach, but he wasn't in the office. I remember that there was a poster on the wall which said the man at the top of the mountain didn't fall there. With that quote I realised that if I wanted to get to the top, it would be difficult but not impossible.

Me and parenting

I have two daughters - my stepdaughter is 13 and my other is four. I have been a stepfather since my elder daughter was four years old. We share a special relationship. I don't believe that the parent should be the kid's best friend.

Life for me is like a big mountain. Everybody is in a great hurry to get to the top of it, but I'm in no hurry to climb it.

I think a parent has to be an inspiration; they have to be a model which the kids can look up to. My wife and I don't play the good cop and bad cop game with them. Their mom is strict with them. I am not as strict but I lead by example. I strive to be a model father to them.

MYSELF

What's made you move your headquarters from Monaco to Dubai?

In 2004 I met someone at one of our events who discussed Dubai and said I had to make a trip here. So I decided to explore it. I came, I saw and I liked it so much that I went back and told

my team that I wanted to open an office in Dubai. It was the beginning of Naseba. We couldn't afford to open an office here but I had faith in the city and within two weeks I registered and opened an office in Media City. We then moved on to opening a few more offices in London and the Czech Republic. I then realised that Dubai is the next New York or London so we decided to close our London office and make a major headquarters in Dubai. We now have two offices here and we intend to open one in Abu Dhabi soon. I am happy with the decision considering the way the global economy is going.

Where do you see the events industry headed? It's an exciting industry and there's always something new and innovative happening. I think the current trend is moving towards the deal flow style of events. This is where people have to sell and meet prospective clients and that's what makes the event successful and profitable. I think the focus is now on how much you can sell. Naseba has always focused on deal flow. We specialise in bringing buyers and sellers together. We are targeting emerging economies such as countries in the Middle East as well as North Africa, China and South East Asia.

Are you attached to the events you do?

To be very honest, I am not emotionally attached to all our events. I am the chairman and CEO of a public listed company and if I get attached to every event then it gets a little difficult to do business and view the events from an objective point of view. Having said that, I am certainly proud of the events we do.

When I do something I do it to the best of my ability and that's the key to all Naseba events. I take great pride in our events and of the success we have achieved in just five years.

Do you consider human resources as the most important asset in your business?

As a businessman I am responsible



to produce profits but in order to make money you have to have great people working with you. I don't want hundreds of average people. I want an exclusively select team who truly believe in what we do. Human resources is most important. We don't have much turnover but we are very demanding. We hire people, get them trained and provide the necessary support for them to succeed. We make sure that they are part of an environment which they are excited to be involved in.

What is the one event that you would want Naseba to be associated with?

I would definitely want a true leader's congress to be done by us where they discuss real issues in the world. The whys and why nots and what's happening in order to decide on the best way forward - an event like this would be very satisfying for me and the company. Another event that I want to be associated with is the Ironman triathlon. I have tried to negotiate and purchase the licenses but I am sure I'll crack the deal sooner or later.

Where do you see Naseba in the next five years?

We will certainly be expanding. We are planning on opening an office in Abu Dhabi. Apart from that we are launching our financial commission services division soon. There are big plans for the company. I want to build Naseba up until the company is the best in the industry. I don't want to do it to have more money so I can buy more things. Instead, I want to develop my success as an entrepreneur and businessman. **E**

- Veathika Jain is a Dubai-based freelancer



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