

Introduction

Richard Harold Smith, or Dick Smith as he is known to most Australians, is a passionate man. He is passionate about many things: he is a conservationist, a businessman, a philanthropist (a person who helps others) and an adventurer. He has made millions of dollars but he is not really interested in the money itself. He gives millions of dollars away.

Dick Smith is a great believer in the power of the individual to make a difference. He admires people who take risks, face challenges and contribute to our world in ways that make it better. He is an adventurer who has performed daring and dangerous feats of flying. While he says that the key to success is to minimise risks, he has never undertaken a challenge in which all the risks were eliminated. On his solo helicopter flight around the world in 1983, for example, he

had to rely on his own knowledge and skill to navigate, as his helicopter was not fitted with sophisticated satellite navigation equipment. Dick Smith was the first person to fly a helicopter solo around the world. He was also the first person to fly a helicopter to the North Pole and the first person, along with his co-pilot John Wallington, to fly in a hot-air balloon across Australia.

Money isn't enough

Dick Smith is the first to admit that as a student he did not appear to be marked out for success. However, he discovered that he had a talent for electronics and through hard work and perseverance he soon became one



Making money
'... I found I hated sitting in an office merely making money.'

of Australia's most successful businessmen. Dick Smith Electronics was a multi-million dollar company but at the height of its success he sold it and left. Making money was not satisfying for Dick. In the introduction to his book *Our Fantastic Planet: Circling the Globe via the Poles with Dick Smith*, he writes 'Australia is the most wonderful place to start a business, because there's not much competition.

Most Australians are pretty laid back, so if you put in hard work, ask advice, copy the success of others and surround yourself with capable people, you are bound to do well.'

What Dick Smith really wanted to do was to go adventuring. He also wanted to show Australians that their country was a place of extraordinary beauty. He started a magazine which set out to do



Dick Smith

Bushwalking is one of Dick's greatest pleasures.

this. Dick felt that there was too much in the media that was negative. It created a sense of hopelessness in people and he wanted to change this. The incredible success of his magazine, *Australian Geographic*, proved that Australians wanted to read a quality magazine that celebrated nature.

The power of the individual

Dick Smith has won many awards including Australian of the Year in 1986. He has produced many documentaries for television and published several beautiful books of his travels. He has also held important positions in the community. Between 1990 and 1992 he was Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority. He was also appointed to a similar position in 1997. He has never been afraid to speak his mind about matters that are important to him. He was so concerned about the problems he saw within the Department of Aviation that he wrote a book about it called *Two Years in the Aviation Hall of Doom*.

Dick Smith's energy seems inexhaustible. His belief in the power of the individual makes him impatient with bureaucracy.

He doesn't like to turn matters over to committees for decisions. He would rather make the decisions with a hand-picked group of advisors, and be responsible for the consequences. He is always ready to listen to advice though. This is, he says, the real secret of his success. Listen and learn. He has said that if there is one thing that annoys him about many Australians, it is their inability to communicate. If you don't know about something, ask. 'People having misunderstandings and not asking advice. It's an Australian condition,' he says.

The simple things

Despite his adventures and his busy life, in the end it is the simple things which give Dick Smith the most pleasure. Bushwalking with his family is his idea of the ideal adventure. One of his greatest pleasures is bushwalking in the bush near his home outside Sydney. There is a cave there which no one knows about except him. He says, 'It's more beautiful than any cathedral. I go there and sit and look at these beautiful trees. And I dream of adventure and things I'm going to do.'