

"Having worked with Drew on a range of different projects, I always find myself energised by his positive approach to business, leadership and life in general. I have no doubt this book will instill that same positive energy for its readers."

Stuart Pearce MBE, Football Icon

WHEN THE CLOUDS COME

**DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES,
FACING YOUR FEARS,
AND OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

DREW POVEY
WITH SAM DRAPER

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Praise for *When the Clouds Come*

“Drew's personality and enthusiasm resonate in every chapter of this fascinating new book. His curious approach looks at new perspectives, provokes a different way of thinking and stimulates meaningful conversation. Having worked with Drew on a range of different projects, I always find myself energised by his positive approach to business, leadership and life in general. I have no doubt this book will instill that same positive energy for its readers.”

—Stuart Pearce MBE and Football Icon

“Up until now, there hasn't been a manual out there to help you lead through a truly unprecedented period like we currently face, but this book does exactly that! Personally, there is no one else I'd rather have to guide me through the tough times that we all inevitably encounter. I believe this book captures the magic of Drew brilliantly and will inspire all those who read it to look at life differently.”

—Dave Capper: CEO, Westfield Health

“I would wholeheartedly recommend that you read this book to help build your strength and optimism and to understand that that the choices we make CAN make everything better. Drew is one of the few people I've met who can help me think through ways of dealing with the constant uncertainty we all experience in life. This book really is an essential companion for the world in which we currently live.”

—Sophie Devonshire: CEO, The Marketing Society

“Having worked with Drew on a range of different projects, I always find myself energised by his positive approach to business, leadership and life in general. I have no doubt this book will instill that same positive energy for its readers.”

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Introduction

I think some people write books because it's their lifelong ambition, others because they think it's a business opening. I think people write books for a myriad of different reasons. For me it's always about, 'Can you put something out into the world that is going to make a difference?' That's it.

People normally write books because they're passionate about whatever their message is, or information they are parting with. Let's be honest, it's not that easy. It's quite a long and drawn-out process - well it is certainly that way for me. I wanted to write this book because I'm limited on the number of people I can share my thoughts and ideas with day to day, and I wanted to get those ideas down so that I can hopefully provide others, whom I wouldn't normally come into contact with, that little bit of additional help to get them through any tough time they might be facing.

Like with anything in life, the decision to write a book will come down to how much you really want to do it. And that is the question that I kick around a lot. Then I'll make a decision, as a result of which I'll actually get behind this book and do it - or not. Sounds simple. But of course, you're going to be asking yourself questions like, 'What's the point of it?' Well, on this occasion I had a clear answer to my doubts and questions.

I've spent around 20 years in the world of leadership and for such a long time, the story was always about the gold medallist - the winner! It was always about the person that had climbed the highest mountain. It was always about those people that have done incredible things and achieved brilliance. And yes, all of this is very inspiring, but there's

always that bit at the back of your mind that says, 'But I'm not an Olympic athlete', or 'Well, I'm not going to be climbing that mountain, and actually I don't want to.'

I really felt that there was a need for people to have more conversations around what happens when life isn't going so well. When life gets difficult. When you're feeling like the walls are closing in or you are perhaps in the middle of your own storm. Bad things happen, it's normal, it's customary to us, it is relatable. Whether it's having a tough time in work, or the devastating news of cancer coming into your family, or whether you have lost your job, or been involved in a terrible accident. Whether it's that you just don't feel right. Whatever it is, it's when those negative times come, those difficult moments that I really think we need to have some more understanding. And hopefully, this is just what this book will do.

I looked at other people's difficult experiences, and to my own life, and considered what was both helpful and not in these types of situations. And soon, there was a real catalogue of ideas emerging about dealing with these tough times. And to go back to that question of how much you want to do something - this is what it came down to for me: can I do something that's going to help more people beyond social media and the coaching/development-type sessions that I already do? Something that was real and that was practical. Something broken down so simply and in one place that would mean that anyone could grasp it - wouldn't that be wonderful?

I'm never going to claim that I've had a tough life. In fact - even reflecting on my most difficult moments when compared to some people - it has probably been a charm. That being said, this book is about difficulties, so I have used my own life to examine how I dealt with those things, as well as looking at other people who have been through

much, much worse. Personally, from right at the beginning of my learning journey there were obstacles. I didn't find school particularly easy. And it wasn't until I was 24 and in teacher training that I realised I had a learning difficulty. As a result of this, a lot of my adult life has been looking back and making connections between behaviour and experience and what I know now. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

It was life changing. It was positive in many ways. I was careful to avoid the medical school syndrome of diagnosing myself of every possible disorder or learning difficulty just because I'd been to a fascinating seminar at university. There are some crazy things your brain can do. So, I tried very hard to stay open-minded about it all, but when I did the test, the results for dyslexia were very high, tipping into extreme. I was on the boundary of being an extreme dyslexic. At that point I thought, 'Well, that now makes sense, and I totally get it.' Nobody had put this label on me in school and so, like many others, I had missed out on the extra support. But I remember thinking that I had done all right without it. I had been to university, through teacher training, and had been coaching for coming up to almost a decade so I must have been doing something right. It was a realisation that I just had to work really hard, and while things might have taken me longer than they perhaps did for others, that was okay and in fact it was actually becoming a bit of a theme.

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.

During my difficult times, I looked to friends and family. It's as simple as that. I have my own things I do, breathing exercises, taking walks, reading, exercise. But when you are caught in a tough time or a struggle, I don't care how resilient you are, there will be times when your belief wavers. And in these times, it is absolutely, totally, perfectly 100% acceptable to borrow someone else's belief. I say it all the time, 'Life is a team sport. You need to have good people around you.' During my darkest moments I had friends and family there to offer support and I will never forget that. It's really important to use your support network. This is a leadership thing as well. Leaders say it's lonely at the top. Well, it's only lonely if you want it to be. I never led on my own, and I don't do life on my own. Because when I'm down, there'll be a good person there to pick me back up. When I'm struggling, there'll be a good person there to help me. And I want to make sure I'm there on the opposite side of that, to do exactly the same for others as was done for me. Network is crucial.

The whole reason for this book is having your own strategies. Someone might read this book and think, 'That

won't work for me, but I do like that other idea, so I'll use that.' And that is great. If you take only one idea away and it helps you, then job done, because every idea and strategy won't fit or suit every person or situation. We need to find our own go-to mechanisms. What do we do in this scenario? Where do we go? We need our own personal plans and this plan would include having that network around you. That network is like the net that catches you when you are going through the motions of difficulty. Perhaps this book can be part of that safety net. In whatever way, I hope it helps you with any difficulties you may be facing.

Chapter 1

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF RESILIENCE

Bad stuff happens! The clouds will come. It's inevitable, it's relentless in some cases, and you can be absolutely sure it will happen to all of us. It doesn't matter what wonderful things we have, how lucky our situation, or simply just how stoic we are, the clouds will come. But before they do, let's go for a lovely picnic.

The Curious Picnic

Start simple. Close your eyes and imagine the perfect summer's day. You've decided to go for a picnic with your friends or family. It's a great day, you're all excited and about to start putting together everything you need for the perfect day out. So, what do you do? Well, first of all you delve into the fridge and you take a good look, and you can hardly believe your eyes when you find everything you need and you're thinking, 'Oh, wow. I didn't realise we had that, and that's my favourite food', and you start packing it up in the picnic basket you've been looking for an opportunity to use.

You grab a nice bottle of wine. And the kids' stuff is in there too - everything they like. The kids are behaving very well and when you say, 'Kids, go and get ready please' they do exactly as you ask. Everything is being done just as you wanted it, first time! It's a miracle! You've then loaded everyone into the car. You're off and you're driving to your favourite park. It's all going so well.

Now, you're thinking ... 'It could be a bit busier today in the park because it's a beautiful summer's day.' But you arrive

and there's a car parking space right outside the gate where you need to be, so with a smile on your face you then think 'This day could not get any better.'

You step out of the car, you get out your picnic basket and you're walking through the tree-lined pathways. People are out walking, children playing and laughing. There's that lovely smell of cut grass. The sky is blue, a few of the leaves have fallen on the ground. You've got your basket in your hand and it's swinging gently as you look around and then there it is - you find the ideal spot.

It's perfect. A bit of shade, but enough sunshine to enjoy. You spread your little tartan rug out on the ground, you put your hamper down, the kids are playing in the grass. It's a bit weird, they've not had a row, no one's stuck their finger in the other one's ear or anything like that. It's splendid.

You start pulling the food out and everything is still looking fresh, and nothing has got squashed or damaged in transit. But then, just as it was all going so well - disaster strikes! You reach for the bottle of wine (or non-alcoholic beverage of choice) and realise you've forgotten the corkscrew. You're raging. 'I don't believe it! Everything was going so well. I haven't brought the corkscrew!' And you really wanted that glass of crisp, cooled wine. You now have a problem. You've got to have this bottle of wine. And - open your eyes. You now have 15 seconds to think about how you would get into the bottle, 3-2-1, off you go.

When I discuss the above scenario with leaders and their teams, I would say about 80 per cent of people start sharing with me some elaborate, or not so elaborate, way of pushing the cork into the bottle, with string, with a finger. Some might even talk of chopping off the top of the champagne bottle with a sword or stabbing holes in the cork with a toothpick.

But what about using a shoe?

A few of you might know this, but one way to remove a cork without the key tool available is to simply remove any foil or seal on the bottle, then take off one of your shoes, put the bottle into the shoe and find a wall. With the bottom of the bottle firmly in the shoe – bash the shoe heel on the wall and slowly but surely the cork will begin to pop out. And you can do the rest. Voilà! Wine for your perfect picnic on a perfect day.

Now I realise that not having a corkscrew on your perfect picnic day out isn't exactly a tragedy – or anywhere close to the biggest problem we might face in our lives. In fact, if it is your biggest problem in life, you've probably got quite a few problems to deal with first, that you might've been overlooking. But, why on earth would I talk about having a picnic in relation to resilience?

Well, here is the key. Within this tiny frivolous example is a hidden gem about resilience that we don't often talk about. A tiny moment.

We can talk very easily about the fact that life has a way of knocking us to our knees. In life, sometimes, things just happen. The clouds come out of the blue, without warning, life smashes you in the face. A problem, an issue, personally or professionally things are going well and then something comes and just sideswipes you. 'Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face', as the infamous Mike Tyson once said, and we can be sure that life is going to punch us in the face one day.

Now this is where I want to challenge other books about resilience and leadership. Like a bad cover version of the Chumbawumba song, so many intelligent folk will be telling you that when you get knocked down, you just need to get back up again. Up you get. Dust yourself off. Pull yourself