

Ancient Wisdom meets Modern Leadership  
to Inspire a Fresh Path Forward

# THE **nomadic** MINDSET

NEVER SETTLE...for TOO LONG

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Day 5:  
Seek the Foie Gras

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DAY

5

# Seek the Foie Gras

Mission: to turn negative situations into opportunities



*“Everything is an opportunity”*

– SAID ZAKI, A BERBER,  
WORKING FOR CLUB MED GLOBALLY



Photo by Hicham Zemmer

## SEPTEMBER 17, 2017, CLUB MED CHERATING BEACH, MALAYSIA

Club Med Cherating Beach, Malaysia, is a dream location to facilitate a Train the Trainer course. Said Zaki, a Berber from Southern Morocco, is a member of my group. After our training, I ask him if we can have a deeper conversation about life as a Berber. One of the first things he says is that Berbers “see everything as an opportunity.” What a positive and

“*see everything as an opportunity*”

optimistic outlook! It makes me more curious. He then goes on to share a story about locust swarms and how Berbers refer to this as Foie Gras. Now I am very curious.

You may have heard of the French food delicacy, Foie Gras: the liver of a duck or goose that has been specifically fattened to produce a rich, succulent, and buttery tasting liver. To get this taste, the ducks and geese are force-fed corn with a feeding tube. Not particularly pleasant for the animals, and today it is often grossly looked down upon in the animal husbandry world.

“We use the image of Foie Gras to explain the story of the locust swarms that come from [the] Senegal River and travel northwards through Mali, Burkino Faso, towards Morocco,” shares Said.

Said continues to explain the migration of the locusts:

The locusts start by eating the greenery around the Senegal River, and as the wind carries this dark cloud of locusts northwards, the skies darken. They will settle for a moment, eating all the greenery, and then move on to more green pastures, growing fatter and fatter. They become filled with all kinds of nutrients and vitamins as they feast on plants, bushes, [and] trees, making the journey north. They are in many ways force-feeding themselves. By the time they get to the southern Sahara in Morocco, they are ready to explode, just like the ducks and geese.

I remember a previous conversation with Romain Simenel, the French anthropologist, who shared a similar experience and story of the Foie Gras:

When I was in Sidi Ifni in southern Morocco, a swarm of red locusts filled the sky, and all the rich, green argan trees in the area. Everything in the sky and on the trees changed to red, like a fire blazing everywhere. The sound was overwhelming and loud . . . like the earth has been shaved; it is horrible. Wow. The red colour are the females who are pregnant. They land for a few minutes, eating, then off they go again. But you know what the nomads say? ‘For us, it is luck.’ They say, ‘This is meat.’

The nomads savour this moment with anticipation and turn it into a fiesta as they take advantage of harvesting the locusts. The Berbers see the swarm of locusts coming, and they capture the opportunity for abundance. In the night, everyone—boys, girls, mothers, fathers—will take long white tissues and wind them around trees and bushes, like nets and a backdrop (so to speak). Then, they set light to the bushes. With the flames lighting up the night sky, this light reflects off the white tissue, attracting the locusts to fly into the tissue. Then they rapidly close the tissue and capture the locusts. The nomads then take the harvest of locusts back to their homes and have a feast: the Foie Gras of the Sahara. They will either boil them, or sizzling sounds can be heard from the grilling of the Saharan delicacy. Thus, the nutrients of the Sahara fills their bodies.

*a sign of a good year is a swarm of locusts”*

Aissa Derhem, the Berber mathematician, also a friend of Romain, says “a sign of a good year is a swarm of locusts.”

## The Foie Gras Opportunity: A Mindset

The locust feast comes at a cost—what some would consider devastation. All that rich produce, vegetation, and crops . . . gone.

It’s most likely those with a settler and builder mindset would be devastated by this destruction. And they certainly have a point—most people would see the negative in this destruction. But not the Berber, not the nomad. Even though they understand the horror of the devastation, they see this as an opportunity to survive and eat rich food.

As Romain observed, “They have this strength to always transform a fatality into an opportunity.” This a nomadic mindset quality.

## Opportunity to Survive

This locust story is also a reflection about survival. Living in the desert or on the grasslands of the Maasai Mara in Kenya or the steppes in Mongolia is about the opportunity to survive—and thrive if you can. Nature is real, the animals’ lives are real, and human nature is real.

How do you survive? How can you thrive? You need to look at all things as an opportunity to survive by finding the possibilities in every challenging situation that might appear in front of you.

Further to the connection between opportunity and survival, I sat down to talk with Ashutosh Srivastava, Chairman and CEO, AMEA and Russia/CIS of Mindshare, a global marketing communications agency. He, too, spoke about seeking out opportunities, eliminating borders, and looking for that Foie Gras customers will consume before moving onto the next Foie Gras.

He says, “In this business, if you are not nomadic, you won’t survive.” And when it comes to opportunities, especially in his business, he says,

If you went with stuff you invented last year or the year before, there’s [since] been fifty other copycats who will do it for that brand and possibly [at] a third or a quarter of the cost . . . we have massive market share only because we don’t follow that approach at all.

“*In this business, if you are not nomadic, you won’t survive*

The approach is to constantly keep coming up with the new products and services all the time in response to the changes in the environment and brand marketers’ needs. There’s so many start-ups, especially in the marketing/ad tech and data sector that are not part of a big, global, monolith type. If anything, they are far

more agile as their survival depends on their next meal. Unlike us, the large businesses who have hundreds of clients, they are even more hungry and agile, and so our approach is to embrace [them] and bring them in.

When a brief from a client comes, we have people who then look out constantly in the market and keep in touch with those new emerging companies to see how we can co-op them into the solution. Sometimes we take a small stake, not such a big stake that [it] will stop them. This gives us a small strategic stake, which is in our interest as it gives the partners some cash, access to the big brand marketers we work with, and a chance to partner with our teams on these clients.

You need to see the opportunities and agile partnerships plus the risks that exist internally and externally to your corporation. What is your next Foie Gras?

1. What is the swarm of locusts that creates a successful year in your company and your leadership?
2. What are the potential fatalities or negative points you have turned into opportunities of late?
3. In what ways can you encourage a working environment to look at everything as a Foie Gras moment?

## Opportunity = The Intelligence of a Nomad

Let's step back for a moment and explain how a few people define the intelligence of a nomad.

*You need a nomadic mind to connect the dots.*

– Aissa Derhem

*Nomads are responsible—they already know what their strategy is. They are very logical; they are people who always look for a better chance.*

– Batgerel Bat, Head of the National Branding Council of Mongolia

*Tribe is a philosophy. It means that it's a kind of a way of thinking [and] a way of seeing life, a way of . . . living in the nomadic world, mindset.*

– Romain Simenel

The intelligence of the nomad is, in many ways, the mindset needed in corporations today. This is intricately linked to transforming potential negative situations into opportunities and being directly interconnected with nature. In this case, “nature”

is your organisational environment and its interconnection with the external environment. When nature delivers opportunities, you must be ready at any given moment to embrace or reject them.

This intelligence allows nomads to Never Settle . . . for Too Long before seeing another potential opportunity. Every move is strategic because it will directly impact the whole tribe, clan, community, family, or nature itself. Nomads are led by nature, and nature's intelligence tells them when to move on.

What metaphoric animals or parts of nature tell you to move on? Is it Wall Street, competitors, new markets, mergers, ideas/creativity/innovation, a little intuitive voice inside of you . . .?

Said Zaki says,

Berbers and nomads do settle and they modulate their lives with the sand . . . the sand is moving everyday . . . it means living in peace with self and nature . . . it means watching and know when to move on . . . they see this in a clear way. The nomads are in tune with nature . . . they understand what their needs are . . . for me, we should not take something from here and put it there; it doesn't make sense. We need to adapt to the environment.

How do you modulate with the shifting sands of your business?

*Nomads are led by nature, and nature's intelligence tells them when to move on”*

## Seeing Opportunities: Getting to the Starting Line

Seeing the seeds of opportunity, adapting to a new environment, and then doing something about it can be a challenge. On that note, I had a wonderful opportunity to sit down with Grant “Axe” Rawlinson, a New Zealander, an adventurer who now works with companies as a coach and trainer. He related his thoughts around “freedom, adapting to no borders, and opportunities” that he sees in life and also what is needed in the corporate environment. The type of adventuring that Grant does is tough—mentally physically and spiritually. He powers a sailboat with just sails or oars (i.e., no motors) on which he set off on an adventure from Singapore to New Zealand with just one other person. Here is a nomad that sees opportunities and pushes personal mindsets. He shares,

It is freedom from a life that human beings have created without us even knowing it. Life is incredibly complicated, and you don’t realise how complicated it is to live, and without doing anything, just surviving until you have to leave. When I left to go away for a long time, I had to shut down phones, make sure the mortgage would be paid, pay the bills—and set up systems to pay—make sure the family was safe and cared for. It made me realise how complex life has become just to live these days. To stay and live in a developed country these days with the insurances, food, car parking, coupons and permits, servicing, jobs, and relationships . . . wow.

*It made me realise how complex life has become just to live these days ”*

I always tell people the hard part is getting to the start line—it is not actually being out there—it’s actually getting away from the massive system we have created, and when you get out on the expedition, there is freedom. The only thing you think about on an expedition is what you eat, keeping moving, sleeping, going to the toilet. Life becomes extremely simple; it is almost as if how life should be to me.

1. How could you better encourage or influence others to get to that starting line?
2. What does the intelligence of a nomad mean to you as a leader?
3. In what ways can you strategize differently with the intelligence of a nomad in mind?

## Borderless: Opportunistic Agriculture

I learned about how “opportunistic agriculture” relates to Foie Gras from the French anthropologist, Romain Simenel:

It’s a spontaneous agriculture. It’s kind of an opportunistic cereal culture . . . a nomad always has some wheat seeds that he carries with him. Old wheat, not Monsanto seeds.

Not every year it rains in the desert, perhaps one in every four years with some huge drops. This is when the nomad will plant his seeds. They plant them on the Grara (area/plot/space). The nomad is not like other farmers or agriculturists; he will not watch over his crop. He will leave it for maybe three or four months and then return to see if how the wheat is doing before leaving again.

Romain once asked a nomad,

‘What if someone comes before you and takes your crop?’ The nomad replied, ‘No problem, because at first, maybe the nomad should know I normally use this Grara, but if not and he takes the crop of wheat, I will go to another Grara and take that crop.’

Therefore, Romain, with his thick French accent says, “This is the opportunistic way: they plant and go. There is no one saying this is my land, and you can’t be here.”

Both Foie Gras and the planting of wheat seeds are different aspects of the underlying theme of seeing positive opportunities. They speak against the protectionist philosophy of lack and instead promote abundance for everyone. Opportunities are everywhere and come in different forms. One way to be open to seeing opportunities is to remove the borders in your mind that might be limiting your mindset. Being borderless or having a borderless mindset is prevalent today in the technological internet of things, and this integrates with the interconnectivity of things.

In the Berber world, Romain says this is called,

*Trab n Mulana*

*Mulana* = another word for God

*Trab* = land, or more specifically, ‘the land of God’

The nomads say, “nobody can put up their hands and say, ‘This is my land!’” They say, “No, all Earth for them is the land of Mulana.”



This is an extreme and outrageous thought in today’s political and economic environments, with respect to industrial copyright, trademarks, countries, immigration, possession of products, territories to sell, and more. As Romain informed me that “Nomads (from southern Morocco) don’t understand when they go north and they see fences—that is outrageous for them.”

How did we get from all the land belongs to everyone (or God, for some) to this mine/ours mindset? What if you thought about this from a different perspective? What if instead of ownership, ego, and possession, you turned it into a letting-go, sharing, win-win solution, and enough-to-go-around way of thinking? Is this a terribly naïve thought? Perhaps, yet I suggest a human way forwards.

*Nomads (from southern Morocco) don’t understand when they go north and they see fences—that is outrageous for them”*”

There are some corporations leaning in this direction who are staying agile and borderless. How are they doing this? Some create smaller teams (or departments or units) that allow more interaction and autonomy of decision making. This removes the borders of hierarchy. It also generally guarantees faster decisions. Some institutions have less bureaucracy by using more technological solutions, which innately have no borders (or fewer of them). A similar great idea is to install smaller incubation hubs within more units or departments so information can flow more directly and faster because of fewer borders.

Are you making good use of opportunistic agriculture?

## Tearing Down Borders: Transformation

Nomads believe that going to the desert is therapy. As Romain says,

It’s good for your eyes; it’s good for your brain; it’s good your heart; it’s good for your soul . . . it is a purge, so everything that comes from the desert is gold. For nomads it is transforming. Settlers would say, ‘this is hell,’ but for nomads, Hell is a paradise!

Just like the locusts or someone taking your harvest of wheat, from devastation comes opportunity. This thinking process is in itself a transformation. This transformational way of thinking can apply to companies. Ashutosh Srivastava, Mindshare CEO, shared his thoughts about breaking down corporate borders as the way of the future—and now is the future.

Every business today is transforming, and why are they transforming? It is because they're unable to keep pace organically with the disruptive changes, to be in sync with the marketplace; therefore, there's the need to do something far more radical to actually aid the transformation. Many people are getting left behind and struggling to cope with the changes. They want to take a leap forwards to transform, then it's another challenge on how to keep up that pace in the future, and this is true for every business.

There are enough disruptions out there; you have booksellers and TV stations, brick and mortar businesses now competing with online retailers like Amazon and Netflix. Uber is disrupting traditional taxi companies. All the so-called legacy companies are trying to transform themselves. That is the journey everyone wants to take, and there is short- to medium-term pain within those companies.

But, say, if you don't respect the boundaries, and you are in a business that does, if you are afraid of making mistakes and getting smacked in the face every now and then, [that] means you're not even taking any risk; therefore, you're afraid to experiment outside the boundaries of your business, [and] it means you will never get anywhere . . .

This sense of transforming a fatality into an opportunity is what Foie Gras is about. It is a quality of the nomadic mindset. Nomads simply don't think about it much; rather, it is the way of life, so they deal with it. The emotional aspect can be there; however, mostly it is a function of existence. Why? Because survival is always on their front doorstep or outside their tents. Even with advancing technology, this preoccupation with survival is always there: land, borders, climate change, their currency in their livestock, and much more. Everyone in modern day life is facing survival, and you are facing this within in your organisation every day.

### *Freedom of Mindset Allows You to See the Seeds of Opportunities*

I found the Mongolians (who are Buddhist), the Maasai (who are mostly Christian), and the Moroccan nomads (who are Muslims) all think about Foie Gras and opportunities similarly. All three nomadic cultures come from different physical environments, languages, faiths, and races yet there is no real difference in their mindsets regarding their concept of land, boundaries, risk, and freedom. This is why they have trouble with this concept of fences, walls, barriers, and borders. Freedom of space is for all, and this brings opportunities.

*Strong as the desert*  
*Move as the wind*  
*Soft as the sand*  
*Forever free.*  
– Kahlid Aoud Al Bdoll

Putting up boundaries or borders in the mind of what people can (or cannot) do, what they can (or cannot) think, what they can (or cannot) say, or what they can (or cannot) create/innovate within your corporation, and even yourself, limits your growth, success, and ultimate performance on the global stage. Look at the different borders and boundaries you and your company have created and consider how you can break them down by allowing more freedom of the mind and physical movement, which will lead to stellar performances. Risk stepping over the border—or better yet, erasing the border!

## Where to Start?

1. Set your default nomadic mindset to ask “What or where is the Foie Gras in . . .? Then ask, “What is the potential return on investment?”
2. Ask “what or how would a nomad think or do or say?”
3. Start from the top: you, your board of directors, your shareholders, your executive team.
4. Look internally at your processes and systems: how rigid or flexible are they?
5. Look at the emotional intelligence and what borders exist that can create inflexibility, disengagement, and lack of motivation leading to less agility and speed of performance.
6. Look at your teams and the mindsets that make up the teams. Do you have the right proportion of nomadic, builder, or settler mindset for the teams and projects?
7. Once you have done that, look externally at how you can reduce borders and increase speed.

My adventurer friend, Grant, demonstrates ripping down the borders with this example of how he chooses people to accompany him on his travels:

For my own expedition, what was the type of mindset that I wanted in that boat with me? An older, reliable man who was completely resistant to change, or an Olympic rowing celebrity who was very fickle and unreliable, OR a young chap who had no experience whatsoever and had a great

attitude and [was] seeking an opportunity. For me, it was the character I was concerned about. Is mindset massively important? Yes, it is! In terms of business frameworks, you need different mindsets at different times. I chose the young chap.

When you are searching for the next Foie Gras or opportunistic agriculture, remember to be ready to move and leap to opportunities, turning negative situations into opportunities, while freeing and opening up the borders of your mind. Take a risk. Keep your nomadic mindset alive.

As Ashutosh says, “Each day you need to start afresh because you might have done a great job yesterday, but today you might be outdated.



The Foie Gras is such a colourful, visual story shared by Said, Romain, and Aissa about seeking opportunities. Even Ashutosh and Grant had a version of Foie Gras in their different roles and experiences. To seek, reveal, unleash, and seize the opportunity, you need to tear down the borders—be fearless—so you can see the opportunities firsthand. Revolt against the initial negative gut response that most likely happens. To see seeds of opportunity, it takes courage, the desire to risk and explore, and the desire to be free of borders in the mind. Another nomadic mindset wake-up call! There is opportunity in everything.

To seize the opportunity, you also need to Recognize Change as the Nature of Things. Get ready.



## LEADERSHIP RETHINK

Essential nomadic leadership qualities to embody:

**Opportunity**

**Expansion**

**Strategy**

**Fresh**

**Freedom**

**Risk**

**Positive**

**Borderless**

**Courage**

**Right attitude**

**Agile**

**Explore**

**Open**

**Adapt**

**Reveal**

**Curious**

**Agriculture**

**Unleash**

## FINAL QUESTIONS

1. How can you create a more opportunistic and spontaneous agriculture/culture in your organisation?
2. As a leader, what borders and boundaries do you need to tear down: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually?
3. What would freedom look like to you?

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*“Having the right mindset is one of the most important success factors of great and inspiring leaders. The Nomadic Mindset is a necessary read for leaders of all levels traversing today’s disruptive environments.”*

**Marshall Goldsmith – Thinkers 50 Ranking: #1 executive coach and the only two-time #1 leadership thinker in the world**

Kevin Cottam believes the mindsets of the world and leadership is becoming increasingly narrow and inward focused; if we are to survive, thrive, and flourish in Industry 4.0, we need to expand our mindsets. He proposes the path towards an expanded mindset can be found through embracing the qualities of ancient nomadic wisdom that have changed, adapted, and survived through the test of time and, in many cases, may have been forgotten.

*“100% of executives interviewed said they needed more people with a Nomadic Mindset.”*

The Nomadic Mindset, a metaphor for “the movement of the mind,” takes you on a journey by drawing upon and vividly sharing a wide range of exhilarating real-life stories and experiences of the nomads in Mongolia, the Maasai in Kenya, the Berbers in Southern Morocco as well as executive conversations and case studies.

This rare, fresh back-to-the-future leadership book will incite you to rethink your mindset and raise your awareness of two other mindsets: the builder and settler. All three mindsets will give you insights on how you can better lead an interconnected, innovative, and engaged organisation. Look inside to discover why you should learn about the nomadic mindset and what the nomads know that you don’t.

*“A tour de force of wisdom: alive, insightful, inspirational, intriguing, timely”*