



From little beans big things grow

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Zarraffa's Coffee millionaire Kenton Campbell woke up one morning and realised the dream wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Then along came Steve Irwin.

KENTON Campbell loves to talk. He can chew the fat with the best of them, a world-class chatterbox. Get the Zarraffa's Coffee founder on a roll and he's a hard man to stow down, let alone stop. But that's exactly what's just happened.

Having barely taken a breath for the past few minutes, Campbell has stumbled, stuttered, then ground to a halt. He is debating if he wants to say the D-word not only out loud, but to the world. "That was towards the end of, kind of my, umm, umm, you know..." No, we don't Kenton. You have to tell us - and he does. "I suppose depression's the best word to use".

Depression isn't a condition many would associate with Campbell. People tend to talk about the self-made millionaire's boundless energy, his infectious enthusiasm, his full-on personality. About the entrepreneur who left behind a tough childhood in America to build an incredibly successful coffee shop franchise here on the Gold Coast. About the 39-yearold with the beautiful family. Then again, depression tends to happen behind closed doors.

"I had a pretty bad year in 2005-06," says Campbell. "Within two weeks I had quite a few things happen that were quite devastating. Without beating around the bush some of them are a little too personal to tell you."

What he will discuss is the shock of his company being slugged with a massive - and unexpected - payroll tax bill. The frustration of training full-time for months for a mixed martial arts bout that was cancelled in the wake of the infamous Ballroom Blitz bikie shoot-out. Most importantly, Campbell talks about finally achieving the financial status he had always yearned and finding it left him somehow empty.



"It wasn't the success I thought it would be," he says. "Don't get me wrong - I'm proud of what I've done. I have to pinch myself every day. I walk in and go, 'Yeah, I own this'. "But I did look around the corner, realise I was going to be economically successful and ask, 'Well, is this it?' It wasn't a good feeling ... I just thought why would I do more, take more risks and put myself out there more if this was going to be the only reward? "I didn't lose it but I thought, 'Nah, it's not me any more'. I had quite a lot people who have worked with me for years shut the door to my office and say, 'What is going on? We are really worried' and I just I didn't have a reason for being that guy.

"I needed something more. It took me a whole year to get through that and during that period I was lucky enough to meet Steve Irwin." It was a meeting that would change his life and one that took place mere months before the so-called wildlife warrior's death.

Having initially approached Australia Zoo to discuss a fundraising link with Zarraffa's, Campbell sat down with Irwin and was blown away by his passion for the environment.

"There's not a time that goes by that I don't think the world was a better place when Steve was alive," he says. "But being the type of person he was he would want us to get on with it and make something happen ... the best thing we can do is prove him right."

Through Irwin, Campbell was introduced to the likes of koala expert Jon Hanger and the issue of urban sprawl cutting a swathe through animal habitats. Bob Irwin, Steve's father, has become a close friend and is mentoring him on issues affecting Australia's endangered species.

Campbell's realisation that he has something to offer the world of conservation has given him new purpose. After a two-year genesis he has launched Ecoforce, a non-profit foundation that will investigate pressing environmental concerns and act as a framework to source and channel funding into research.

He's met with Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott and the likes of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger are on his hit list. "(Kenton's) like a bulldog when he gets his teeth into something," says Bob Irwin. "He's young and he's keen and I think with the right type of guidance we can do good things with (him)."

"I could write out cheques for other people to do it but that's not who I am," says Campbell. "I can't write out a cheque and hope it happens. I need to be part of it and do everything I can to make sure it happens. "I see this a lot in conservation and it happens in business too – 50 per cent of the way there, they run out of money or resources or they run out of steam because they can't do it all on their own. "I'm results-driven, so this is about making sure that when they set out we've all thought about it and we see there's going to be a result ...

Ecoforce is the thing that in some cases will finish things off." Campbell, who will be profiled on ABC 1's Australian Story on Monday, says he now splits his time evenly between the foundation and his business, with the success of Zarraffa's closely tied to the future of Ecoforce.

"I see Zarraffa's as being a conduit for conservation. I really do," he says. "If I didn't, I don't know how much longer I'd last in business. I've reinvigorated myself.

"I'm looking at ways to have (Zarraffa's) bigger and better than ever because there's something on the other side now. It's not just about making money"