

“There is a tremendously high ‘level of service’ expectation”

1 Warmer

Discuss your answers to the questions.

- What sports do children play at school in your country?
- What sports did you most enjoy when you were a child?
- What sports are popular in your country?

2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article, and then read the article to see how they are used in context.

appoint	clinic	cone	cutthroat	grasp
immersed in	incredulous	notion	spread	swamped

1. a low object with a circular base that rises to a point; usually plastic, red or orange in colour and often used to prevent traffic from driving somewhere _____ (para 1)
2. knowledge or understanding of something _____ (para 1)
3. an occasion when an expert teaches their subject _____ (para 5)
4. showing that you find something hard to believe _____ (para 5)
5. grow and become known to many people _____ (para 6)
6. spending most of your time doing something or thinking about it _____ (para 8)
7. overcrowded _____ (para 9)
8. when people behave in an unfair or immoral way in order to get an advantage over other people _____ (para 10)
9. understand something _____ (para 12)
10. choose someone to have a particular job or position _____ (para 14)

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3 Word pairs

a. Join the words to make word pairs from the article. Then write them next to their meanings.

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| 1. eureka | a. acumen |
| 2. grew | b. fund |
| 3. disposable | c. moment |
| 4. business | d. demand |
| 5. hedge | e. income |
| 6. in | f. virally |

1. money you have left over after you have paid all your bills and taxes
2. a financial organization that invests money that has a high risk of being lost but which may make a very large profit
3. wanted by a lot of people
4. a time when you suddenly realize or understand something or have a good idea
5. increased and developed very quickly
6. a good sense for business

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Gary Book arrived in New York in the 1980s with a bag full of footballs from which he developed a successful business. PAUL WHEATLEY describes his career path.

- 1 Turning up with little more than a bag full of balls, an armful of cones and half a business idea doesn't sound like a great way to start a career in a new country. But that's what Gary Book from Bath in southwest England did in the late 1980s. With no business background and only a general notion of what he wanted to do, Book found himself in super-competitive New York.
 - 2 Within a few years, however, his football coaching business was a leading name in a booming industry. Book had lit a fire that helped to radically change the face of football in the US – or “soccer,” as it is known there.
 - 3 Book, now 61, comes from a footballing family. His uncle Tony had been a hugely successful professional player and manager with modern-day English Premier League giants Manchester City. Another uncle, Kim, was a professional goalkeeper in England. But after failing to make the grade as a professional himself, Gary Book left university in the early 1980s and taught physical education in the UK.
 - 4 During the university summer of 1979, he had already headed over to New York to coach kids at summer camps. While there, he cast his expert eye on New York parents doing their best to coach their kids at soccer. Back then, he recalls, youth soccer in the US was led by an army of volunteer parents who did the coaching for free. He watched the coaching; it wasn't very good. It was hardly a eureka moment, but with his background and his professionalism, he saw a business opportunity.
- A desire for success**
- 5 So it's 1989, and Book has already coached a number of times in New York summer schools. Now he's back with a rough idea of setting up a coaching business, and he starts by giving what he calls “free clinics.” The kids are impressed. Just as importantly, so are the parents. Then suddenly, the whole thing takes off. “First it was me; then a handful of staff; and within three years, we had over 250 staff working for us.” He still sounds slightly incredulous

when recalling those early years. “It just grew virally,” he says.

It worked because, when Book and his small team of professional coaches went out to coach a group, parents on nearby playing fields wanted the same level of professionalism for their own kids. “Those first free clinics,” he says, “showed parents what a professional coach could do. It then just spread – and it was frightening.” Book's timing was perfect. He could feel there was a “desire from American parents, many from immigrant backgrounds, to make each generation more successful than the generation before them – to invest in their children.”

He also says the location, New York, with its energy and vast, diverse population – which included many immigrants who already knew soccer – played a major role in his success. The last piece of the jigsaw was that he knew these parents also “had the disposable income” to be able to afford high-quality coaching.

But as a Brit, immersed in the game, Book also understood the importance of the nature of soccer as a sport. In contrast to American football, baseball and basketball, he explains, soccer has always been “a sport for all”. Size, build and athleticism are vital in most sports, of course. “But soccer is something anyone could enjoy.” In no time at all, his free clinics were transformed into paid-for coaching sessions and courses, and even expanded to other sports. As well as employing hundreds of staff, the business expanded from its New York base to having offices in North Carolina, Colorado and California.

A cutthroat business mentality

New York being New York, however, Book's success didn't go unnoticed. “There was absolutely no barrier to entry to what we were doing,” he explains. “Basically, anybody could set themselves up as a soccer coach with a bag of soccer balls and a few cones.” Soon, new professionals and also less professional organizations alike started to offer coaching. “The whole business got swamped,” says Book. Today, it's “a multibillion-dollar business across the country, with the likes of Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester United involved.”

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10 Book cites New York as providing the perfect base for the company’s takeoff. He points to the pace of life, which is reflected in the way people do business. “There is a tremendously high ‘level of service’ expectation.” Book also points to New York’s cutthroat business mentality. “I think there is a large percentage of people that seem to be quite willing to do whatever it takes to gain a market share of the business,” he says.

most famous soccer clubs. Book’s NOGA Soccer is now part of Steel Soccer, which claims to have more than 300 coaches for more than 25,000 players. Soccer in the US is very much big business.

A love of coaching

Even as the head of a successful business, the desire to be a soccer coach never left Book. Long before he sold the business in 2013, he had handed much of the day-to-day running over to partners. He just wanted to coach, which he did with the new company till 2017.

Like his famous Manchester City uncle Tony, Gary Book has enjoyed great success as a coach and has an excellent reputation in the game. In 2018, New York’s Adelphi University appointed him head soccer coach for the Adelphi Panthers. And he’s much in demand on a national level, too, for example via the elite United Soccer Coaches. On his appointment at Adelphi, Adelphi’s Athletic Director Danny McCabe commented that “Gary has dedicated his life to the game of soccer, and over the past several years, he has done that right here in the New York metropolitan community.”

For somebody who arrived from the UK with a bag full of soccer balls and an armful of cones, Gary Book’s “half an idea” has taken him a very long way indeed.

11 Book readily concedes that this became a major challenge. “We were still very British and very ‘gentlemanly’ to a certain extent about our business dealings,” he says. “In certain ways, this worked very well and, initially, it was to our advantage. But as time went on, we lost a number of potential contracts and deals to people who were just far more cutthroat and far more willing to do whatever it takes. I think that is very much a New York, perhaps American, mentality.”

12 More than once, Book refers to his “lack of business acumen.” And to how he and his partners just didn’t grasp “how the level of competition would grow once it became very evident that we were doing very well.” But he’s also being very modest in a stereotypically British way. Around four years ago, his business was still attractive enough for a hedge fund to buy it – at a time when countless competitors were around, including the world’s

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4 Understanding the article

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Gary Book already had a strong business plan before he went to New York.
2. The business environment in New York is competitive and tough.
3. Gary Book once played professionally for a top football club in England.
4. In New York, Gary Book coached children for free to build up a strong customer base and to get himself known in the business.
5. It took Gary Book more than five years to grow his business enough to employ staff.
6. Many of his clients were from families with migrant backgrounds who came from countries where football was popular.
7. When Gary Book arrived in New York, football coaches did not have to hold formal qualifications.
8. Gary Book’s business has never managed to move beyond the boundaries of New York and football.
9. Gary Book sold his coaching company to investors, and it is now part of a larger organization.
10. Gary Book has now moved away from New York and the soccer coaching business.

5 Multi-word expressions

a. Find these expressions in the article. What do they mean?

1. make the grade
2. cast your eye on somebody
3. a piece of the jigsaw
4. to a certain extent

b. Use the expressions to talk about Gary Book and his business.

c. Use the expressions in sentences of your own.

6 Discussion

- Why do you think Gary Book’s business became so successful?
- Do you think he would have had the same success with this business idea if he had stayed in England?
- Do you think his football coaching business would be as successful in your country?
- What do you think makes Gary Book a successful businessman? What business character traits does he possess?

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7 Extra reading and task

Read the fast facts, then write similar fast facts for the city or area where you live.

FAST FACTS: NEW YORK STATE AND NEW YORK CITY

New York State capital: Albany

New York State main cities: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, Syracuse

New York State governor: Andrew Cuomo, Democrat

Population of New York State: 19.5 million

New York City (NYC) mayor: Bill de Blasio, Democrat

Population NYC: 8.4 million

Currency: USD (€1 = \$1.10)

NYC GDP growth: 2.4% (Q3 2019)

NYC unemployment: 4.2% (Q3 2019)

NYC inflation: 1.7% (Q3 2019)

Sources: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>; <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/new-york-cityquarterly-economic-update>