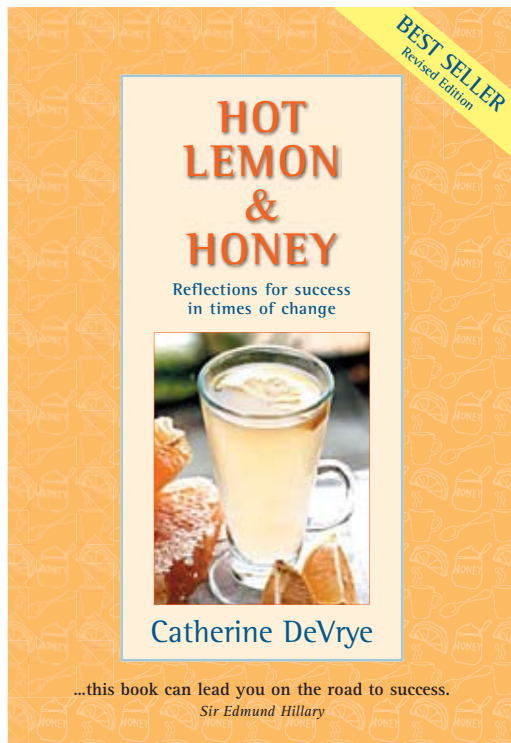




# Chapter 9

Excerpt from  
*Hot Lemon & Honey*

Written by  
**Catherine DeVrye**



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## 9

**‘The man who swims against the stream knows the strength of it.’**

*Woodrow Wilson*



This statement implies that life has to be a struggle, and I'm not saying that it isn't at times—nor that struggle does not build strength of character, which I believe it does. However, there comes a time when too much struggle only strangles. And aren't many of us guilty of using our limited energy reserves on tasks we're not good at, rather than going with the flow of our strengths? In surfing, it's imperative to learn to use the energy of the wave to propel you forward and then you don't need to paddle nearly as hard. You do need to paddle harder to catch one, but once you know what to do, the momentum will take you forward.

Panic is one of the most dangerous things for surfers and business owners. And relaxing is one of the toughest. Yet if you're being dumped in the surf, the best thing to do is relax, as it allows you



to hold your breath longer under water. How many bankrupt businesses do you know whose owners panicked and drowned with debtors, rather than riding out a tough time?

I first learned to surf about the same time as I started my own business. Like all small businesses in the first few years of operation, it was struggling. And I was also struggling with my new, so-called recreational pursuit. I was extremely frustrated with surfing and was frankly getting quite despondent at my inability to catch a wave and stand up without getting dumped mercilessly under water. There I'd find myself gasping for air, churning around out of control beneath the waves like a limp rag in a washing machine, not knowing which way was up, struggling finally to the surface for a gulp of air before the next wave tossed me under again. In fact, it seemed a bit like my fledgling business. The harder I tried, the worse it got and I'd return to work feeling defeated, rather than energised, after a spell in the water.

What could I be doing wrong? I'd taken lessons from a good coach, read a book, practised, watched others and technically knew exactly what to do. So why couldn't I surf? Were there other lessons that weren't in the book—lessons equally applicable to business?

The hardest one for me was to learn to wait quietly and patiently for just the right wave for my skill level. Patience is a word I hadn't heard in business life, as we were always told to go out and create new business and not wait for it to come to us. That's exactly what I'd been doing in my own

business. I'm not suggesting that anyone should sit in the office and wait for the phone to ring, but there are many situations where frantic activity actually doesn't make any difference whatsoever to the bottom line, as timing is all wrong for reasons beyond the control of the proprietor.

Timing is everything in surfing as well. An average good ride on a wave lasts only a matter of seconds, so it's important to be in the moment. One of the great things about surfing is that you don't have any choice but to be in the moment and your mind is magnificently clear of any distractions. You simply enjoy the pure joy of the ride before going for the next one. It is not always easy going, but it is important to have fun. That's what surfing and work should be about. It's certainly a foreign concept to the one I was accustomed to in the corporate world: being involved in frantic activity and rushing on to the next project before savouring the success of the past one.

Obviously, balance is important to be able to stand on a surfboard. It's equally vital to have in your business life. Because what's the point if you don't enjoy the ride! How many people do you know who never take time out to enjoy riding the waves of their success? They constantly feel as if an imaginary tidal wave of trouble is about to again drown them in the depths of despair, as they get caught up with their nagging negative thoughts?

A life without positive energy is like an ocean without waves. A life without hope is like a sea-

gull without wings. And a life without joy is like surf without sound.

In the ocean, it's important to be able to understand rip tides. One of the first things you learn is that if you get caught in a rip, dragging you out to sea, it is important not to fight against it but wait until it ends, as they don't go on forever. Then paddle back towards shore. In fact, experienced surfers always paddle out with a rip. It's an example of using something as frightening as a rip to your advantage.

The same rule applies to the flow of the economy, which may be going against you. That's not to say you succumb and admit defeat, feeling that you can't do anything but be sucked out by the monetary tide. But, by being more of an astute observer, versus frantic, futile activity for the sake of activity, it will be to your advantage if you don't use up valuable energy fighting the tide of events in the economic world that you are powerless to control. Sometimes trying harder makes absolutely no difference at all and it's important to have the wisdom to know when enough is enough and to go with the flow, recognising that Woodrow Wilson was correct in stating that:

*'The man who swims against the stream knows the strength of it.'*



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Catherine DeVrye is also the author of the #1 best seller *Good Service is Good Business* and 5 other successful books. A former IBM executive and past winner of the Australian Executive Woman of the year award, DeVrye has spoken on five continents to a wide array of audiences from small business and Fortune 500 companies to government organisations and Olympic athletes. She has cycled over the Andes, climbed Mt Kilimanjaro and was honored to carry the Olympic torch on the day of the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

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