

THE BOSS

Schooled in the Scrum

I GOT kicked out of school at 17 because I got my girlfriend pregnant. I grew up in Lancaster, a working-class city in the northwest of England. Her school allowed her to stay, but my school said I couldn't. I never went back to school.

Being at the Lancaster Royal Grammar School, however, had been a turning point in my life. It is one of the finest private schools in England, and I had gotten a scholarship at age 11 because I was a strong athlete. It was the first time I had met kids who were not from the same environment. My father was a security guard and my mother worked in a shop. These kids were from middle-class backgrounds.

When I was 14, the teacher had us share our dreams. I wanted to be a millionaire by 30. Everyone laughed, but I was serious. The people who have the money make the choices.

When the school told me to leave, the headmaster took away my rugby jersey. I had been captain of the team and it was the only possession I was proud of. I wore second-hand clothes. This was a thing I had earned, and he made me hand it back to humiliate me.

Four years ago, the current principal tracked me down and said: "You've done so well. We want you to come back. We want you to inspire our kids." I said, "I don't think so." But he was persistent, and I went back and absolutely loved it. I went to a rugby game. At the end of the game, the boys took me into the dressing room and the captain took off his jersey and handed it to me to replace the jersey that had been taken from me. It was very moving.

When I think about when I'm at my best, it is when I'm on a team, as long as I'm captain of the team. I've been that way since I was 7. People say it is tough at the top, but I found it much tougher at the bottom.

With a wife and baby to support, all my dreams seemed to be dashed. I worked two



Duncan Cole

KEVIN ROBERTS

Chief executive worldwide, Saatchi & Saatchi

BIRTH DATE

Oct. 29, 1949

FAVORITE SPORTS CLUB

The All Blacks, the New Zealand rugby team

SARTORIAL QUIRK

Wears only black T-shirts and black pants. Doesn't own a tie.

HOME

New Zealand; main office in New York City. "I'm on the road 250 days a year."

jobs and had no money. But I thought, you've got to fish where the fish are, and all the fish were in London. I saw an ad for Mary Quant, the designer. I went there and said: "I'm 19, I speak French and Spanish and I work really hard. I'm three times smarter than anyone else you've got, and whatever you are paying them, I'll work for half." Luckily someone hired me.

I worked for Mary Quant for three years, opening new markets for her cosmetics line. I had no idea what I was doing, but I kept moving quickly.

I learned about speed. The average product life cycle was nine months. You had to be decisive, intuitive, but most of all, fast. I found that I really liked marketing. You could make things happen and make a name for yourself.

I was recruited by Gillette in Europe, and the more I advanced, the more I realized that my colleagues had a framework that I didn't have. Going to graduate school wasn't an option, so I decided to do my M.B.A. at Procter & Gamble. I talked my way into P. & G. by taking a 50 percent cut in my Gillette salary. I worked for a guy named Herbert Schmitz, who was the most inspirational guy I've

ever worked with.

I was recruited by PepsiCo from P. & G., and they made me a vice president for the Middle East at age 32.

I'm not at my best flying solo. I need a coach, a guide, a mentor. I've been fortunate to have a lot of excellent mentors. I like playing on the global stage, but at the same time, I am insecure and feel a need to constantly prove myself because of my lack of education.

There was a guy at Pepsi named Bob Beeby, who was head of international. He took care of me, supported me, protected me. At the same time, he pushed me forward. He sent me a picture of a bridge that seemed to go on into infinity. The caption read: "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." □

As told to Glenn Rifkin.