

Swinging the Pendulum

Work and Play

Mike Cartwright was a little different than most of us. I don't recall when and where I first met him. But I distinctly remember he stood out in the crowd. Tall, athletic, lanky, shoulder-length blond hair, and a heavy accent. He also happened to be the Vice President of IMSI, one of baby Cybage's early customers.

Around '98, Mike made his first trip to India to visit Cybage. I drove down from Pune to Mumbai Airport to pick him up from his late night flight arrival. In those days, there was no expressway connecting Bombay and Pune. We traversed through the old beat-up highway, and got stranded in a massive traffic jam in the middle of countryside. Mike's jet lag ensured that he stayed wide awake, and my vendor status ensured that I matched his alertness. Today, when I look back, I am thankful for that never ending night in wilderness. After all, I got to learn a lot about the real Mike behind the technology genius I was familiar with. Brilliant words were spoken that night. The new virtual world of dotcom. The real world outside the virtual world. The cosmic world outside the real world. He seemed to know most of the constellations in the night sky. And the politics of the turning earth. And the roadside fauna and flora of rural India's early morning.

Prior to that night, I always rated Mike as one of the brightest digital minds on the planet. But that night I discovered that 'profession' to Mike was just a question of making a living—his being an IT geek was merely a 'chance by compulsion'. He was a gypsy at heart—rock climbing was his only true love! Mike was raised in South Africa, trekking the African landscape of late 80s. Then in early 90s he set up a rock-climbing adventure magazine and equipment company to see whether he can make a living out of his passion. The unusual business idea laden with debt prompted him to take a break from climbing and relocate to bay area for work.

Then as VP of IMSI, he chanced upon a solicitation mail from Cybage and ended up initiating offshore partnership with us. I suspect that beyond offshore arbitrage, his real driving decision was the fascination of traveling to exotic places. His career strategy had no ambiguity—make just enough \$\$\$ to pay off debt, and then set off on a rock climbing pilgrimage across continents! I still remember his target; as per his calculations all he needed was \$20 per day to take care of his basic needs while going global trekking.

As IMSI started going down, Mike made his anticipated move along with his new wife Tamara who co-shared his passion. I lost touch with him over the next couple of years as he went dabbling on large hills of Peru and extended climbing trips in the southwest US and in South Africa. As the savings started dwindling, it was time to get back to civilization. This time around, the destination was Seattle based startup—Odyssey Technologies. We reconnected at personal level when Odyssey tied up with Cybage as its offshore partner.



Mike Cartwright

As luck would have it, Odyssey too went down, and Mike zipped off again—traversing the Berg tagging Cathedral Peak, Mponjewane, and Sentinel; then the frequent mountain and trail running in Seattle cascades, usually as an excuse to visit sunnier places in the middle of winter. Money started evaporating again; thus followed a short stint with Microsoft, and finally the incubation of his own startup [Solid Documents](#). Once more, he started working with Cybage, but the startup nature of his needs did not make it conducive for a formal partnership to sustain.

Over the last few years, I have lost touch with him (for the third time)! It was only recently that I got the urge to reconnect with him, specifically for any interesting inputs to be touched upon in this blog. I wrote him an email a few weeks back, but he doesn't seem to be accessing his emails. But thanks to Google, I have managed to locate his whereabouts from a magazine interview he appeared in about a year back (<http://www.climb.co.za/2011/03/southern-rock-magazine/>). And it comes as no surprise that he has now relocated to south island of New Zealand to re-pursue his rock climbing passion on a full-time basis!

Today, “work hard, play hard” is a motto practiced by many organizations. But Mike has taken this motto to a new level. As one of Mike’s close friends aptly puts it—Mike likes to “swing the pendulum”. Work 100%. Play 100%. Sequentially! The regular corporate world doesn’t understand this. Most of the successful people seldom switch off completely... the mainstream believes in striking a healthy balance—don’t forget work while playing, and don’t forget play while working.

I too belong to the mainstream. In fact, I extend this approach to almost everything I do. For example I enjoy bingeing, but I watch what I eat. I enjoy working out, but I need the TV on. I enjoy my vacation, but I can’t have my Blackberry ever switched off! I seem to be forever trying to balance everything I do—‘simultaneously’—it gives me a nice feeling of control. But then, I haven’t seen the other side, have I? Sometimes I wonder—who has got it “more” right: a) one who balances work and play ‘simultaneously’?; or b) one who balances work and play ‘sequentially’? Perhaps, it is time for yet another opinion poll 😊