

**DISCOVER
YOUR PIVOT**

DISCOVER YOUR PIVOT

JULIE BROWN

P E L C K M A N S

I dedicate this book to Dixie Dansercoer, in memoriam.

You encouraged me to pursue every dream. Here's one more.



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Foreword

Monday January 28, 2008

MV Polar Star

Brabant Island, Wilhelmina Bay — Louise Island

Noon position — 64° 26' S 62° 15' W

Air temperature — 5°C/41°F

Sea — 1 meter

Wind speed/direction — Force 5 SW

Pressure — 999 mbar

On board the Polar Star, we are crossing Wilhelmina Bay. Suddenly there is a whale alert. A giant humpback and her calf put on a show for a few minutes. Afterward, the crew claims they have never seen such a spectacle in their combined 400 days in Antarctica.

In the course of the afternoon we come close to the Euronav Belgica, the expedition ship of Dixie Dansercoer. The crew

members come aboard the Polar Star and are greeted with champagne and loud applause.

Together with Dixie, a landing is then made on Louise Island. This is the so-called unofficial landing of the Belgica, because no scientific measurements were made. Before us, only Dixie and his team had been here as tourists. The available space for landing is even smaller here. The one hundred or so Flemings are huddled together like penguins on a narrow strip of boulders against a hill of snow. Dixie has crawled to the top of the hill to temporarily place the Euronav flag in the snow. We are not allowed to access part of the pebble beach because there is a Weddell seal sleeping. Gentoo penguins can also be seen up close. The landing is followed by a cruise between the icebergs – out of this world. The day will end with an Antarctic barbecue on the deck of the Polar Star and a premiere presentation by Dixie and his team. The comparison of the photos taken by the expedition of the Belgica led by Adrien de Gerlache in 1898 and those taken by the Euronav expedition led by Dixie Dansercoer a few weeks ago do not lie. The centuries-old ice layer in Antarctica is melting and on islands that were inaccessible until recently, there are now beaches where landings are possible.

A fantastic day, partly sailed under the original flag of the Belgica, comes to an end.



When reading the manuscript of Julie's *Discover Your Pivot*, the preceding passage from my travel diary came to mind. In 2008 we had the privilege of traveling with Julie and young Robin on the *MV Polar Star* to meet Dixie and his crew in Antarctica on his "in the Wake of the Belgica" expedition, an epic reenactment of the first ever scientific exploration of Antarctica by Adrien de Gerlache on the *Belgica*. Seeing the photographic evidence of how the Antarctic ice cap had retracted over a good hundred years since the first ever pictures taken by the *Belgica* expedition left no doubt in my mind that global warming was real and urgent action was needed. For me, that evening was a pivotal point in my venture capital career. Reminded of the power of nature during a force 12 storm in the Beagle Channel, we returned safely to Leuven where the evidence provided on that memorable evening in Antarctica kept urging me to do something. In my opinion, the use of new technologies was going to be part of the solution, so I fully committed to setting up one of the first and largest European venture funds focused on investing in start-ups that would contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Dixie became our ambassador, and Julie a friend for life.

The above is an illustration of how pivotal events or insights have a profound impact on someone's life and future. But Julie's book goes beyond these pivotal changes that we all experience and live through.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a pivot is a fixed point supporting something that turns or balances. Reading Julie's personal life story, I started realizing that life is more than a random walk in the park or, for my fellow scientists, more than a Brownian motion. When looking back at your own or someone else's career, it might seem that external events happened and pushed a person in one direction or another. Clearly fortuitous encounters, attractive opportunities, or dead-end situations are trigger points to pivot in a new direction. But what Julie helps us realize is that, in those situations, the choices we make are grounded in our fundamental values and visions; our fundamental pivot point. Hence any change in direction is not just the result of a random knock by some other molecules, but deeply influenced by who we are and what we want to be to the people around us and to society.

Julie then takes us on her journey as a loving spouse, devoted mother, and trusted business partner, lifting the veil on the realities of daily life behind the glory of the extraordinary exploration achievements of her late husband Dixie Dansercoer. She covers the various dimensions associated with pivots in a structured and systematic way and goes well beyond the anecdotal in distilling valuable lessons and providing useful insights for us all.

Starting from her very personal account of the pivots in her own life, Julie helps us to accept change as a positive aspect of life, and at the same time delivers the message that we should all be conscious of our own fundamental point around which we pivot. As parents, grandparents, and role models, we should make sure that children and young people develop an unwaveringly stable pivot of human and societal values and are not pushed around in a random walk by social media and false prophets.

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Introduction

Discover your pivot

Expansion and discovery
as strategic tools toward
goal achievement

Throughout my twenty-seven-year involvement in polar expeditions, both professionally and personally, I've spent dedicated time with a variety of extravagant personalities in a multitude of extreme situations. It took me a while to define my place in the mix – my purpose – and even longer to realize my strengths and contributions. At the beginning of my involvement in Dixie Dansercoer's polar exploration, while I wasn't suffering from a small degree of imposter syndrome, I needed clarity regarding what had become an abrupt professional pivot. What did Dixie need from me in order to accomplish his record-breaking achievements in the forbiddingly harsh Arctic and Antarctic environments? What did I need from Dixie in order to build a solid business foundation beneath his (and later our) grandiose adventures?

Dixie's first renowned exploit took place between November 1997 and February 1998 when he and Alain Hubert traversed the Antarctic continent on foot, each pulling a sled that carried all of their supplies for a hundred days of polar travel. They were assisted