

Business Success Lessons from Africa's Big Cats



Lorne Sulcas, former game ranger and now motivational speaker, shares what he's learnt in the wild about striving for success.

→ **EVERYONE THOUGHT I** was crazy: "How can you walk away from your two university degrees and a stable profession to become a game ranger?" It was simple: I was following my dream. I'd grown up like most middle-class kids do in Cape Town: spoilt for choice when it comes to exploring the natural world. However, my first exposure to the bush was while studying towards my postgraduate degree in architecture at the University of Cape Town. When my friend invited me to join him on a trip to a bush camp in Botswana, that was the end of one road for me, and the beginning of another. I was smitten.

Three years later, I was pursuing a career in corporate leadership training and as a performance facilitator, but I was pining to be in the bush – it felt like I really didn't have a choice. My passion was overwhelming; I just had to follow it. So I opened the *Yellow Pages* (Google wasn't around in those days), looked up "private game reserve" and, after an interview and some fairly rigorous training, was lucky enough to be offered a job as a game ranger-guide at Sabi Sabi, in the Greater Kruger National Park.

I've never looked back.

For six years, I guided guests on safari for about eight hours every day, 320 days a year, in one of the best places in Africa to view big game. Tracking the animals, and in particular the large carnivores, off-road and into the darkness of night, was an incredible experience. I was fascinated by the behaviour of the super-predators that, I realised, have a million-year-old proven track record of success in the oldest, busiest marketplace: nature. I decided to study the three big cats: lions, leopards and cheetahs.

I'd done my time walking through corporate hallways, and suddenly, I could see clearly how much there was to learn from animals in the wild – how they've survived massive change, competition and challenges, for millennia. At the time, I had no idea that those experiences, and the knowledge I'd accumulated, would one day lead me to address employees and executives of US corporate giants – such as NASA, AT&T and Sony Music – on the secrets to achieving success.

When I left South Africa in 1996 to live in the US with my Canadian wife, I created my "Bushveld Lessons" series of talks and seminars, which, for the seven years we lived in Denver, Colorado, became popular in the US with organisations, athletes and teams striving for high performance. I eventually left that successful business and returned to South Africa to be closer to its animals and people.

Today, I love sharing my passion, experiences, wildlife photographs and my message with local organisations, through my new presentation, "Thriving in a Wild World." In it, I share what I've learnt from the three big cats about getting results and finding your niche in the ruthless, fiercely competitive marketplace of nature that we can all apply to the cutthroat, ever-changing business world we live in.

Here are some of those central principles.



CREDITS TBC.

Lion
=
Synergy

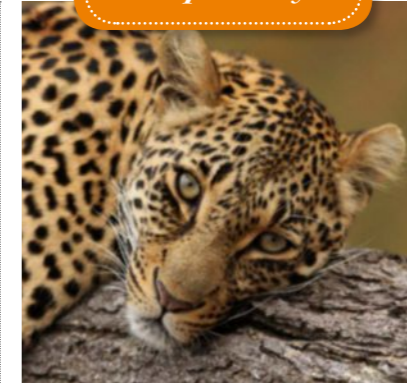


Of all the big cats, the lion is the only truly social species. They collaborate to form teams we call a pride, which allows them to synergise their efforts to be able to hunt the massive herbivores – wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, buffalo and even elephant – that the other cats can't hunt. This way, they can get results that the other felines can't. Their collaboration and synergy also allow them to defend a much larger or more prime territory, which in turn gives them access to prime habitat and resources. Relationships between team members are key. Lions are constantly reinforcing the strong social bonds between the pride members and male coalitions, with greeting rituals, play and training: exercising the stalking, movements and muscles used during the hunt. Every member of the team is extremely powerful, committed and hungry. Every member of the team takes ownership and performs – there are no passengers holding the rest of the team back.

ASK YOURSELF:

Are you collaborating to create synergy? Do you continually work on key relationships?

Leopard
=
Adaptability



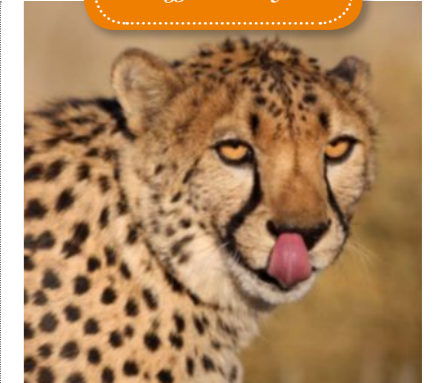
The leopard is a solitary hunter, versatile in almost any circumstances and habitats, but most comfortable where there's cover. Because its hunt is typically a mindful, patient, focused stalk to within metres of its prey, followed by a lightning fast chase over a short distance. Its energy expenditure during the hunt is relatively small, and it can afford to be highly opportunistic, feeding on a huge variety of prey. This, and the leopard's incredible focus, enables it to survive not just the competition, but changing circumstances and climatic conditions. The leopard is the strongest of the three cats for its biomass and, in areas where it's at risk of losing its kills to larger predators, it can hoist prey three times its own body weight into a tree for strategic protection, where it will feed at its leisure sometimes up to 48 or even 72 hours.

ASK YOURSELF:

Do you approach your goals mindfully and with focus? Can you adapt when things change?

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Cheetah
=
Efficiency



Because the cheetah is built for speed, not strength, it's right at the bottom of the large carnivores' pecking order, and is constantly at risk of losing its kills – and cubs. So it avoids competition by hunting typically on wide, open areas where it can run down its prey, and during the day – sometimes even in the heat of the day – when its competition is sleeping. It also specialises, hunting mostly medium to small gazelles.

With incredible speed, but limited stamina, the cheetah has to be very careful and strategic in terms of opportunity selection and energy expenditure, and has to make its efforts really count. As a result, it has the highest conversion rate of Africa's three big cats:

About 80 percent of the cheetah's attempts result in successful kills. Mom proactively creates low-risk opportunities for the cubs to learn how to hunt, and through this enabling and empowering leadership, the species continues to survive in spite of great odds and massive competition.

ASK YOURSELF:

Are you making your time really count? Are you creating opportunities, for yourself and others? 🐾