

## The CEF Environmental Awards 2009

*Acceptance speech by Sean O'Sullivan, MD Avego,  
winner of the 2009 Business & Commercial Award*

"Thanks to the Cork Environmental Forum for having these awards and honoring these great projects and people, and for recognizing Avego.

It's inspiring to be in this room and to see so many people here so passionate about improving the sustainability of the human race.

Avego is being acknowledged here for a thing which many people would say is crazy, this idea of sharing your private car for the public good. But I'd call your attention to another human race, back in 1958, when it was said that it was physically impossible for a human being to run a mile in less than 4 minutes... there were all kinds of detailed reasons for why and how it just couldn't be done.

But then Roger Bannister did break the 4 minute mile. And, within 1 year, 28 other people broke that false psychological barrier. It proves that imaginary obstacles are powerful only until the moment they are disproved.

Today, if Tiger Woods were being chased by his wife holding a golf club, I think even he would break a 4 minute mile.

A friend from Brazil told me this story: A grandfather and his grandson were walking out in the woods one day and came across a destitute family in a shack, with only a single cow, emaciated. The little boy said "Grandfather, I'd like to help these people". And the grandfather said, "come then, take this cow". And he led the cow to a cliff, where he had the little boy push it off the cliff, killing the cow.

A few years later, the grandson came back with the old man, and found that the shack had turned into a house, with a clearing, several livestock and crops. He turned to the old man and asked, "How did this happen", and the grandfather said "you helped them".

If I've learned anything over the years, it's that it is not misfortune to go through hardship, it's a strengthening and clarifying process. Without hardship, we don't know what we're capable of. Difficulty creates inspiration and creates focus, and focus creates strength and leadership and prosperity.

When we think about the challenges that are facing Ireland today, the supposed impossibility of eliminating our need for oil, the difficulty in balancing a budget and living within our means... don't think of these as anything other than temporary hardships. Everything is impossible only until it is proved possible, and usually all it takes for something to become possible is willpower.

Everyone is familiar with the expression "making lemons into lemonade". I think the challenge is to keep thinking positively, to have this entrepreneurial willingness to take a difficult challenge and keep pushing it forward. Keep moving forward. There is a tendency for some negative thinking to creep in, and of course negativity dominates a conversation. Fear is one of the most powerful emotions. But my advice is, if you've gone to all the effort of making lemonade, "don't piss in your lemonade".

There is this pseudo-science called "neuro linguistic programming", one of the things it stresses is the power of positive thinking, and one of the dangers it highlights is the equal power of negative thinking. Our goal cannot be to "not fail". Negative goals bring us closer to failure, not toward success. Our goals must be to create something great, to keep innovating, to have positive targets.

We all have goals, we all have areas we are responsible for, either in our workplaces or in our homes. Avoid allowing snakes to breed in your garden. Create a positive and supportive environment. Set impossible goals and then exceed them.

Thanks for the recognition tonight. And enjoy the rest of the program.”