

Numbers in Our Lives Interview with Neil Wright

Q: What made you write a book on this subject – we do have Google?

A: *It was a mammoth undertaking and much of it will always be a work in progress, as numbers change.*

Two numbers sparked the thought:

- 1. The build-up of CO₂ in the atmosphere, now over 400ppm (parts per million) in 1988 350ppm was considered as critical. The growth is causing climate change.*
- 2. CD4 cell count – these are the cells in the white blood cells that are part of our immune system and critical for monitoring HIV/AIDS Normal is between 500-1600mm³, below 200 could indicate HIV/AIDS. Antiretroviral drugs are recommended from 500mm³ by the WHO (World Health Organization).*

Q: You have dedicated the book to Numeracy in South Africa First Part and Second to Numeracy in the Economy of South Africa.

A: *When I ran my business – a transport company – I had great chaps working for me, but I was struck by how innumerate they were. The majority were drivers – standard of education was not high – but even if they had matric they lacked the basics. So this is a problem we have in South Africa, we are not good at numbers – many miss so much. This book is an attempt to help – the economy has real need for numeracy.*

Q: Are we talking about adult education?

A: *That is one area, then, I think for teenagers at school this gives supplementary reading. It is a book for the family. The Second Part is especially interesting for older readers.*

Q: It is long – 426 pages – isn't that a bit off-putting?

A: *No you don't have to read every page. It should be paged through and then one can study a chapter that interests you in more detail. You might need to research for new information.*

Q: You wrote 18 chapters. What made you decide on these particular subjects and not others?

A: *In our lives, these are the numbers that generally are associated with the middle income group in our society. It is the group that gives stability, maturity to countries. Hopefully my numbers will help to grow our middle income group.*

Q: In your Afterword and in other places you talk about “opportunity” in the same breath as numbers. Could you explain?

A: *Yes, numbers present opportunities in abundance. You can take any field: communications, cities, power, transport and travel and sport are examples. The numbers present opportunities for careers – open areas, opportunities in business, opportunities in self development. They assist freedom of opportunity. Awareness and focus come to mind.*

Q: Did writing this book give you pleasure; is there a sense of mission about the book?

A: *Yes to both. I had fun. Numbers have nothing to do with the gripes we have in society; it is not political; I was not going to have numbers measuring transformation or racial demographics. In writing the book I wanted to assist inclusiveness. That’s where we have to start in our society – not work backwards. Our priority should be self-development and of course maximum assistance to the disadvantaged irrespective of race, creed, nationality or gender. That is all we need to do...from there people will find their own opportunities...you destroy people by quotas and social engineering....many are willing to help others because they want to not because they have to.*

Q: Of your target market, you have said it is for the family but will they buy it?

A: *A good product or service fulfills a need. A good book will meet needs. A great book will create a market for itself, like a great product or service. If the book is going to be great then we have to start a cult about numbers. We want people to talk about numbers.*

- *Have numbers on their T-shirt*
- *Numbers must become a fashion*
- *When you go to a restaurant or café the number of calories should be important*
- *Numbers should be part of the truth – you have “Liars, damn liars and statistics”. This is nonsense statistics from a reliable and credible source can never be part of lying or misleading.*

So, let’s aim high – a great book will sell itself.

Q: You said a book on numbers will always be “a work in progress” – so what of the future? This is not just a once off – will we have new editions?

A: *We have established a website where we up-date numbers, where numbers can be viewed, where suggestions are made. Then, there is nothing like a book – something you hold in your hand. A new edition published every few years – there is some work to be done here and I cannot do it alone. I hope to have some top people to help, or even handover to someone else.*

Q: Is there anything really special about the book, something you would like to bring to the attention of your readers?

A: *Yes, I am sure I am not alone; I understand something far better when the history, origins and development are described. That is what I have done in the book – even the origin of numbers themselves. I have especially done this in Numbers in Communications, in Democracy and in Power, Transport and Travel .*

Q: So who is this author Neil Wright? What qualifies you to write a book like this?..... you still expect people to read it!

A: *I am like a messenger boy. In all my books it is the same. I am not the original researcher or highly qualified academic, but I am fascinated by many things and I have the compelling urge to write about them. I try to make things understandable and useful. In my business I made things happen....I was at the coal face, I learnt a great deal.....I am still about that person making things happen. I write for others that would make things happen.*