

# 'Lack of ambition is a huge issue in Scotland'

By Erikka Askeland

PHRASES such as "cash flow is more important than your mother" are typical of Ken Morse's plain-speaking wisdom.

The founder and managing director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Entrepreneurship Centre has dedicated his life's work to improving sales management for growing and start-up business.

Such is his profile he was invited by Gordon Brown, when he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to come to the UK and find out why the country was under-performing in innovation, entrepreneurship and global competitiveness.

Today he is in Fort William leading a seminar to Highland firms on global strategies for ambitious Scottish entrepreneurs. The £1,000 seminar is being funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE).

"Our mission is to help those companies who want to be global players. It is about creating employment and achieving true potential," he says.

"In the United Kingdom they are great at invention, they are getting better at innovation, and they have a long, long way to go on total global domination of the chosen market niche."

Scotland, in particular, has problems fostering innovative firms that tackle global markets, although he praises Fife-based eye exam firm Optos for getting it right.

According to Morse the definition of innovation is simply invention plus commercialisation.

## Business guru claims firms fail to think beyond UK borders

"The first thing is you need to know what it is," he explains.

"If it is an idea, the idea is four stages. The idea becomes an invention, the invention becomes an innovation, and then the innovation has to have a big impact.

"That requires things that are very counter cultural like ambition, not hiding your light under a bushel, and – God forbid – celebrating somebody else's success.

"This is a huge problem in Scotland and I hate it."

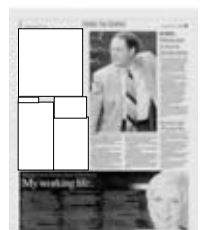
Morse says young companies in the UK – and in Scotland particularly – fail to address the "global imperative" to think beyond Scottish and UK borders to wider markets.

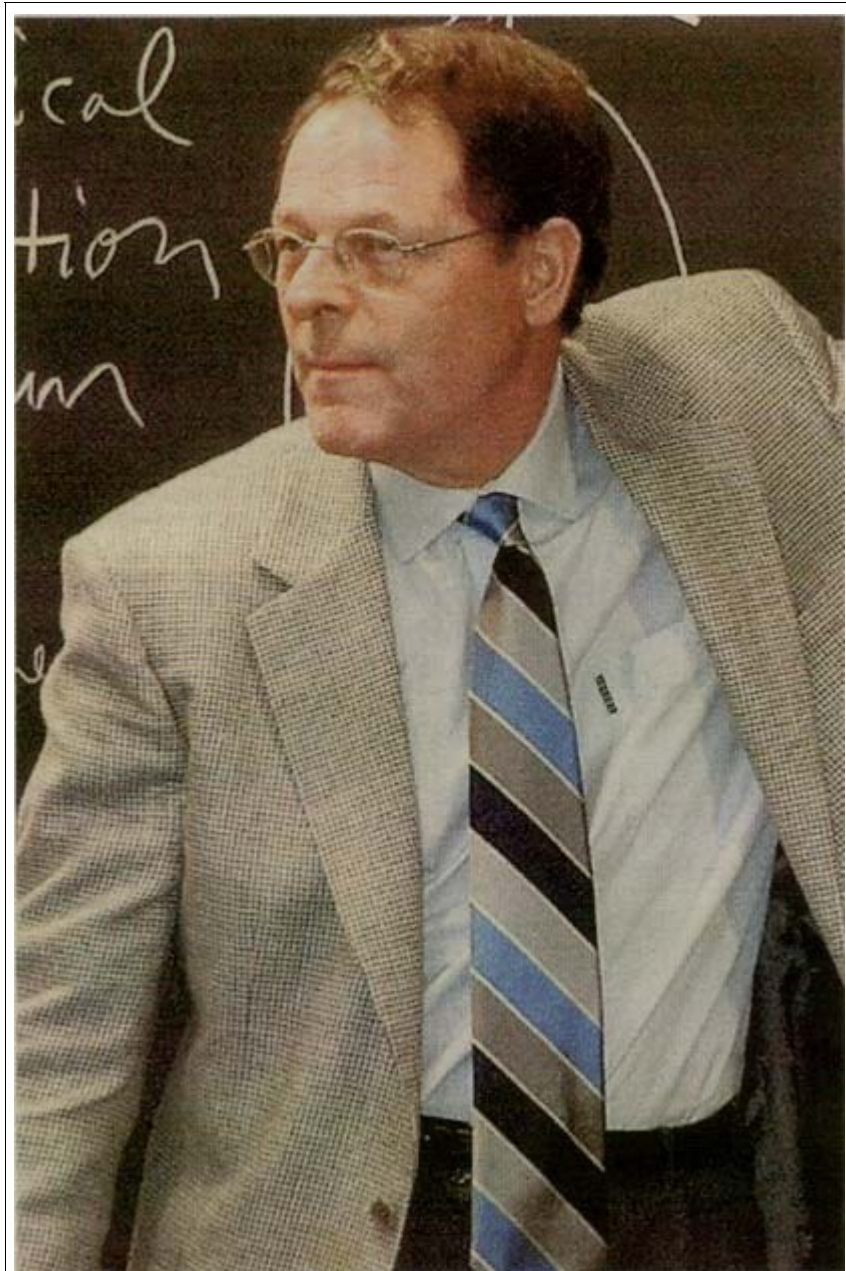
"There is a great spirit of small business in Scotland, but I really worry about the lack of ambition," he says.

"They do well selling to everyone in Scotland, and they do OK in England.

"But as soon as they have to go overseas they have enormous problems.

"If they don't go global, they are inviting competitors to take their markets. And those competitors will eventually come back and bite them at home."





**MISSION:** Ken Morse wants to help those companies who want to be global players

Morse also suggests small companies often don't put sufficient resources into building teams of people big enough to get products or services sold abroad.

"I also worry about the size of the teams," he adds.

"It is hard to get big teams to do start-ups. It is hard to go global with one person. You need someone to talk to."

Morse believes the biggest challenge for British companies is fear of failure, but argues that failure may be essential to success.

"Failure is part of the process. I don't know what they say in Scotland, but in Taiwan, they say failure is the mother of success. You fail, you learn from it," he says.

Morse adds that it isn't just entrepreneurs who lack ambition, but also the system

surrounding them and he has some special criticism reserved for the Scottish press who he accuses of pillorying failure.

He also suggests the venture capital community might not support companies to a suitable level.

But he also points out that responsibility for a company's failure or success ultimately lies with the business.

And he believes that while mentors should know what success feels like, they should also have some experience of failure in order to support the company they are mentoring through harder times.

"The ones who have had some reasonable batting average but have succeeded more than they have failed make great coaches," he adds.

