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# Achieving peak performance

Challenging situations can motivate people to do amazing things

RESEARCH has verified that high-level leaders and performers possess a variety of personal and professional qualities that bring out the best in them and others at moments that demand peak performance results.

Some people seem to have been born with a success gene, and it flows into everything they do throughout their lives. Others seem to find their own formula that works best, or they might be part of a moment in history that creates work or career glory.

What is it that motivates some people to do amazing things in their work or lives while others can hardly get out of bed in the morning?

## Motivating people

Recently, I attended a senior manager's strategy session in Hong Kong. The topic of "Motivating Our Staff in 2011" was on the agenda as it related to their South-east Asian and Asian sales, administrative and operational teams.

Having been a part of these types of sessions on countless occasions as a speaker, trainer and workshop leader, I found the discussion interesting to listen to and to learn what these senior managers were expecting of their employees and channel partners.

It wasn't long before someone asked me if I had some ideas or examples to share that would bring some clarity and new momentum to the discussion around "work and motivation".

With this group of senior managers over 35 years of age, I shared examples from recent history they could easily



The unselfish leadership and personal contributions of the Chilean miners, posing next to the Phoenix 2 capsule that was used in their rescue, demonstrate peak performance. PHOTO: REUTERS

relate to. Each example illustrates moments of "work peak performance".

## Apollo 13

The 1995 Hollywood blockbuster movie Apollo 13 was nominated for nine Academy Awards and won two. The central story revolves around the United States' space programme and its third manned lunar mission to the moon in 1970.

The movie was about the "peak performance" story of real-life teams and individuals involved with the Apollo 13 mission.

Historically called a "successful failure", the crisis began when an explosion in one of the oxygen tanks crippled the spaceship and put paid to the moon landing. Mission Control in Houston had the extremely challenging task of successfully returning astronauts Jim Lovell, Fred Hayes and Jack Swigert back to earth.

I reminded the managers that this was played out in front of a television viewing audience estimated at 1.6 billion people worldwide in April 1970.

The leaders, managers and individuals at every level of the mission were under massive stress with limited resources. With time ticking away, they did the possible under impossible conditions.

The Apollo 13 mission still stands out as one of the most viewed events in television history and with many noted examples of personal and team peak performances.

## Atlanta Olympic Games

The next example I shared was the individual performance of Australian Kieran Perkins who was swimming for his second gold medal in the gruelling 1,500m swim final at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia.

Perkins was the gold medallist in the 1,500m race at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, setting a new standard in his sport with another world-record performance. The difference in the Atlanta Games was that he went into the final race as the eighth-slowest qualifier, having been sick with the flu days before hand.

What happened in the final race has become one of the greatest finishes of all time. Not only did Kieran stand out and win his second Olympic distance 1,500m final race, he set a new record and standard.

He did what he had been training to do "at work" at 4.30am every day for half his life — swimming practice. In doing so, he gained glory for his country by being at peak performance rate for nearly 15 minutes to become the 1996 Olympic gold medal champion and giving one of the greatest swim performances in history.

## Chilean miners' rescue

The last example I shared with the senior managers on how to motivate a team for peak performance was very recent, and known by all the managers, as they nodded in agreement.

It was the attributes of unselfish leadership and personal contri-

butions of the 33 miners who were recently rescued after two months of being trapped underground near Santiago, Chile, in South America.

In circumstances that would crush the hopes of most people, 33 colleagues who had known one another for many years, stuck together to become national heroes.

An old South African saying is: "To go a short distance, go alone; to go a long distance, go together."

While peak performances are normally an individual pursuit, under the right circumstances, top performances can lift the spirits of companies, nations and even the human race.

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