

EXECUTIVES on the *RUN*

2MAGAZINE DISCOVERS WHY SOME OF ASIA'S BIGGEST BUSINESS HOTSHOTS ARE JUMPING OUT OF THEIR GOLF CARTS AND HITTING THE ROAD RUNNING. *Kristina Foster*

THE WORD MARATHON comes from the legend of Pheidippides, a Greek messenger. The legend states that he was sent from the battlefield of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. It is said that he ran the entire distance without stopping and burst into the assembly, exclaiming "We have won!" before collapsing and dying.

Nowadays, marathon-running has become a signature of winning CEOs and top business executives all around the world. Marathon runners among the eligible senior executives are being recruited as CEOs, while many other senior execs are taking up marathon running. Is it true that the skills essential for business success can be learnt and honed by running marathons?

A marathon is defined as a long distance running race of 42.2km. More than 500 marathons are contested throughout the world each year, with the vast majority of competitors being recreational athletes. The popularity of marathons in Asia is on the rise, with the 2009 Singapore Marathon hosting more than 50,000 participants. But what's driving so many pencil-pushing execs to put themselves through the agony of chasing those endorphins?

According to Brendan Wong, a high-flying investment analyst for a global fund with over US\$ 8 billion funds in management, the secret of running a marathon is to pace oneself so that one can still be going many miles down the line. Otherwise, runners burn themselves out and hit the wall. Wong says he follows his marathon training and running approach in his job. While many rival funds across Asia have come and gone, his company earnings have grown steadily and profitably. "During the past ten years the company has been one of the highest performing equity specialist

boutique managers and has demonstrated a consistency in delivering superior returns," he says confidently.

Raimund Wellenhofer is managing director of Go Thailand Tours in Bangkok that organizes Thailand holidays for about 50,000

"THE MARATHON IS A CHARISMATIC EVENT. IT HAS EVERYTHING. IT HAS DRAMA. IT HAS COMPETITION. IT HAS CAMARADERIE. IT HAS HEROISM. EVERY JOGGER CAN'T DREAM OF BEING AN OLYMPIC CHAMPION, BUT HE CAN DREAM OF FINISHING A MARATHON"

Fred Lebow, New York City Marathon co-founder

clients per year from all over the world. He considers preparation for a marathon as good training to stay mentally focused on your goals. "To stay within a certain training regime you need to have discipline. Focus

and discipline are the keys to success in the corporate world," he asserts.

In the US, marathon running CEOs are trimming their double chins and building endurance to manage stress, global travel and the 24/7 media scrutiny that comes with being the head honcho. Jim Jenness, global chairman of Kellogg Co, is a keen marathoner. "Running is a stress reliever, perspective re-gainer and re-invigorator" he proclaims. He extols the marathon run as a confidence and self-esteem builder. "It makes you feel good about yourself and thereby you're going to do better in business."

The CEO marathoners list includes Walt Disney's Robert Iger, Mike Parker of Nike, Klaus Kleinfeld of Alcoa Inc and Bill Gross, known in the financial world as 'The Bond King'. Gross is the chief investment officer for the Pacific Investment Management Company with more than US\$ 500 billion in assets. He once ruptured his kidney on day five of a 250km, six-day run and drove himself to finish the event. According to management gurus, the traits exhibited by Gross during his six-day run and throughout his career are the norm among top corporate leaders. "These people are known for setting high standards; planning strategies to achieve them, and not letting so-called 'challenges' like a bleeding kidney stop them. Targeting a 25 percent sales growth each year is similar to planning your Personal Record (PR) at the next marathon."

The trend is moving across the Pacific as business leaders in Asia are running more than ever before. Below, some of the region's business movers and shakers share with us their insights into their passion for marathon running. All aspiring CEOs, pull on those sneakers and get training because legging it to the top of that hill could also be a leg up to the top of the corporate ladder.

RAIMUND WELLENHOFER
(Managing Director of Go Thailand Tours)



2magazine: How did you get into running?

Raimund Wellenhofer: As a tour operator we are in the service industry and that means being on duty 24/7. Competition is very tough in our industry and all these things combined make for a stressful lifestyle. Fifteen years ago I felt exhausted and terrible most evenings. At one point I remembered sports at school made me feel good – so I put on some old sneakers and started to run from my house to a small park nearby. After 15 minutes I was totally destroyed, but luckily I kept on doing it. After a tough day, running can calm you down like nothing else. The monotony of the movements and the breathing is very close to meditation. Running in the morning brings energy. Getting up early morning is tough but after a few minutes of running your heart rate gets up and you really feel great. A day started with a run is so much more productive.

What is your fitness regime?

I run four or five days a week. During the week my runs are between 45 and 60 minutes. On weekends I will run longer distances for 90 to 120 minutes. In the preparatory weeks before a marathon I will increase the intensity of the training and also spend more time running on long weekends.

How do you feel after running a marathon?

Completing a marathon gives me a great feeling of achievement and joy. Every time is special, as every marathon is different. Even if you do the same course again, the emotion, the challenges are never as before.

What moment in running have you been most proud of?

The moment I learned that attaining fast times are not the most important thing about running. I realized that running is a great therapy to keep me emotionally and mentally in good shape.

How do the skills in marathon running help you to successfully run your business?

Preparation, dedication, focus and a positive attitude are important to complete a marathon – and key to running a business as well.

BRENDAN WONG
(Investment Analyst)



2magazine: Why do you run?

Brendan Wong: To maintain fitness and the challenge of training towards lowering my fastest time.

How far do you run?

When I am training towards a race, I usually run 60-80km per week. Twice a week during my short lunchbreak, twice a week after work and then a longer two-hour run on Sundays.

How does marathon running help you in the corporate world?

Marathons are one of the toughest races in the world, both mentally and physically. To successfully conquer a marathon you need an adequate training program. You also need to have a frequent review of your progress to ensure you're on your way towards reaching your goal. Planning and execution of a program to achieve a key objective is also an important aspect of successful corporates.

Throughout the actual marathon, mental strength and dedication is required to keep running despite what your body is telling you. You need to be ready for unexpected challenges with nutrition, hydration and external factors such as weather and competitors. Similarly, in business you need to have the mindset to keep going on and respond to challenges, no matter how the environment may change.

Where are your favourite places to run?

It is interesting to run around the outskirts of Shanghai. I run on the road in the bike lane amongst the thousands of locals who are usually on old push bikes or mopeds. In Chiba, Japan (near Tokyo), there is a 15km running circuit named after the Japanese Olympic gold medallist Naoko Takahashi. It is a very scenic area in rural Japan that cuts through rice fields, pine forests by the ocean with very fresh clean air.

"I'VE LEARNED THAT FINISHING A MARATHON ISN'T JUST AN ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT. IT'S A STATE OF MIND; A STATE OF MIND THAT SAYS ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE" *John Hanc, running writer*

JAMIE PANG
(IT Project Manager)



2magazine: Why do you run?

Jamie Pang: Running to me is a form of stress relief, time for myself, keeping fit and on an even keel to cope with the pressures of daily life.

How often do you run?

When training for a marathon, I run five to six days a week.

How do you think marathon running helps you in the corporate world?

Running promotes a general sense of well-being and brings about change in an individual, and ultimately on a wider scale, that individual's effect on the corporation.

How do you feel after running a marathon?

Extremely fulfilled. The harder the race turns out to be, the greater the sense of achievement – especially when I've spent months in preparation for it.

What moment in running have you been most proud of?

Realizing my dream of running the New York City Marathon in 2008 and achieving it in a personal best time.

Where are your favourite places to run?

The East Coast Park in Singapore is a favorite since it's shady which helps combat the tropical humidity. The Kuala Lumpur Lake Gardens, otherwise known as the Taman Tasik Perdana, would be another favorite place as there are many route variations I can take.

How have the skills learned in marathon running helped you to achieve business success?

Training for and running a marathon teaches one the value of patience, humility, dedication, passion and perseverance. All of which will serve one not only in the business world but in one's personal life too. 🏃