

Hard Disk Cafe Toastmasters, CTM-10 presentation - Inspire your audience

CTM-10 “Inspirational Friends”

Bill Howell, 01Nov06

Opening

Seeing, understanding, and appreciating the efforts, skills and achievements of others is a major motivation and inspiration for our own lives.

We can all gain inspiration from great people who stand out in history, who stand out in our communities or our fields of endeavour. Alexander the Great, Albert Einstein, Mahatma Ghandi, Napoleon Bonaparte, and countless others stand large throughout time. But perhaps there is a danger in focussing too much on historical greats. They are too far removed from our own lives and we cannot observe them personally, perhaps they provide unrealistic examples for our own aspirations, and perhaps our own potential. Perhaps they are good long-term models for inspiration, but less appropriate for helping us to make all the steps along the way to achieving our goals.

And perhaps they tend to blind us to the inspiration that we can get from friends and associates.

I consider myself lucky to have worked and played with some pretty awesome people. I now realize that they have had far more impact on my own goals and efforts than the “big names in history”. And the standards that they have set have very often been daunting. I'll provide very, very brief descriptions of three people who have really inspired me.

Needles

My long distance “jogging” partner was given the nickname “Needles” because she sometimes shot cortisone into her knees in the middle of marathons to better manage “pains of inconvenience”. Everyone thought that she was crazy, and that she would destroy her body, but they couldn't understand. Running was and still is a big part of Needles life. She proved to me that all of the common sense, all of the truisms about running and health simply don't work in the details. What matters is you, your goals, your body, and your decisions.

We are completely different personalities, but the one thing we shared was that we are both slow runners. In fact, without Needles, I probably never would have run marathons, because I couldn't understand that you have to slow down, and control your pace. During the latter part of marathon distance runs, she would always talk about stopping, even though she never would. You knew she would never give up.

She just had her 60th birthday, she has really slowed down, but she's still running marathons. And this year a friend came up with a great idea. In order to qualify for the New York City marathon, instead of accompanying handicapped runners, she should now be able to qualify as a handicapped runner herself!! That would make it about her 50th marathon, not to mention 5 or six ultramarathons.

Jan Veizer

A very recent example of inspiration dates back to a couple of weeks ago when I organised sessions on solar physics in Ottawa. Luckily, Dr. Jan Veizer of the University of Ottawa was able to attend. This man has been crucified and vilified in the scientific journals for his unorthodox theories on climate

change, and his outspoken criticism of the main arguments of what I will call the “Kyoto Premise” -

During the solar presentations his level of frustration grew visibly. Being the facilitator or chair, I was trying to compromise and accommodate viewpoints, but Veizer kept raising questions and concerns that cut through the gaps and failures of some of the material. By the end of the sessions he couldn't hold back any more, and we were treated to an impromptu presentation over the noon hour that, from a climate change perspective, set the record straight and put everyone back onto a track that was solidly based. He was biting where needed, accommodating where the data and uncertainty begged caution.

How can someone be so clear, so firm, so well-founded and articulate - keeping himself on track so well? How can he continue to pursue “the truth” while been attacked so fiercely for so long? As a strong environmentalist at heart, how can he go against his own belief systems when the data and good analysis say otherwise? Most scientists don't seem to be able to do this!

Gary Yen

I'm probably out of time with this speech, so my last example I have to keep short. Suffice it to say that Gary was the General Chair of my “summer vacation conference” last July, involving 3,600 people. He also initiated a new scientific magazine for his society, and he published many highly complex and innovative scientific papers with his graduate students. How can he keep a million organisational details in his head? He knew some of the details of my conference tasks better than I did. In only one year he pulled more novel ideas out of the air and established a solid mathematical basis for them, when almost all of the scientists I know haven't even achieved one such idea.

In my mind, Gary Yen is proof positive that there are aliens on Earth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, you don't have to look far for local heroes, sources of inspiration that set seemingly unattainable goals for yourself. In this short presentation I cannot hope to give you any more than a flash of insight into some very extraordinary people that I've run into, and I've run into many more.

I think that it is important to draw inspiration from efforts and achievements of others. I also think that this is most effective when you work alongside them and can truly appreciate what they do. I also think that its important to believe in yourself, in spite of whatever limitations you have, because like a marathon run, you are really competing against yourself, you are trying to beat your own standards.

enddoc