

Marathon running

A hobby of global CEOs

The skills essential for business success can be learnt and honed by running marathons. The article identifies some of the CEO marathoners and their marathon running efforts, apart from highlighting the reasons and benefits for running marathons as outlined by them.

Running a business is like running a marathon. Some of the skills essential for business success can be learnt, honed and demonstrated by training for and running marathons. Hence, some marathon runners among the eligible senior executives are being recruited as CEOs and some CEOs are taking up marathon running. Executives involved in marathon running comment that marathon running helps them to hone their managerial and business skills, improve their fitness level to manage their companies and help them manage their stress. In this article, some of the CEO marathoners are identified and their marathon running efforts, the reasons for running marathons and benefits outlined by them are detailed and described. This information will be of use to CEOs and aspiring CEOs to assess the benefits of taking up the marathon running challenge in the foot steps of current CEO marathoners.

Marathon is a running race and the distance involved is 26 miles and 385 yards (26.22 miles). A person who finishes the marathon race is termed as marathoner. Nowadays, the emphasis in marathon race is on finishing the distance. Every marathon participant is in competition with himself to finish the distance as well as to improve his timing. Marathon running is very popular in the US and more than 382,000 persons finished marathons in 2005. Comparatively in India, around 1000 persons may have finished marathon.

CEO marathoners and their motives

According to Jerry Kline, the founder and CEO of Innovative Interfaces, which has stayed in the race to supply business systems to libraries around the world for more than 25 years, 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. According to Kline, he followed his marathon training and running approach in business. While many rival companies have come and gone, Innovative has grown steadily and profitably to a company of 280 employees.

Jim Jenness, chairman and CEO of Kellogg Co., is a marathon runner. Jenness describes running as a stress reliever, perspective regainer and reinventor. He praises marathon run as a confidence and self-esteem builder. His opinion is, "It makes you feel good about yourself and thereby you're going to do better in business." The psychic payoffs Jenness gets from a good run are tapped for the breakfast

wars that he wages as CEO of Kellogg. Some of the reasons that he attributes to marathon running among CEOs are: Being stoked by the same fire that pushed them to the top ranks of corporate America, trimming their double chins, and the need for more endurance to manage the stress, the global travel, the 24/7 media scrutiny that comes with being the head honcho.

The CEO marathoners list includes persons from well-known companies—Greg Brenneman of Burger King, Walt Disney Company's Robert Iger, Bill Perez of Nike, Klaus Kleinfeld of Siemens AG, Jack Brennan of mutual fund giant The Vanguard Group, and PepsiCo's Steve Reinemund.

Klaus Kleinfeld, top man at Siemens AG, runs ING New York City Marathon regularly. He says the long roadwork practice gives him time to absorb the audio versions of various books. One of the books, especially mentioned by him is, *of Winning*, the latest management primer by the hard-nosed former General Electric boss. He mentions that his mood on days when he doesn't make it out for his early-morning run is bad and whenever it happens, he blames himself and his office for improper work schedules.

Bill Gross, Known in the financial world as the Bond King is the chief investment officer for the Pacific Investment Management Company and he manages more than \$500 bn in assets and is known for aggressive maneuvers in bond markets. At a point of time, Gross was a 6:30 minute miler and had run one half-marathon. At that point of time, Bill Gross was trying to impress his date with his performances in running and the lady, herself being a long distance runner proposed a long run. They agreed upon running from the Golden Gate Bridge to Carmel, California, a distance of 157 miles in six 26.2-mile legs run over consecutive days. Both of them were obsessive persons. So two obsessive people had said, "this is our goal" and went ahead. Gross reported subsequently that after day-one he could hardly walk. A couple of days later he had pain in kidney comparable to kidney stone pain. Gross's girl friend begged him to stop running on the last day due to the amount of distress that he was exhibiting. He told her "We gotta finish". He finished the 157 mile run and made a fast trip to a hospital where he was told that one of his kidneys was bleeding. Fortunately, he recovered quickly.

According to management gurus, the traits exhibited by Gross during his six-day run and throughout his career are the norm among corporate leaders. These people are known for setting high standards; planning strategies to achieve them; and not letting so-called "challenges" like ruptured kidneys stop them. Targeting a 25% sales growth each year is similar to planning Personal Record (PR) at the next marathon.

The running CEOs manage the challenge of time management. Erik Blachford, 38, former CEO of online travel giant Expedia.com, ran or swam first thing in the morning, then commuted to work via bike. Blachford now sits on four boards, including that of bike tour operator Butterfield & Robinson. Nike's Bill Perez (a 3:48 marathoner) is up at 4:00 a.m. He heads out, at 5:00, for a four-mile run along the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon. On those runs, he says "I time myself every morning. You always want to have a better time. You have to believe in continuous improvement." Greg Brenneman of Burger King trains most mornings by 4:30 a.m. with an eight-mile run. The Walt Disney Company's Robert Iger, trains with predawn runs in Central Park in New York. Carla Cico, CEO of Brasil Telecom has been named by *Forbes* as one of the 50 most powerful women in the world. She has run a 4:15 marathon. Still, she's not satisfied. Cico works out at 4:30 a.m. with sub-four hours goal for the marathon.

Jack Brennan, a 3:10 Boston marathoner, often runs midday when the financial markets have slowed for lunch. He heads off from the suburban Philadelphia headquarters of Vanguard, the second-largest mutual fund investor, by himself or with coworkers who can keep up with the boss. "I work long days and find a run reenergizing," Brennan says. According to him, after the run he gets the energy to

go for another six or seven hours, and then to go home and be a competent father and husband. It's a mistake to ignore fitness in a high-stress, high-impact job, says Brennan.

In many cases, a CEO's worth is based on hitting marks like an end-of-day stock price or the quarterly earnings report. Running can help CEO to hit marks in one more front of action. Peter Dolan, now the CEO of pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers Squibb, ran his first marathon in 1981 in New York, when he was 25 years old in 3 hours and 55 minutes. In 1996, Dolan had the goal to beat his 15-year-old mark and to prove that "I was in better shape" at age 40 than 25. Instead, he finished in 4 hours and 12 minutes. He was frustrated, but not defeated. Just three weeks later he ran the Pittsburgh Marathon with timing of 3:48 (hours, minutes) achieving his goal. According to him, "The discipline, focus, and perseverance required to be a runner clearly translate into skills that are necessary and important to business. Breaking down a job into more manageable bites and setting up milestones along the way is how someone goes about running a long race and running a business."

John Legere, the CEO of Global Crossing, saw his photo in a copy of *The New York Times* in a July 31, 2002 story about his previous day of testimony before a US Senate committee on problems in the telecommunications industry and felt that he was totally out of shape. He started practicing for marathon running, and clocked 3:15 in ING New York City Marathon in his first attempt and 3:14 in his second attempt. Legere had managed head count reduction to 3,600 employees from a peak of 17,000, part of the fallout from going through the fourth-largest bankruptcy in US history. He had to endure a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation into alleged violations committed by the company's previous management. He brought Global Crossing out of Chapter 11. Legere says running is something that had kept him fit, physically and mentally, since he was a teenager.

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In the depths of Global Crossing's crisis, John Legere won the CEO division of a JP Morgan Corporate Challenge. Many in the crowd murmured about his tainted company's name, but Legere didn't flinch. He said the win signaled something to his employees about his winning abilities in highly challenging activities.

For some CEOs, a long run provides an opportunity to think about the job without a lot of clutter. PepsiCo's Reinemund uses running time as "Time to think through a subject. He averages a four-to-eight-mile run four to five days a week. According to him, he always keeps a pad of paper and pencil in his car and tries to capture his thoughts about anything from a new product idea to how to deal with a competitor.

One can wonder how typically overworked CEOs finding time to run long distances for weeks together to train for one of the most demanding sporting tests on the planet when most others struggle to go on a walk for a couple of times a week. They do it by focusing the same energies on athletics that they pour into their profession. Linda A Rahal, a marathon runner and president and COO of Washington (D.C.) law firm Trow & Rahal says, "Ironman training and racing is how I approach life: Set high standards and work extraordinarily hard."

Some executives are linking their extreme athletics to achieving social or corporate goals. The CEOs are being hailed as Chief Fitness Officers and Chief Endurance Officers of their companies by some sports writers. James Maguire Jr., CEO of Philadelphia Insurance Companies and seven of the company's staffers competed at a Florida Ironman competition. Their aim was to set a *Guinness Book*

of *World Records* mark for the most company employees competing in an Ironman distance event. Maguire claims the credit for motivating his staffers. He himself has finished five Ironman events. He hopes that the fitness culture will catch on with the rest of his 1,100 employees.

Physical fitness of CEOs – Recruitment aspect

According to Dennis Carey, a partner at Spencer Stuart, the Philadelphia-based executive recruiting firm, most corporate boards are now looking for leaders who get to the office early, stay late, and know that things don't come easy. A CEO's job is going to take a lot of licks, and that the job's never finished. So Carey, a former collegiate swimmer and triathlete, says he often looks for candidates with an athletic pedigree with background in finance or sales or law for prospective chief executives. A commitment to sports teaches humility because the participant knows how tough it is to get the results one desires. Arrogance doesn't fit in the executive suite. One of Carey's most notable placements was Ed Breen as the CEO of Tyco.

While one would expect an athlete to bring a certain "we're-all-in-this-together" attitude to leading an organization, doesn't the reputation of the singular, sometimes idiosyncratic runner work in contrast? According to Carey, marathon running is about integrity, hard work, passion, and hands-on dedication. A position specification for a marathon runner would be the same as for a great CEO. The physical fitness can be a big plus for the top job. According to Curt Coffman, author of the bestselling management book *First, Break All the Rules*, "The health of the CEO is a significant board-of-directors concern. An active, fit, running CEO can allay a lot of worries."

Beyond marathon running – Ironman (Traithlon) competition

Running has so infiltrated the corner office that a CEO Marathon Challenge and CEO Iron Man Challenge are being regularly held. Ironman event demands still more endurance. It involves swimming, cycling and running in a single day event. CEOs are actively participating in Ironman events also.

A record 18 CEO Challenge competitors had qualified for participation in the Ford Ironman World Championship conducted at Kailua-Kona, Hawaii on October 15, 2005. The competition is held in four categories - female, male over-50, 40 - 49, and under-40. The Ironman is regarded as the toughest single day endurance event in the world, and therefore the fastest male and female CEO Challenge finishers are given the title of "Fittest CEO in the World®." An Ironman event consists of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile marathon run. The details of 18 participants qualified from various countries are given in the table.

Indian CEOs' efforts in marathon running

In India, in the recent Mumbai Marathon, Anil Ambani, the CEO of Dhirubai Anil Ambani group participated in the half marathon. Along with him, in ladies category was joint managing director of Kinetic Engineering, Sulajja Firodia Motwani. I was also a participant in the half marathon section of Mumbai Marathon 2006. The participation of Ambani and Sulajja Motwan, gave birth to the idea of exploring the reasons for CEOs taking up marathon running and helped me to bring out this article. Compared to US, marathon running is in infancy in India. We will also see more CEOs in action in marathons in India in coming years. The information presented in this article may help in that process.

Discrimination between managerial success and effectiveness – Marathon analogy

Bernard M Bass, author of *Leadership, Psychology and Organizational Behavior* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1991) suggested a distinction between successful and effective leadership or management.

CEO Ironman challenge 2005 – Participants			
Name	Company	Qualifying Event	Qualifying Time Hrs.: Minutes
Female			
Leslie Myers	Foodsense, Inc, VT	Lake Placid	10:43
Anja Daechert	Daechert & Partner, Germany	Austria	11:43
Linda Rahal	Trow & Rahal, DC	Lake Placid	14:17
Male over 50			
Ernie Parr	Parr Insurance, IL	Coeur d'Alene	11:27
Larry Smith	Smith Chevrolet Cadillac, CA	Lake Placid	11:31
Whitney Lynn	RWBC, Inc, CA	Austria	14:39
40 – 49			
Giuseppe Maurizio	Deagostini Partworks, Italy	Austria	10:01
John McConville	Dexpharm Ltd, UK	Austria	10:06
Peter Scharer	In Foil Inc, CA	Lake Placid	10:21
Ted Philip	Decision Matrix Group, MA	Coeur d'Alene	10:26
Gunter Liska	Xerox Beteil., Austria	Austria	10:31
Max Hoes	CFR Line, NC	Coeur d'Alene	10:50
John Schlagenhauf	Badger Truck Center, WI	Lake Placid	10:52
Mike Dannelley	American Interbanc Mortgage, CA	Lake Placid	11:03
Under 40			
Frank Karbe	Exelixis, CA	Coeur d'Alene	9:46
Peter Lazar	Bank Austria Creditanstalt Financial Services, Austria	Austria	9:51
Gary Holt	Comfort Dental, CO	Coeur d'Alene	9:57
Alex May	Citigroup, NY	Lake Placid	10:25

Source: <http://www.ceochallenges.com/article.asp?c=144>

Successful leaders achieve the goal of the organization. But some of them may demoralize the organization in that process. Effective leaders build an organization of high morale. Success has to do with how the group behaves. Effectiveness is attitudinal in nature. Society wants leaders who are both successful and effective. This distinction can be identified in marathon running efforts. A person can complete a marathon successfully, but can injure himself so seriously that he is out of even normal action for a long period of time. Some participants can be out of action within the marathon run itself. An effective marathon runner recovers quickly from the marathon effort and becomes a stronger person. CEOs who participate successfully and effectively in marathon runs may understand the analogy in running their business concerns and manage their human resources in such a way that success is attained along with maintaining a favorable and positive attitude among their associates.

Conclusion

A number of CEOs are participating in marathon runs. They express that their marathon running gives them psychological and physical rewards that are of use in managing the business. Aspiring managers to junior, senior and CEO levels have to learn from it and take up a suitable and appropriate similar physical challenge or marathon itself.

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Reference # 15M-2006-07-12-01