

SPORT CAN BUILD BUSINESS MUSCLES

Jill Fraser explores the connection between sporting success and business success



Marius Grobbelaar

TODAY SAVVY employers routinely ask prospective job candidates, “What sport did you play in high school?”

The correlation between sporting prowess and business acumen is now widely accepted – from boardrooms to business management institutes – and this maxim is shaping a new corporate mindset.

The link between sport and career achievement ticks a broad range of boxes determined by individual scenarios. But a consensus prevails: the sport/business synergy is generally positive and the skills and behaviour codes are interchangeable.

Kevin Filo, senior lecturer at Griffith University’s Business School, maintains that the key aspect of the link relates to “intrinsic motivation”.

“To succeed in your job you need to be intrinsically motivated. If you’re only in your line of work for

financial gain, you might not set yourself up to succeed,” Filo told *Australian Broker*.

“Participation in sport activates intrinsic motivation, which has three components: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy means you want to be self-directed, mastery means you want to keep improving, and purpose means you want to serve something beyond the individual; you want to be part of something bigger than yourself.”

The mortgage industry has no shortage of sporting champions. But it’s hard to go past Perth-based, specialised commercial short-term lender Quantum Credit as a standout example of the significance of sport in the management leadership equation.

Within the short-term finance organisation’s ranks, five of the senior management team are

surfski events on the open ocean with 20-year-olds, agrees that there are many parallels between sport and business.

Echoing Filo’s sentiment regarding “intrinsic motivation” superseding bottom-line motivation, Eadie says that while he enjoys co-steering Quantum Credit’s successful expansion, it’s not what drives him.

“My philosophy is, have fun and the results will come to you,” he says.

“One of the reasons I picked surfskiing is because it’s fun and I love doing it. The same with business; I love achieving and participating in a process that gets results.

“I’m not super motivated by the idea that I have to beat somebody. It’s all about balance.”

Achieving balance is a common theme expressed by Quantum Credit’s sportsmen.

Operations and credit executive Rhode Truter, a fanatical cyclist, is the organiser of a cycling association that raises funds for charities such as beyondblue through its rides.

“In life everything is about balance, and everything in life has a price. If you work or train 20 hours a day you sacrifice family,” he says.

Truter was middle-aged when he started cycling.

“I couldn’t afford a Porsche so I bought a bicycle,” he laughs.

“I started doing 3km down to the beach and back and progressed from there.”

The motto of the club and biannual cycling events he organises is “redefine your limits”.

“The rationale behind that motto is the importance of encouraging ourselves and each other to step outside our comfort zones and accomplish something we often don’t think we’re capable of,” he says.

He admits that recently taking on the role of Quantum Credit’s operations and credit executive meant stepping outside his own traditional comfort zone.

Through sport Truter says he has learned to value what he would once have perceived as menial roles. In the case of cycling, he has acquired great respect for the ‘sweeper’, the person (now himself) who always rides at the back of the pack and helps those who are struggling.

“And I’ve seen how this model is reflected in business,” he says.

David Rooney, professor of management in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Macquarie University, refers to Truter’s realisation as an illustration

of “the opportunities that sport presents to develop wisdom”.

One of Rooney’s fields of expertise is the role of wisdom in management. Sport, he says, affords many opportunities to develop wisdom.

“Wisdom comes from learning from experience and reflecting deeply on what was gleaned through that,” he explains.

Quantum Credit’s loans manager, Jacques Meyer, an ultra-marathon runner, a consistent silver medal winner and the most decorated mature-age sportsman in the team, admits he acquires great insights into himself and life as he pounds the pavement.

“People sometimes say, ‘Isn’t running boring? What do you think about while you’re out there for three or four hours?’

“I’m constantly monitoring how I’m feeling and assessing my energy levels,” he says.

Introspection is inherent within the running experience for Meyer, but it’s ‘the zone’ that intrigues him.

“The meditative elements are immense,” he says. “You definitely get into a space that’s described as ‘the zone’.

“My wife tells me she’s going to yoga to meditate. I tell my colleagues

that everything I do now becomes a meditation. Sitting at my desk doing my job can even become a meditation. It’s about getting into that zone every day, and I attribute this to my experience when running.”

Another quality Meyer has taken from marathon running is patience.

“You have to pace yourself in a marathon,” he says. “You can’t go too fast too soon. Work is the same. You can’t go flat out all the time. You need to strategise.”

Quantum Credit executive director John Broadway refers to himself as a “fish and chips runner” who appreciates the participation and camaraderie of triathlons and adventure races.

Broadway confesses that as he’s got older his urge to compete and super-achieve is diminishing. He ascribes to the ‘healthy body, healthy mind’ tenet, along with the philosophy of achievement and goal-setting in sport, which he maintains is readily transferable to a business environment.

He notes that he and his colleagues at Quantum Credit are all solitary sportsmen who can play in a team when necessary.

“I think there is a distinction

between a solitary sportsperson versus someone who is innately a team sportsperson,” he says.

“Everyone here is an entrepreneur, whereas a team person might more commonly be found in a corporate environment.”

Broadway shared his perspective on non-participants in sport.

“Having interviewed hundreds of people for jobs over the years I have seen that those who don’t participate in any form of sport, other than from a prostate position on the couch, can sometimes present as out of shape and unfocused. They don’t always turn out to be the employees who go furthest,” he says.

Quantum Credit co-founder (along with Richard Eadie) and executive director Marius Grobbelaar was a track star in his youth while at school in South Africa and at university in the US.

He shifted to triathlons in his ‘30s. In 2009 he began scaling back and concedes that his current views may be contrary to those of some of his colleagues.

“One of the reasons I stopped competing at an elite level and participating in endurance events was because that was where my creative energies were flowing,” Grobbelaar says.

“We have a limited reservoir to use every day, and in many instances I feel that sport absorbs your creativity.”

“I’m still active in sports, I still exercise and I’m still healthy, but I’m careful not to overtrain and retain a balance.

“I will always be in favour of participating in sport; it develops many skills that are useful in business.

“But I’ve noticed that when people take up extreme pursuits and ultra-endurance events their input and output can diminish because their passion for their sport is dominating.”

Grobbelaar turned 40 in 2009, the year he did the half-Ironman.

He says he found the physical demands of training in three disciplines too much.

“By 3 o’clock in the afternoon my body was shot and I wasn’t worth anything,” he confesses.

“There is a tipping point when it becomes physically too demanding and your creativity gets stunted.

“In summary, my take is that sport should stimulate and promote creativity but never get to the point where it absorbs it,” Grobbelaar maintains. **AB**



John Broadway

KEY LESSONS

David Rooney, professor of management in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Macquarie University, outlined the following key lessons that emerge from sport and business and if applied will lead to success in both arenas.

- A** The ability to delay gratification
- B** The ability to regulate emotions, particularly under pressure
- C** The ability to execute and function under pressure
- D** Discipline
- E** An understanding of the importance of deep learning and the mastering of skills
- F** Resilience and the ability to bounce back from failure
- G** The ability to understand the complex relationship between competition and collaboration
- H** Sportsmanship and sporting values
- I** Neither sport nor business success is born from the attitude of winning at any cost



Richard Eadie



Jacques Meyer



Rhode Truter