

The Power of Passion

by Grant Woolliams

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Think Outside...

The late Sir Edmund Hillary was into "Peak Performance" big-time.

"Peak performance" implies sustained achievement - the ongoing output of the best of which one is capable. Sir Ed didn't just go up and down a few times; he also went on and on.

But is talent, education and training - even when combined - sufficient to enable an individual or team to sustain peak performance?

I don't think so, and neither did the 30th President of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, who wrote a superb verse about the value of application:

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."

So if talent, genius and education aren't enough to produce sustained peak performance what is?

The X factor - the something that motivates people to continually achieve the best they can - has to be passion (in all its guises). Enduring peak performers put their "heart and soul" into what they do.

A common denominator of weekly MYOB Awesome Service Award winners (see the Winners Gallery at www.awesomeservice.co.nz) is passion and enthusiasm. Clients and customers nominate them because they sense the X factor, and appreciate being treated as more than walking wallets.

Award winners typically own, or are employed, by small and medium-sized businesses. But multinational companies also

produce winners. MYOB became involved in the Awesome Service Awards after one of its enthusiastic call centre staff was nominated by an accountant who was over-the-moon by the service she got.

Well known businessmen Michael Hill and Michael Barnett - by any standard peak performers - also support the awards.

What is apparent is that the passion of peak performers has focus. Hewlett Packard's Warwick Grey (also an award supporter) loves small and medium sized businesses. He has helped start them, grow them, and bought and sold them.

In 20 years in marketing roles with IT companies he has invested more than \$20 million in New Zealand businesses, in recent years through marketing roles within Microsoft and Hewlett Packard.

Until recently Warwick was SMB marketing manager for Hewlett Packard in New Zealand. While in this role he set up the HP New Zealand Marketing Council, was awarded a number of internal HP achievement awards, and won an HP Asia Pacific Leadership Award in 2007.

In 2008 the New Zealand Excellence Foundation awarded him the title of "Most Significant Contribution to Business Support by an Individual" as part of the Vero Excellence in Business Support Awards.

His award entry was supported by 15 references written by people in business who have benefited from his passionate support of them and their organisations. Here's a sample of quotes, each from different supporters:

- "Warwick is one of those few corporate people who understand that selling their product to the marketplace happens as a result of their organisation's understanding of, education of, engagement with, support for and ongoing provision of service

to a community, or really a number of communities, of small business owners... unlike most corporate sector sponsors, Warwick gets on board behind his partners personally, not only investing financially in relationships which benefit small businesses, but opening doors, making introductions, offering mentorship, advice, support in kind, and taking a genuine, personal interest in the people and organisations with which he engages..."

- "Warwick epitomises the very best of business support in New Zealand and has earned the admiration of many through his ability to understand issues, champion causes and connect with business owners and leaders..."

- "...Warwick is a technical evangelist that actually likes to see productivity improvements in small businesses..."

- "The enthusiasm he showed toward our start up venture was enough to ensure we'd never let our business slide - we simply didn't want to let Warwick down... has restored my faith in larger corporations."

...And the accolades continue in the same vein.

Passionate commitment is a magnet - and HP used one of theirs in December to pull Warwick across the Tasman, promoting him to personal systems group marketing manager for Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific based in Sydney.

So, can "passion" (and rewarding it) be explicit in your business plan? How about this:

- Spend more/most/all of your time and money training and developing your already passionate team members, rather than - or at least before - trying to fire up their less motivated peers.

* Grant assists in running the MYOB Awesome Service Awards which reward individuals for providing great customer/client service. To nominate someone who has given you service with passion go to www.awesomeservice.co.nz.