

Struggling to always do our best

by MARK PAVILONS

Have you tried your best today?

Albeit a bit cliché, this saying stands the test of time.

If we get up every morning and try to give 100%, or even 80%, that's something. It shows we're committed to, well, something, anything.

What really is your best? I believe it all depends on the individual. We must be realistic in the goals we set and we need to know our limits. It's an exercise of sorts, working our 'talent muscles' so they can spring into action without even being called upon.

Johnny Reid urged us to: "... keeping grounded and not really getting above yourself and always trying your best to be yourself."

Some days, our best may be amazing, while others quite modest. They say the key is consistency and just 'showing up.'

In this hectic, stressful society, it's not easy to welcome each new day with the awesome wonder of a child. It can be a chore just to make it out the door.

If you're struggling, mentally or physically, the task sometimes becomes insurmountable. But that's okay, too. We're not perfect, not by a long shot. Heck, I don't even know what perfection is.

Very few jobs are solo efforts. Most often, it takes a team of dedicated individuals to make things happen both at home and at work.

As such our family and team members feed off us, and how we approach tasks sets the tone for how others will approach it.

Generally speaking, I think people are task-oriented - we thrive on doing something. Give us a problem and we'll try to solve it. Hand us a wrench and we'll turn it.

I think that's linked to our own self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. As 'pack animals,' our ancestors, in order to stand out from the rest of the Neanderthals, had to rise to the occasion, take on each challenge and do it with gusto. So, our survival of the fittest instinct has led us to the survival of the best widget-maker, retailer or story writer.

People also like to take pride in their work. Just ask any creative type - artists, actors, plumbers, blacksmiths, carpenters and computer programmers.

When you do give your best and you 'nail it,' your chest puffs out, you stand back to take it all in, and smile to yourself.

'The desire to reach for the sky runs deep in our human psyche,' according to Cesar Pelli.

It's natural for us to seek progress and self-betterment. We like to push ourselves.

Motivation is a big factor, and I wonder just how far we've come from Pavlov's doggy treat concept. Our motivations can be quite selfish, even greedy. We are passionate beings, but we are also susceptible to those deadly sins.

Psychologists believe the desire to be better than others can spring from factors like social comparison, competition, and the desire for fame or status. Seeking improvement with the goal of benefiting humanity reflects a more altruistic and collective mind set,

focusing on contributing to the greater good.

Our education system has always been the cornerstone of measuring student achievement. Sure, there's always pressure to achieve those high marks and we've learned over the years that current instruction isn't gender-neutral. Grades, report cards, attendance, are all being reviewed by Ontario's Education Ministry to address shortcomings in the system.

Neuroscience suggests that the act of seeking itself, rather than achieving the end goal, is intrinsically motivating and leads to satisfaction. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, present in all mammals, is linked to reward and pleasure.

But the big nut we have to crack is selflessness or self-interest? That's the question and modern-day dilemma

A team of scientists approached the question of what guides altruism from the perspective of motivation. The team, including Kyle Law, a postdoctoral researcher at Arizona State University, and Ph.D. student Seoyeon Bae from Boston College, studied anonymous survey responses from almost 1 million individuals spread over more than 100 countries. They found that the vast majority reported performing acts of altruism because they were interested in the well-being of others, not because these acts benefitted them indirectly.

“People are more likely to want to be remembered for making a difference, helping others, and improving the world,” says Bae, “and to value things like caring over status or personal gains.”

People are more likely to value things like caring over status or personal gains. Think about that.

That's true evolution. When in history has that ever been the case?

I do believe most of us are, deep down, good, decent human beings.

We're born that way. It's only through trials, tribulations and tragedies that our “goodness” is somewhat kneaded out of us.

But “and this is a big one” if we look around the world today, millions of people, countries, governments, dictatorships and yes, criminals, are at their peak performance levels, too. They seem to have taken the “self-betterment” idea to a whole new level of self-centred greed. So, perhaps we're not motivated by altruistic intentions after all.

I imagine the survey wasn't given to the thieves, violent criminals and scammers in our society.

Yes, there are heartless souls in our midst, and more and more are trying to find new, innovative ways to steal from us.

Instead of trying their best, these selfish jerks put personal gain above all.

I would point a prophetic finger at all of them if I could.

It's a shame that most of us average folks get out of bed in the morning with the intention of doing good or making difference.

Maybe we need to put that into everyone's first sip of morning coffee.

Perhaps we need to do our best when it comes to selfless acts of kindness, spreading joy and just being there for one another.

Again, have you done your best today?