

Finding Your Inner Hero

by Dave Norton, M.A., R.C.C.

I am often awestruck by enormous accomplishments which some people are able to achieve in spite of overwhelming odds against them. The Vancouver Olympics provided ample evidence of the heroism that lifts the human spirit. Petra Majdic, a cross country skier from Slovenia, flew off course into a gully, severely injuring herself, yet she was able to rally, complete her race and win a bronze medal heroically. Skiing in front of her whole team, she inspired her colleagues. Her coach noted that the three-time sportswoman of the year lifted her teammates with the power of her will to win for her country. In 1992, Canada's Silken Laumann raced to a bronze medal in Barcelona only a few weeks after suffering a major leg injury. She has since become a role model exhibiting courage, strength and the care of others as she inspires others through her public service. These two women are examples of heroic performance inspired by the support and courage of and for others. Their success mattered to them, to their teams, families and nations.

The late Ernest "Smokey" Smith has been revered as the only Canadian man to win the Victoria Cross for bravery. He earned this honour in World War II for single-handedly turning back a tank division to save his comrades. Smokey was the first to say that he was only doing his job, nothing special. He would point to the many thousands of men and women who selflessly served our nation to defend our freedom because it mattered to them. It was important. Acts of heroism are accomplished daily by people who are motivated by a concern for others. Some of these acts are reported. Most are simply achieved in the course of day-to-day living and are known only to those who were positively affected.

Mattering is not just caring about people. Mattering is a motivating factor in human relationships and human performance. Mattering involves feeling that we are the object of somebody else's attention, that we are important to them. It means that people depend on us, and they measure their success through our success as well as their own. Classically, this relationship is found between parent and child, between husband and wife. It is not just love or caring, it is feeling that we truly matter. We take pride in our accomplishments both large and small, and of those whom we share our lives with.

We saw many examples of this motivating factor at the recent Vancouver Olympics when athletes as well as their parents and families were interviewed by the media, both before as well as after events took place. The nation sat on the edge of their collective seats that first Saturday night of the games, hoping that a Canadian would win our first ever gold medal at home in an Olympic event. When Alexandre Bilodeau raced across the finish line to win Olympic gold in skiing, the nation celebrated. Alexandre turned and looked with pride and love to his brother Frederic, who battles cerebral palsy every day. Frederic, 28, was not supposed to walk past age 10. He stood, triumphantly, waving his red mittens, as his brother crossed the finish line. "My brother is my inspiration," Bilodeau said, wiping tears from his eyes. "He taught me so many things in my life."

Wayne Gretzky gave us an example of the motivating force of mattering in action at the last World Cup of hockey in the 1990's. When asked about playing again with ex-team mates Paul Coffey and Mark Messier he stated, "Mark, Paul and I have a special relationship. We always

push for each other. If Paul scores two goals and two assists, we all feel equally successful. It is like we all achieved it.”

Smokey Smith performed an incredible act of heroism, because his friends mattered to him and he was willing to give his life for them if needed. Terry Fox wanted to run across Canada to raise awareness and money to fight cancer and to show the world how much can be achieved by one single man who is motivated to help others. Hoping to raise one dollar from each Canadian at the time, his goal of 20 million dollars now stands at 500 million dollars worldwide. Rick Hansen travelled the world because it mattered to him to show the world how much can be accomplished by the physically challenged. Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther king, Jr. were willing to give their lives and freedoms for the advancement of their people. History is filled with examples of how people achieved almost miraculous achievements for causes outside of themselves.

Mattering takes place everywhere, everyday. You just have to look for it. It may be a teacher motivating a student to overcome a challenge. It may be a Social Worker protecting a child from harm. A firefighter saving a home or a police officer protecting the public. It may be a nurse, a parent, a friend or anyone who uses their relationship to motivate another to be the best they can be. The literature of motivational lecturers and business performance specialists has many examples of this motivating factor put in other terms. There are many corporations which have attained great success through placing pride in their employees in the forefront above all other values. Quite simply, when we feel that we are important to someone, that they care about us, that they depend upon us, and that they measure their success from our success and this feeling is felt mutually, that is mattering. We have a far greater tendency to achieve at a higher level in whatever endeavour we are involved in when we feel we matter. This mattering motive nurtures all positive human relationships.

So take a moment to think about somebody who matters to you. It may be your partner, child, an employee or employer, friend or associate. Then do something to show them that they matter to you. I did not know Smokey Smith personally. I do know his daughter Norma. Smokey was correct when he said that it does not take much to be a hero. People just have to matter to you. So let somebody know they are important you, that they can depend upon you and that you wish the best for them. Try being a hero to someone today and every day. The benefits will enrich your life and the lives of those who are important to you.