



THE



NEW



AFTER



WORK



DRINK



Swap your cocktail for a protein drink. Recruitment experts say you need a few marathons under your belt for the best chance of landing a top job. *Stylist* investigates

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Think about your job description for a moment. You know, the one you pored over when you were weighing up whether you were cut out for the role. No doubt it listed required qualifications, preferred attributes and specific experience, not to mention desired skills such as efficiency, initiative and team-playing. What it most likely didn't demand was that you were a seasoned marathon-runner, or that you'd completed two triathlons and were in training for a third. Yet, these are exactly the kind of attributes that recruitment experts say are increasingly coveted in candidates when canvassing CVs today. And in some firms, they could even be the clincher in deciding who wins the top job.

The latest research from Germany reveals a burgeoning belief among big businesses that people who have completed challenging sporting events are more likely to make goal-focused, productive employees. And it's a trend that comes straight from the top: the study suggests that CEOs who run marathons are more likely to run highly profitable companies. Indeed, it showed that businesses managed by bosses partial to pounding out serious mileage were valued at between four and 10% higher than those run by less active counterparts.

High achievers

"The more senior the role we're recruiting for, the more important it is for candidates to tangibly demonstrate the skills associated with success in the business world – dedication, focus, tenacity," explains David Dumeresque, a partner at executive headhunter firm Tyzack. "Being able to say you've completed endurance events definitely helps paint a picture of someone who's proven to be an achiever, who can deliver results."

In tandem with this recruitment trend, more of us are taking on extreme physical challenges than ever before, with activity dramatically increasing among women. Last year, the notoriously tough Ironman 70.3 triathlon saw a 35% increase in female participants around the country, and there has been a 12% increase in UK female marathon runners over the past five years. Even events marketed at male competitors are enjoying an unprecedented uptake from women; last year's *Men's Health Survival Of The Fittest* series (an urban assault course that involves scaling walls, running against spraying water and scrambling through mud) reported that over a quarter of their participants were female.

What makes these statistics interesting is the sort of women who are signing up: invariably high-achievers, holding senior management positions in large companies or boasting

success in their own start-ups. The latest numbers from Ironman show that a massive 73% of their triathlon competitors are management executives.

So why the sudden uplift? Once you've tasted a certain level of professional success, are you more inclined to set new goals outside of the workplace? Or does engaging in high-stamina activity outside your comfort zone help to sharpen your focus professionally?

It might be a bit of both. According to Richard Simmons, director of industry practice at executive recruitment firm Harvey Nash, the link between taking part in extreme endurance events and scaling the career ladder is twofold. "There is the logical explanation: that highly motivated, ambitious individuals will tend to be highly motivated and goal-oriented in other areas of life. And without a concrete objective to train for, their interest in fitness is likely to be affected by a different, more urgent task. So, in a sense, committing to an endurance trial is the best way to guarantee their own commitment to exercise," he explains.

"But, arguably more interesting is the flipside: that competing in such challenges could make you a better worker and a more attractive prospect to potential employers – or a more

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effective manager yourself," he continues. "If I'm looking for extra-curricular evidence to prove an individual is results-driven, endurance activities such as Tough Mudder or a marathon offer more positive evidence than a gym membership. Why? Because I know that this person can – and will – always find time."

That's the experience of Tamara Hill-Knowlton, founder and creative director of activewear brand Sweaty Betty, which has over 30 stores nationwide. "Taking part in triathlons has helped increase my confidence and made me more likely to step outside of my comfort zone, which is key to growing my business. It's also taught me that sometimes things don't go according to plan and you have to adapt. Developing that mindset makes good business sense."

Dumeresque confirms that sporting success is already on the CVs of most CEO-level candidates – and that it's a trend that's trickling down the lower rungs of the corporate ladder. "There's an increasing correlation between sporting achievement and success in senior management positions. But we're also seeing increasing numbers of employees at more junior levels getting stuck into physical challenges to show their good 'all-rounder' credentials. At the

moment, this is most apparent in the office itself, where employees are volunteering to join corporate teams taking part in charitable sporting events. The employee is not just showing that their commitment to the company extends beyond their job spec, but it all ties into corporate social responsibility too. By making the company look good, you're making yourself look good – both to the company you currently work for as well as prospective employers in the future."

Feel the benefits

Helen Akande, 40, head of EMEA marketing at digital advertising company Turn, credits her Tough Mudder training with making her better at business. "It has benefited me professionally as it helps build commitment to seeing through a task that's not easy. You need to show perseverance when you're training and, more importantly, on the course itself – and that resilience is something that can be applied in business when you are faced with a challenge or difficulties that are standing in the way of getting to your goal."

Emma Lawrence-Jones, 31, a customer experience manager at online ticket buying site, Stubhub has run the Paris marathon plus four half marathons in the UK. "Training helps me de-stress, then when I'm back at work, I approach issues in a calm, more considered way. Exercise helps re-energise my mind and look at situations differently."

And of course, there are numerous other reasons why employers could do worse than scan a CV for marathon times as well as work experience. Countless scientific studies have shown that people who work out on a regular basis experience health and wellbeing benefits that directly correlate to their performance at work. Research published in the *Journal Of Applied Physiology* proved that weight training increases levels of norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter that helps the brain cope better with stress and anxiety, by 36%.

Another study has shown that 40 minutes of vigorous running can increase your body's levels of the protein BDNF by more than 30%, which in turn activates brain stem cells to fire up new neurones, promoting better memory and concentration.

Fit for the job

"Working hard at a senior level is an endurance sport in itself, so it goes without saying that maintaining a high level of fitness is essential to career success," explains Dr Rhonda Cohen, sport and exercise psychologist at Middlesex University. "Employees who work out regularly are proven to have higher energy levels, produce better work and take less sick leave."



→ With all this in mind, the researchers behind the original German marathon study now regard their results as evidence that businesses should use high levels of physical fitness as a hiring requirement for influential professionals. "This is how women have got to the top in traditionally male-dominated environments," confirms Laurent Bannock, founder of Guru Performance, who trains athletes including rugby stars and the Olympic fencing team. "These women are the ultimate goal-focused clients – the 'go-getters'." And if the head of the company is a marathon fan themselves, listing a marathon on your CV could make an even bigger statement.

"There's a tendency for people to employ in their own image – we call it the 'like me' bias," explains Simmons. "So if the CEO runs the London Marathon every year, they're likely to lean towards someone who shows that same interest, if faced with two otherwise equal candidates." If Tania Segovia's team is anything to go by, this certainly seems true. The 34-year-old senior manager at a global law firm works with a team of active individuals, where half of them recently ran the Bath Half Marathon and are planning on entering Tough Mudder later this year. "It's not a specific policy, but I think in many international companies there is a preference for sporty people who take on high stamina challenges because it demonstrates commitment and resilience," she says. "It's only natural you'd want those skills in your colleagues too."

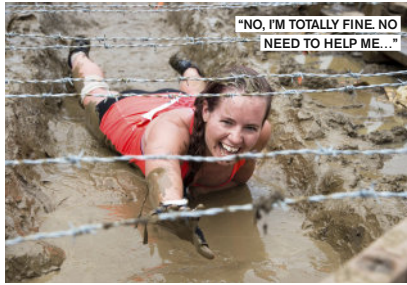
“EMPLOYERS WANT TO SEE DEDICATION BEYOND THE OFFICE”

But what if you're not 'that sort of person'? What if the idea of running a marathon or committing to a triathlon is entirely beyond you? "I signed up for the Paris Marathon before I could even run five miles," laughs Lawrence-Jones. "At first, I never thought I'd actually do it, but then you put the time in and realise that, actually, you can do anything if you put your mind to it. It's become entirely true of my work. Training for that first marathon meant I was not only working more efficiently in the office in order to fit it in, achieving more in the process. It also spurred me to push for a promotion and pay rise that I'd never have had the confidence to go for before. I got them both and it felt great."

Dumeresque wholeheartedly agrees. "Everyone can do something," he says. "For various reasons, I can't run – so I signed up for the Three Peaks Challenge instead, which involves climbing the highest mountains in England, Scotland and Wales in 24 hours. Or, rather than doing a marathon in one go, why not complete the 26.2-mile distance over the course of a month instead. What employers want is an eagerness to show dedication beyond the confines of the office." There are a wide range of ways to do that. How punishing you make it is up to you. S

ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH?

Regular marathon? Pah! Try one of these extreme challenges on for size



"NO, I'M TOTALLY FINE. NO NEED TO HELP ME..."

TOUGH MUDDER

Like *Total Wipeout* with mud, this obstacle course covers 12 miles and involves wall climbing and heavy lifting. Camaraderie is a big focus, testing team skills as much as physical strength, so much so that organisers don't even time your efforts. **Various dates; £119; toughmudder.co.uk**



THE CYCLIST'S THIGHS WERE GRATEFUL FOR THE DOWNHILL STRETCHES

CHASE THE SUN

On the longest day of the year, over 200 cyclists will attempt to ride more than 200 miles over 17 hours in this extreme cycle-a-thon, designed to follow the sun from its rise in the east of England (at 4.35am) to its setting in the west (at around 9.30pm). **18 June; free; chasethesun.org**



AS DORY WOULD SAY: "JUST KEEP SWIMMING"

IRONMAN

The definitive triathlon, Ironman was created by Naval Officer John Collins and his wife Judy in 1978, consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike race and 26.2-mile run. It has since become an international phenomenon, with 180 events in over 20 countries. **Various dates; £395; eu.ironman.com**



GET SOME HIGH FIVES AND SEE THE BIG FIVE AT THIS SOUTH AFRICAN MARATHON

BIG FIVE MARATHON

This race takes runners through the heart of the Entabeni game reserve in South Africa, so you're likely to come across the Big Five (elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion and leopard) on your 26.2-mile stampede across the savannah. Entry packages start from £1,475. **25 June; big-five-marathon.com**



BEATLES FANS TAKING IT TO EXTREMES: ABBEY ROAD AFTER A SNOW STORM

NORTH POLE MARATHON

For seasoned marathon runners, this race is run in sub-zero temperatures across the ice sheets of the North Pole. It costs £11,100 to enter – including flights, accommodation and souped-up medical insurance – but it's almost worth it for bragging rights alone. **9 April 2017; nparathon.com**



TAKE ON 200 OBSTACLES IN THIS GRUELLING 20-MILE CHALLENGE

RAT RACE DIRTY WEEKEND

Part run, part monster after-party, this annual event at Burghley House, Lincolnshire has the world's biggest assault course – 20 miles and 200 obstacles (including hurdles and balance beams). It's designed to smash your physical limits, and is as social as it is crippling. **6-8 May; from £139; ratrace.com**

