



Warm up

SOMETIMES IT ISN'T ALL IN YOUR HEAD

IN HER NEW COLUMN, DAWN
TUFFERY UNPICKS THE POWER
OF MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES.

Trawera Ultramarathon put out a nice series of posters a few years back, featuring top runners and the words: "Do something extraordinary." I still

have one on the wall. At its best, it's great inspiration, a nudge – 'Go for the run!' 'Set a goal!' 'Make cool things happen rather than fluffing around on your phone.'

At its worst, and this is not the poster's fault, it's incredibly frustrating.

Social media loves such run-spiration. If you're connected to a running tribe, they'll pop up on a daily basis. You know the ones. They say things like:

Pain is temporary, quitting is forever.

Ultras are 90 per cent mental and the rest is in your head.

The question isn't 'can you?', it's 'will you?'

Go as far as you can and then take another step.

Awesome is never achieved within your comfort zone.

All solid, powerful messages at the right time, but at the wrong time, they're like

a mini-blow to the stomach. It's a slightly different beast from Fear Of Missing Out, although that can be simultaneous. One is about wanting to do what your friends are doing, and the other is feasting on your insecurities while minimising challenges you may be facing.

Everyone has times when they're out of action, through injury, physical or mental illness, or simply a necessary shift in priorities (family, work...)

My longest stint off running in recent years was due to persistent, deep fatigue for a good number of months, potentially related to hormone changes after finishing breastfeeding – or the several ultras earlier in the year. Who knows? I still think the former, but causes are difficult to to diagnose.

Even if you don't know what it's officially called, anyone who's experienced a similar



Photos by Paul Petch Photography

enough you'd persevere and be out running now. No awesome for you!"

Truth is, the quotes aren't always right. Sometimes it's not the best thing to push through. One more step might be really bad for you if you're injured or fatigued. Sometimes it actually isn't all in your head. And you're still awesome.

Do something remarkable

But back to "Do something extraordinary". If

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state knows what it feels like. Walking through mud to get ready for the day despite being in bed for eight hours, discovering new levels of empty or feeling like crying when you try a 3km jog and simply can't run up any gentle rise.

It doesn't matter what distances you were smashing previously, or at what pace. It's not about taking more iron. You know without doubt that something is thoroughly awry with your body, beyond even the power of an inspiring meme.

I would glare at the poster on the wall, and rage inwardly: "Right now, getting off this bed after work and preparing a vaguely balanced meal for my child is all the extraordinary I can manage."

It still felt hollow, like I was making excuses to myself. "Quitter!" say the social media quotes. "If you were really committed

we look at the key word, it helps drill down which aspects are feeding the melancholy and how to mitigate it. 'Extraordinary' is defined as both 'remarkable' and 'unusual, out of the ordinary'.

A single parent getting up to a baby several times a night for months on end and remaining functional is remarkable. Processing grief while dealing with daily life, having the long-term depth of focus to create something significant, making a point of relating to others with kindness and compassion – they're all remarkable and incredibly valuable, but not necessarily considered extraordinary. Because people do them every day, often privately, it's hard to find a focus point of celebration.

As Joseph Campbell says, a person's ordeal or cross that we all share is seen "not in the bright moments of his tribe's great

victories, but in the silences of his personal despair."

I remember being at a playgroup and bemoaning the lack of finish-line euphoria when parenting a small child. The non-running mums were...unsympathetic. "It's not that I want to 'finish' parenting," I explained, digging the hole deeper. "It's like finishing a big race can create a magic moment for all the effort to rally around, a memory to savour amid the hard parts. Not that raising a child isn't rewarding in its own right. No, I'm not asking for a drudgery medal. Yes, I do actually like my child..."

Unlike caregiving or contributing something tangible to the world, there's nothing inherently useful about running, even if you run really far. Despite this, it is still 'remarkable' in many ways, and adds in the 'unusual' factor.

The most exciting thing about big races is novelty – it's a step completely away from what you do every day. We crave ultras because they're not ordinary. There will be triumphs and heartache and perseverance and time in nature, quite unlike the average work day. Your friends will be impressed, because it's different to their experience. Events offer a simple goal that will require incredible focus and dedication, and, at the end, the possibility of a transcendent moment that will still make you smile when you think about it years later.

I found an odd reassurance in recognising the difference between 'remarkable' and 'out of the ordinary', because while they're both part of 'extraordinary', it makes it clear which of the two matters most. When the opportunity to do events came around again, I appreciated it hugely while keeping things in perspective.

By all means, treasure the achievement of a race well-run. It's an amazing thing to have worked hard and then have everything align to help you accomplish something beyond your perceived limits. But if you're not in a place to do that, make sure to be kind to yourself and consciously acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable aspects of now. 🏃