



# Maintaining the momentum of success

THE NETWORK  
OF LEADERS

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*Giles Long was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 13. As a competitive swimmer, this presented a hefty obstacle to his lifelong goal of one day competing for an Olympic gold. However the young athlete was persistent and used his experience to go on and win gold at the paralympic games, breaking world records along the way. By turning his adversity into opportunity, the MBE-honoured athlete has created a celebrated formula for success – the ‘Chimo’ cycle – on which he gives inspirational lectures. Writing exclusively for Criticaleye, Long tells his story and explains how a little change can go a long way.*

## INTRODUCTION

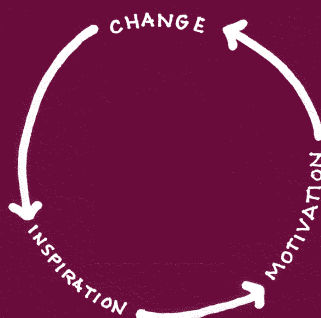
Success is the ultimate goal of anyone operating a business. We all seek to do our jobs well, hoping that the outcome spells victory for our employers and consequently ourselves. In my experience, simplicity lies at the heart of success. Apply this to business and the less complexity you find at the core – the more triumphant a company is likely to be. By overcoming certain challenges, I have learned that there are simple steps you can take to ensure success – simple steps that are easily applied to both professional and personal goals.

Maintaining success relies on how you embrace change. Change is often feared, and even viewed as a hindrance, but positive and negative change can be the foundation for the achievement of goals.

From my success as an athlete I have come to realise that motivation is sustained by inspiration and that the best fuel for that is change. Taking the starting syllables of those

all-important three words, change, inspiration and motivation, I coined the ‘Chimo’ cycle (Chee-Mo).

FIG.1 BASIC CHIMO CYCLE



## MY STORY

I joined a swimming club at the age of seven. Having loved the water from an early age, it was no surprise to my family when my enjoyment of the sport quickly transformed into a dream of going to the Olympics. I announced to my parents that I would one day

win a Gold medal – and half expected to be laughed at – but was surprised when posed the question “How are you going to go about that then?”

I had absolutely no idea, but I had a goal and was pretty sure that the way forward lay somewhere down at the pool. I made a pact with my parents that if I tried my hardest then they would make sure that I got to the swimming pool every time I needed to go. Together with my coach, this was my team. Without realising it, all of us were engaged in the ‘Chimo’ cycle.

In the early days it was all about having fun. If I didn’t win, I felt disappointed but didn’t dwell. Instead we evaluated the race and looked at ways of ensuring the next would be an improvement – no matter how small – a personal best always provides the best motivator of all – change.

The art of swimming is like playing the piano – the only way to improve is by doing it. Thinking about what and how you are doing something in training often separates a good swimmer from a great one. In essence, you can ‘think’ yourself faster.

By the time I was ten I was swimming roughly 20,000 metres each week in the pool. The general trend of my results had been moving in the right direction and by the age of twelve I was just breaking into the National level and starting to race the best swimmers in the country of my age.

## DISASTER STRIKES

At thirteen tragedy struck. After a long hot summer day I fell over on the school playing field and broke my right arm just below the shoulder. The X-ray revealed a clean break



and a mysterious fuzzy patch. At first no one seemed to pay attention to the fuzzy patch, but alarm bells went off when a junior doctor let slip I would have to go to London to have some tests. Not long after arriving at University College Hospital in London I was told I had a bone tumour. I was thirteen years old and I had cancer.

Treatment for the cancer meant chemotherapy and surgery to have my right humerus (the upper-arm bone) removed and replaced with a prosthesis. The chemotherapy and operation were successful. Unfortunately the surgery had left me without any muscles in my right shoulder. For a swimmer with dreams of going to the Olympics it was a nightmare.

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#### ADAPTING TO CHANGE

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I carried on swimming to stay in contact with friends, though I was using only my left arm. My coach eventually began to enter me for competitions and I would constantly get thrashed. I wondered why he kept entering me and finally asked him straight out. His response left a lasting impression:

"I have a team of people all working toward a common goal – to swim at their fastest at the end of the season. If each person is motivated we will move forward. The only way we can fuel that is to keep changing things, no matter how small. You have to be part of that or as a whole the team cycle will stop working."

At a swimming competition in East London I was spotted by a member of the British Paralympics Swimming Team. She invited me to a training weekend where some members of the British Team would be clocking up some metres. When I arrived I walked into a ballroom at the hotel and was amazed to see it was full of disabled people. It was the first time I realised that I had a disability. I couldn't help but question whether competing at the Paralympics could ever answer my dream of going to the Olympics. At first I didn't think it could.

After my next competition I was approached by a rather formidable-looking man. "I was really impressed with what you were doing in the pool today, are you aiming for the Paralympics?" he said.

Stubbornly, I answered, "No, I don't think so."

He replied: "Before you were ill you could do 10,000 things. Now you can do 9,000 things. This leaves you with a choice, you can concentrate on the 1,000 things that you can't do anymore or you can concentrate on the 9,000 you can do."

I later found out that he had been Head Coach of the Moscow 1980 Olympic Swimming Team. It was the spark that I needed to re-engage with my goal, to be the best I could be. My plan for improvement: to change something every time I went to the pool. Although I

hadn't yet given it a name I was using the 'Chimo' cycle.

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#### OBSTACLES, CHANGE AND ENCOUNTERING SUCCESS

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After many years of grinding out the metres in the pool and endless competitive successes and failures, I qualified for the 100m Butterfly at the Atlanta 1996 Paralympics. I won gold by 0.04sec.

When I returned home it was incredible. Everyone wanted a piece of me and I instantly forgot how difficult it was to get there in the first place. I decided I wanted to go to the Sydney 2000 Paralympics, win the Gold medal and set a World Record doing it.

However my motivation slowly slipped away and so did improvement in my results. I had a goal but identifying the improvement I needed (in teamwork and communication) was only easy in hindsight. How to improve those transferable skills was something I forgot to ask myself. The result was I stopped changing something each and every time I went training – the entire point of training in both sport and business.

By standing still I had no inspiration, no motivation. Two years on I was defeated at the World Championships and it stung. I had not only let myself down but also all those people who had continued to work as part of my team. I took a long, hard look in the mirror and asked myself why I wasn't motivated. Did I not like swimming anymore? Did it not fire me up?

To begin improving again I reverted to the time-tested cycle: I gave myself a list of things to change at each training session. Some were small, some bigger – but as long as I could look back on each session and see one achievement, I was happy. It took about 5 training sessions before I had the bit back between my teeth. With this process in place I was comfortable with the larger changes of moving club and coach – my merger.

From there I won the 100m Butterfly at the Sydney Paralympics in a world record time. Having finally recognised the power of the 'Chimo' cycle aged 24, I went on to duck under the world record at the Athens 2004 Paralympics, but left with the Bronze. Unfortunately two other people broke the world record. But that day I was the very best I could be, owing to the change-inspiration-motivation cycle that took that many years to perfect.

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**I worked with a sales team that was part of a large motoring organisation about to go through a merger. The change would create a new environment but the team hadn't envisaged themselves within it. The team had previously achieved target-busting sales**

**figures but this unwillingness produced uncertainty. The sales director wanted each person within the team to become 'freer' in their approach to work – opening up to the change and the potential advantages it could bring to the organisation, making each individual indispensable. However the fear of the buyout triggered the opposite reaction and many prepared for the worst. This was killing motivation and meant rising sales figures reached a plateau.**

**Using my swimming career, which mirrored this sequence of events, as a motivator – the sales team was able to reassess the upcoming merger, realising it was as much an opportunity as it was a threat. And in the end, they stayed in tact.**

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#### APPLYING 'CHIMO'

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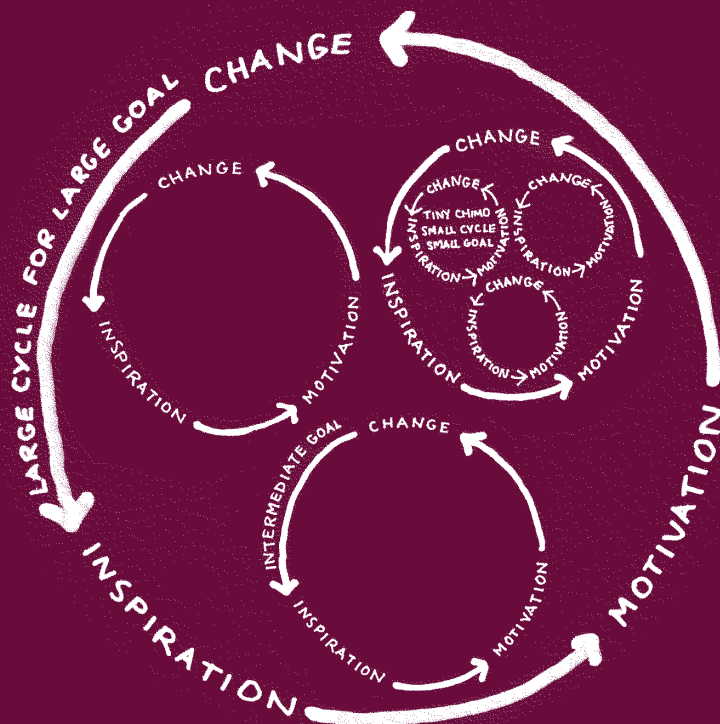
I have worked with executives who consider their dream so huge and outlandish that they've kept it secret. They can't begin to comprehend what change could possibly ignite the level of inspiration required for the monumental motivation needed to climb the mountain. In this instance it's not the dream that is the problem, it's usually the small timeframe attached to achieving it. These kinds of dreams can take years (it took me 23); which itself is a classic motivation killer.

However if you have one of these dreams I expect you can identify the area in which you might make the first step. After taking that step you'll have a far better idea of what lies ahead. In essence you are building a series of small 'Chimo' cycles that will be able to support a larger, slower turning one. After you've linked a few of these cycles together, they can be used to support something even bigger!

But it's not always about the mighty dream. Perhaps you're at low ebb for one reason or another and you just want to get going again in some small way. Or maybe, in your busy life, you know what you want but there never seems to be any time to achieve it. This is the best time to draw the smallest of 'Chimo' cycles on a blank piece of paper. The problem is how to start it.

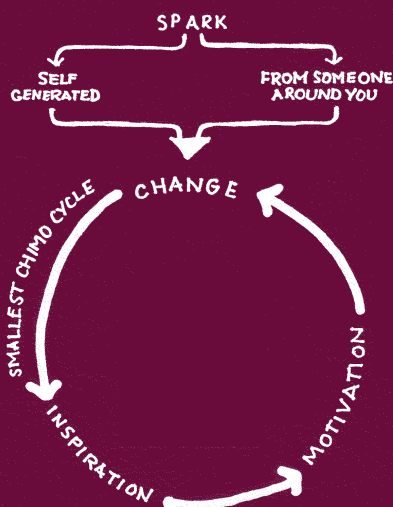
That start will come from one of two places. Someone will say or do something that will alter your perceptions and spark an idea. Or you can make the change yourself. The former can be incredibly powerful. Unfortunately you might be waiting a long time for that pivotal moment. The latter is much more demanding – even if that necessary nugget is within you. It is at your disposal whenever you choose to use it.

FIG. 2 – FITTING SMALL ‘CHIMO’ CYCLES INTO A LARGER ONE. ‘BASE CYCLES’



The smaller the chimo cycle, the more robust it is. Keep making them smaller until you find a personal ‘foundation’ cycle of inspiring change

FIG. 3 – INITIAL ‘SPARK’ DIAGRAM



The pinnacle of achievement in the sport of swimming is to win a gold medal at the Olympic or Paralympic Games. There is just one week of competition every four years during which an entire team have to be at the absolute zenith of their performing abilities. The only problem is there are short events and long ones, all swum across four different strokes.

The training regime required for an athlete to be at their best for the 50m Freestyle is completely different from that needed for the 200m Breaststroke, which in turn is different from the 1500m Freestyle. All three will need to hit form at the games and are collectively expected to do so at other large competitions along the way. However at a range of smaller competitions beneath that layer, they will not always be at their peak; the sprinter will be

close to their best every time, the 200m swimmer – three or four times a year, and the 1500m competitor possibly only hitting a best time once each season. In essence people are hired as individuals.

This was an apparent characteristic in a John Lewis sales team I worked with who were tasked with beating record sales figures in a tough market place. Motivation came much more readily when the team accepted that everyone moved through the ‘Chimo’ cycle at different speeds (in spite of having a collective goal). The team was incredibly tired from getting the complexities of each store’s 1200 staff ironed out. Often in the retail business there is a fixed final date that cannot be moved and it can actually work as a de-motivator as people within the team lose sight of the task, focusing on each other. By allowing them to move through ‘Chimo’ on a more individualised scale they were able to switch their concentration between task and team, which in itself created stimulating change.

#### START SMALL, AIM BIG

There are many models for improving performance across a team in a commercial environment but most seem to have an inherent inefficiency built into them. They require the entire team to move through a series of steps at exactly the same time no matter what they are trying to achieve.

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This is fine if you have a team of people that are able to operate within a rigid structure, guaranteed to move forward without interruption by any one individual. Few are lucky enough to work like this. The reality is that most end up getting what they need from the majority while a few on the periphery are left to try to fit in the best they can. The team functions, often very well, but not at its true potential. Because there are a few within the team who are never quite able to draw on the power of change as a motivational tool, they instead get washed along by it.

There are many different ways of leading a team. You need to decide the objective and create a framework that works with each individual and his or her respective cycles. Try focusing on a fairly low target level to ensure that people can hit the smaller deadlines, coming together for a big launch event.

If you can get each member of your team to look for change that will give them a spark of inspiration and you can offer flexibility to choose the level of ‘Chimo’ cycle they engage in, then you will have a happy and motivated team. But don’t forget that no one will be interested if you aren’t motivated yourself.

Using the ‘Chimo’ cycle I have managed to remain motivated to maintain the momentum of success over a 23-year swimming career where the total time spent at the pinnacle of my sport was just 3 minutes and 24 seconds.

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#### Giles Long MBE

Paralympic Athlete, Public Speaker  
Changing to Win

Giles is a triple Paralympic Gold Medallist and former World Record holder in the 100m Butterfly. He was part of the Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 Great Britain Paralympic Teams. His public speaking is based on his story of having dreams of competing at the Olympics; being treated for a bone tumour aged 13 and the re-alignment of his ambition, which ultimately led to Paralympic success. Giles now works with organisations, principally in the UK and US, to motivate and inspire staff at all levels.

Contact Giles through My Criticaleye.