

INSPIRATION FROM AUDACITY

The impact of a Canadian icon

BY **BILL OVEREND**



If he only knew.



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To get anywhere in life, they say you need a plan. It's a tempting notion. A few of the clients in our business consulting practice, glints of desperation in their eyes as the competition gains more and more "focus," are grateful just to get a plan. More daring clients, however, treat a plan as only the beginning. They recognize that a plan may put you in the game, but it's how you put it into effect that can turn you into a legend.

Getting traction, then taking action: I know why this is so important for me. I draw my inspiration from a string of events in 1980, when a young man with a big plan, and the even bigger audacity to pursue it, made a legend of himself – and a difference to me.

It is fully 28 years since Terrance Stanley Fox, a teenager from Port Coquitlam, B.C., lost his right leg to cancer; 26 years since he determined to lead the fight against it; 25 since he ran on one leg from St. John's to Thunder Bay; 24 since he died. All my adult years, when I have sought inspiration, it's been Terry Fox. He didn't get a very long kick at life, but he's been making me take the best kick at mine.

I take a certain pride in the fact he riveted a nation. Many Canadians are re-living Terry's story this year because it's been a quarter-century since the 21-year-old dipped his prosthetic limb in the Atlantic Ocean and, determination embodied, headed west. His ungraceful but powerful ground-eating lope along the shoulder of the Trans-Canada Highway has earned a permanent home in our collective psyche, on par with Paul Henderson's 1972 series-winning goal.

As many remember, Terry's marathon-a-day progress was cruelly halted just outside Thunder Bay – with more than 5,000 kilometres complete and some 3,000 still to go – by the cancer's return. His "Marathon of Hope" gave way to an outpouring of anguish. The fundraising floodgates opened. From one forlorn 100-mile stretch of road that summer when Terry raised just \$35, Canadians met Terry's goal by the time the year was out by donating an average of \$1 a head for cancer research. Hundreds of millions have been raised since through annual renditions of the Terry Fox Run.

That's very good for Canada and for the 50-plus countries where the Terry Fox Run takes place today. It's great for cancer research. It has been accretive to the survival percentages; that starts to get close to home. My own family has not gone untouched by cancer. But Terry's impact has been even more personal.

Like the steamy groundwater that moves unseen through seams and caverns under Sulphur Mountain, a certain river of tears tends to anchor all great and good human achievement. Terry manifested the price that gets paid in life: gradually, over the miles; and suddenly, in great fell swoops. Further, he demonstrated how one climbs the mountain anyway. He attacked what he could control. He didn't wait until everything was perfect to grab his moment. Once he got hold of it, he refused to let up. He squandered little of his life breath on self-doubt. He simply got up on his good leg and led the way down the road.

Two and a half decades later, the raw elements still burst through: courage, impatience, exhaustion, joy, frustration, conviction, reticence, pain, humility, perseverance. Doing it.

I never met Terry. Western Canadians were left, figuratively, standing at the roadside waiting for a speck to appear in the distance. We could almost taste his triumphant return to the west coast. It never happened that way.

"If it doesn't work out," said Terry, "I've got to be able to accept it and people have got to realize that good things and bad things happen in the world ... Terry Fox is somebody who tries his hardest ... even though I die of cancer, my spirit didn't die and I kept trying, and that should influence a lot of people as well."

If he only knew.

Bill Overend is a part-time instructor and the owner of Overview Business Consulting in Calgary, Alberta.