



# BUSINESSBEAT

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## Power of balance

**Working to your strengths can create success, provided it is moderated, writes MARGARET LINLEY**

PICTURE this. A businessman is in coronary care. It's less than 24 hours since that chest pain erupted into a heart attack and catapulted his ordered life into something unrecognisable. And yet here he is, in his hospital bed, working. He's making calls on his mobile, barking orders to his team back at the office, reigning in the chaos he's certain has been unleashed by his sudden absence.

Another image. This time, it's the shift worker who's nodded off for just a nano-second but instinctively wakes in fright and steers the car back on the highway. He's well past his retirement age, and this is his third close call since he's been putting in long hours at a tough job.

What is all this about?  
Too much of a good thing, said Geelong psychologist Chris Mackey. "Persistence is overrated if it is taken to dangerous extremes," he said. "It's a great virtue, but it can be overdone."

He knows these men; the one in the hospital bed, the other dicing with death on the road. Both have been so persistent in their work, they have placed themselves in grave danger.

The psychologist is worried there are many of us who place too much emphasis on some character traits, to the detriment of our health, our safety and our relationships.

While acknowledging it's easy to play to our strengths, he said the problem arises where our focus is skewed to those areas of excellence and creates an imbalance.

**'I reckon we can all benefit from learning what our top character strengths are and milking them for what they are worth, without overdoing it.'** — psychologist CHRIS MACKEY

Mr Mackey said he was compelled to speak out after hearing a recent presentation from *Celebrity Apprentice Australia*'s Mark Bouris who, in common with many successful business people, demonstrated a particularly zealous attachment to the notion of persistence.

Mr Bouris described his regular routine to his captive and appreciative audience at the recent Geelong Chamber of Commerce president's lunch. The Yellow Brick Road Wealth Management founder and television personality's punishing schedule included rising at 4.30am before heading to the gym and then winding up his day close to midnight.

While conceding Mr Bouris' persistence has enabled him to achieve considerable success, the psychologist cautioned against a focus on extreme persistence without the counterbalance of other virtues such as self-regulation, creativity and fairness.

"In business or in establishing any successful venture, you have to be prepared to go hard at it, and for a long period of time," Mr Mackey said. "I reckon you sometimes have to allow things to go out of balance in order for them to come back into the balance you seek down the track."

"Without a preparedness to go to



**EQUALISER:** Chris Mackey beside *Living Balance*, a work by local sculptor Leonie Amarena. Inset, Mark Bouris speaking in Geelong.

Photos: MIKE DUGDALE

very great lengths to make a venture a success it will often not succeed."

So what is the answer?

We need persistence to build our business, but with too much the price becomes too high.

Costs can include not only the perilous personal danger the two men faced (a heart attack, a close call on the road) but also relationship breakdowns and chronic health problems, and can prevent people from realising their full potential.

"So where does this leave us?" Mr Mackey asked. "I think that one of the best things that leaders can do for their Geelong businesses — large or small — is to identify and wisely

exercise their own greatest virtues or character strengths, in relative balance, taking their specific circumstances into account."

"I reckon we can all benefit from learning what our top character strengths are and milking them for what they are worth, without overdoing it."

"We can also develop the other strengths. For example, we can bolster our one or two lower ones, because without doing that we are even more likely to get into trouble."

Mr Mackey said there are 24 specific character strengths or virtues that we have in varying degrees. Research has shown that by scaffolding the weaker characteristics

against the stronger ones we are able to build strength and balance.

"I would encourage all Geelong business leaders, indeed everyone, to learn what their character strengths profile is," Mr Mackey said.

"This will help guide you as to how you get the best return for effort in improving your and your team's performance and wellbeing."

To find out what your strengths and weaknesses are in the 24 character virtues, head to [authentic.happiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://authentic.happiness.sas.upenn.edu). You will need to register (free) to do any of the quizzes on the site.

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