

RUNNING WITH THE BOSS | RAJIV MISHRA

# The more I ran, the better I felt about myself

BY POOJA SINGH  
pooja.s@livemint.com

For 16 years, Rajiv Mishra, managing director of the India arm of the Hong Kong-headquartered utility CLP, had been a casual “gym runner”—a 3km easy-paced run as part of a workout, no more than two days a week. But after he was diagnosed with hypertension, the 51-year-old decided to pay more attention to cardio than strength workouts and started running longer.

“One thing led to another, and the more I ran, the better I felt about myself, which led to the runs becoming longer and more frequent,” he says. So far, he has participated in almost 10 half and full marathons around the world, including the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon and the Volkswagen Ijubljana Marathon.

Taking inspiration from Mishra, several people in his firm have started running too. Even his 14-year-old daughter runs. “She runs 10km a day, six days a week,” he says.

Edited excerpts from an interview:

## What impact does leading by example as a fit leader have on your team?

One of the things you discover as a leader is that there are many, many pairs of eyes on you. Everything you say or do is being watched. Apart from the ability to carry responsibilities more easily and being more productive, fitness tends to give you a “can-do” attitude—there is nothing we can’t do—and this rubs off on your team.

## Does running affect your performance at work?

Running affects your entire life. You feel more energetic, your sleep improves, and that improves your concentration as well. It truly results in physical and mental “well-being”.

## Any leadership lessons from distance running?

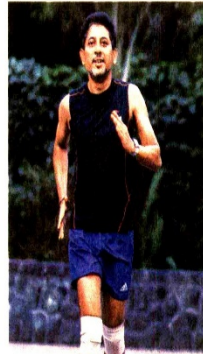
I like to summarize it as “mind over matter”. In particular, training for and finishing a marathon teaches you the virtues

of single-mindedness of purpose, doggedness, incredible patience, an ability to break up a challenge into meaningful parts. When I run a marathon, I don’t think of 42km at the start—it is always 5km at a time—and this is a lesson you can easily transfer to your business. Challenges in business are often complex and multilayered, but if you break them down in parts, just as you do at a marathon, you find that it becomes much easier.

Finally, in a long race, sometimes you see people suffering from cramps, dehydration, etc., and you remember how fellow runners offer you moral support during such times. That brings you to another important life and leadership lesson—empathy.

## Has running changed the way you network?

Not really, my social circle remains the same. But once you start long-distance running, you discover you build a special rapport, a special bond, with fellow long-distance runners. When I meet colleagues and friends who are runners themselves,



you always have an additional aspect of your life to catch up about—which is your next race? Where did you run last? You even start swapping notes about the merits of the latest running shoes!

## How do you balance your training and work?

In the usual course, I like to run on the road in the mornings. However, one has to recognize the demands of frequent travel and work; so I also have multiple gym memberships—at home, near office, etc.—and drop in after the first round of morning meetings before lunchtime, or in the afternoon, or whenever I get the time, to the gym. If one has been unable to run in the morning, a lunchtime run is ideal—it breaks the working day neatly into two halves.

## Who are your running buddies?

I prefer running on my own. To me, it is an intensely personal activity, the time when I am with just myself.

## In a perfect world, how would you incorporate running in the workday of all your team members?

In my experience, everyone’s body is different. What works for me may not work for someone else. I would, therefore, tell my team members to learn and adapt the mantra of fitness, through running, jogging, playing sports, dancing, yoga, whatever. Just be fitter than you were last year! For me, a perfect start to a day is an early morning 10km run.

## Your toughest race.

My first full marathon (Amsterdam). About 30km in the race, I realized I was undercooked (not fully prepared) in training. The last two were the longest kilometres I have ever run.

## Your favourite running moment till date. And why.

Earlier this year, my daughter completed in and completed our first race together—she for 10km and me the half marathon. It was a truly special feeling.

*Running with the boss is a series where C-suite executives talk about leadership lessons, the importance of a fit team and striking a work-life balance through running.*