

My kind of job...

Motivator holds key to a successful life

Globetrotter and motivational speaker **John Amatt** comes to Belfast in March when he will urge people to explore their limits

What's your job?

For the past 23 years, I have travelled around the world speaking at corporate and professional meetings and sharing my experiences as a leader of Canada's first successful climb of Everest. I have delivered some 1,800 presentations in 44 countries.

How did you get there?

Our 1982 ascent of Everest was not easy. We suffered four tragic deaths in two accidents that happened over a two-day period early in the climb. We were forced to challenge our assumptions of what might lead to success and to change our planned approach in order to reach the summit. The story has become a metaphor for how to climb to the top in the rapidly changing world of today.

What training/qualifications did you need for your current job?

I graduated from Durham University with an education degree and immigrated to Canada in 1968. After teaching for six years, I became an administrator in a management training school in Banff in the Canadian Rockies. It was here that I started to understand that success on a mountain like Everest requires exactly the same approach as does seeking success in everyday life.

What skills/talents do you need to be a motivational speaker?

I am a 'storyteller'. To be a successful professional speaker, you need to be able to articulate the lessons from your experiences in a way that is meaningful for your audience. Credibility as a speaker comes from having lived



your message, not from reading something in a book. It's all about articulating clearly and communicating masterfully.

Why do you think motivation is so important?

Complacency is the biggest danger in life, because that's when we make mistakes. By nature, we seek out security and comfort in an attempt to isolate ourselves from risk. But this is a paradox, because once we've built the secure world we desire we then have to leave it all behind if we hope to keep progressing in life. We cannot stay where we are today, because the world is changing. If we try to cling to the status quo of today's world, we will get left behind. We all need to be shaken out of this 'trap of complacency' and

motivated to 'keep climbing'.

How do you keep yourself motivated?

My work keeps me motivated. I am constantly trying to be better, to find ways of giving more meaningful presentations. I'm lucky, because Everest changed my life and every time I tell my story I am re-energized by reliving that experience.

What's the best thing about your job?

The opportunity to travel to parts of the world that I could never otherwise have hoped to visit. And to meet people from other cultures and to realise that despite our differing values and beliefs, we are all the same in our desire for comfort and happiness in life.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Long hours on planes and strange hotel beds.

What's the common misperception about motivation?

Although I'm usually referred to as a motivational speaker, I do not consider myself as such. What I am really hoping to achieve is to give people the keys for happiness and success in their lives. I was trained as an educator and I am still an educator.

What would you describe as your best experience?

At the age of 20, I was part of the team that made the first ascent of the 5,000 foot 'Vertical Mile' Troll Wall in Norway. A stone dropped from the summit of this mountain

touches nothing until it lands in the valley one vertical mile below. Expert climbers said it couldn't be done. It took 10 days, sleeping on ledges less than two feet wide. After that, I knew there was nothing that I couldn't do if I was committed to the goal and brought the appropriate resources to the task.

What did you want to be when you were at school?

I was not a great success in school and had to repeat a year in fifth form. I dreamed of success but because of shyness lacked the confidence to achieve it. As a result, I've spent my entire adult life proving to myself that I can be successful.

What advice would you give to someone wishing to pursue a career in motivational speaking?

Don't try to package your message from someone else's experience. You can't learn it from reading a book. Stick to your own experiences and learn how to translate your life story into a meaningful metaphor for others.

What's the most common question people ask when they find out what you do?

Usually 'I wish I could do what you do'. My answer is that you can, if you're willing to make the same sacrifices and to take the same risks that I have. One of the saddest things for me is to see people with potential who don't achieve it because they're afraid to leave behind their comfort zone. As a teacher I was often asked what subject I taught? My answer was "I don't teach subjects, I teach kids." My goal was always to find out what the children were good at and to encourage them to follow that path in their lives.

If you could swap jobs with someone, who would it be? There's nothing I'd rather do than what I'm doing today.

■ John Amatt will be speaking at a seminar at the Culloden Hotel on March 15.