In a world of instant gratification, working on the same project for three or seven years or even longer can be challenging for some, while others simply get it done. What makes people stay the course? Cherice Smith found out.

**THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE**

Whether it is working on a PhD, an MBA or a long-term project in the workplace, one thing is critical: having the staying power to push through even though the end goal may seem very far away.

Staying power is extremely important when tackling any long-term project, says Willem Conradie, a registered psychologist with extensive experience in psychometric assessment, learning and development and managing director of a niche human resource development consultancy.

“People who are involved in projects that stretch over a long period of time constantly need to deliver high-performance outputs, despite setbacks, continuous pressure, budget cuts, scope creep and other obstacles. Therefore, endurance and stamina become all the more critical to remain focused on the task at hand.”

But how do some get it right while others simply get it wrong? Three or seven years or even longer are running a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself as if you were running a marathon almost every day for 98 days in temperatures exceeding 40°C.

For other people, to learn or to innovate or go back to the drawing board. When working on long-term projects planning is key, but to be realistic is even more important. Have the end goal in sight, but focus on the micro components of the plan and execute each of those with precision and 100% commitment. Never lose sight of where you are heading and understand that setbacks are part of the game and that you only grow through adversity. And, have passion for whatever you embark on.”

**CONTINUOUS LEARNING | STAYING POWER**

Ernst van Dyk

Hannelie Kruger

Jack van der Merwe

Jana du Plooy

Willem Conradie

“It was my dream to complete a PhD. My older sister is a world-renowned Friesian horse breeder and my younger sister was a cyclist with national colours and is now an extreme sports competitor. My mother completed her third degree at the age of 70. I was raised to be determined and to never give up.”

Kruger, who never took a break from her PhD, says she worked when and wherever she could and as hard as she could. “I didn’t even take a break when I had a child who did not sleep for two and a half years. I have a very supportive husband who took over many of my household chores during the last year of my studies.”

USB MBA student, Jana du Plooy, who started her Modular MBA in 2012, says her staying power comes from her determination.

“Sometimes, you simply cannot get around everything we have to do that we become paralysed and then do nothing at all. Sometimes, you simply cannot get around to everything. When this happens, you need a support structure. My husband is amazing – he picks up when I drop a ball.”

Jack van der Merwe, CEO of the Gautrain Management Agency, is in charge of Gauteng’s 25-year integrated transport master plan (ITMP25) to develop an efficient transport system in Gauteng. He knows all about the ups and downs of long-term projects. He headed up the Gautrain Rapid Rail project from its early beginnings in 1997.

“This has been a rollercoaster ride where I have had the privilege of interacting with a world-class multi-disciplinary team of professionals in South Africa and abroad. Everyday has been a learning experience. The fact that I was part of a team that has changed the face of Gauteng and that the project has received numerous international awards, is icing on the cake.”

“This is a 24-hour job, even when you are on holiday you are thinking about issues and problems. You have to be mentally fit. If you don’t enjoy what you are doing, you will not last a year. Deciding that you want to do the project and completing it to your standards is the reward for all the work, worry and effort.”

Ernst van Dyk, the veteran of his Paralympic Games and a multiple medallist in wheelchair racing and handcycling, approaches his project. “I grade competitions according to importance and profile. Also, I ensure that I have smaller competitions in between to keep me sharp and to measure progress.”

Van Dyk says that he has come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to be at your best for every event. “A setback is merely seen as stepping stone to improve, innovate or go back to the drawing board.”

When working on long-term projects planning is key, but to be realistic is even more important. Have the end goal in sight, but focus on the micro components of the plan and execute each of those with precision and 100% commitment. Never lose sight of where you are heading and understand that setbacks are part of the game and that you only grow through adversity. And, have passion for whatever you embark on.”

**HOW TO SUSTAIN YOUR ENERGY WHEN WORKING ON LONG-TERM PROJECTS**

Willem Conradie shares some tips:

- Place yourself as if you are running a marathon and not a sprint.
- Set milestones along the way and make a point of celebrating small successes.
- Involve those around you and create a support network.
- Take it one day at a time or one challenge upon another.
- “Begin with the end in mind,” like Stephen Covey, American educator, author and businessman, recommend.
- Stay focused on your end goal – the reason why you decided to embark on the project.
- Break your long-term goals down into manageable short- and medium-term goals.