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VINNY LAUWERS

World Disabled Sportsperson of the Year 2001

On Saturday 12th August 2000, Vinny Lauwers returned to Melbourne after seven months and two weeks at sea. It had taken seven years of preparation for Vinny to realise his incredible dream...to be the first disabled person to sail solo, non-stop and unassisted around the world.

Vinny lost his ability to walk after his spinal cord was severed in a motorcycle accident when he was 22. Not expected to survive the accident, Vinny made a remarkable recovery. However, the accident had not just taken away his ability to walk but also his love for life. Slowly, Vinny deteriorated and soon he believed he was nothing and felt his life had no meaning.

One thing however still burned deep within Vinny - his love of the sea and his dream to one day sail around the world. This dream was born as a 14-year-old boy when he sailed with a crew from Melbourne to Sydney.

It took Vinny seven years to prepare. After repeated operations, immense physical and mental pain, and another broken back, Vinny's dream began to take shape. In October 1999 an emotional farewell from family together with hundreds of supporters including Victorian Premier Steve Bracks, Vinny set sail from Port Phillip Bay on his custom-made yacht, Vision Quest, to turn his dream into reality. Vision Quest itself had been specially built by Vinny to reduce the need for movement around the deck.

Vinny's dream was not just for himself, he also undertook this voyage to help enhance the quality of life for disabled and disadvantaged kids. Through his world voyage Vinny raised funds for Parasail Caring For Kids, a non-profit organisation for disabled and disadvantaged children that he established in 1996.

Vinny is a seasoned sailer having competed in two Sydney to Hobart yacht races as well as the 5,500 nautical mile Melbourne to Osaka Ocean Race. His sailing experience is over 100,000km.

In May 2001, Vinny was recognised as International Disabled Sports Person of the Year at the Laureus World Sports Awards in Monaco – other recipients on the night were International Sportsman, Tiger Woods and International Sportswoman, Cathy Freeman.

Vinny continues to struggle with multiple injuries beyond his damaged spine, including chronic pain, sleep apnoea and brain damage.

Vinny's story has already touched the hearts of many Australians and others around the world – his passion for life defied the odds of self-destruction from childhood psychological abuse to a horrific motorbike accident the doctors predicted he would not survive. Let Vinny share his remarkable story with you.

“Once the dream is big enough, the facts don't count.”

Vinny Lauwers

CLIENT FEEDBACK:

"Vinny Lauwers achievement in sailing around the world single handed non stop is absolutely incredible. He planned the journey from scratch, he accepted all the 'no's' from wide and far and regardless he was able to get the project together and launch his boat and equipment. Then he embarked into the glorious unknown. And all in a wheelchair or dragging himself around the boat by himself. To do this as a fully fit person is a great accomplishment, to do it as a disabled person is amazing. In 2001 he received the Laureus World Sports Award, the highest international award a sportsman can receive. This is a just accolade for this man."

John Bertrand AM

"A natural showman"

The Age Newspaper

"Excellent. As a professional coordinator of events, launches, seminars, conferences etc. I have experienced quite a few presentations. None have come close to Vinny's! Inspirational!!"

Rhumblin Marketing Pty Ltd

"Excellent! Vinny was an excellent presenter, and everyone was inspired by his presentation. Nothing was too much bother for him. He joined us for lunch with the advisers and was very generous with his time"

The Mawson Group of Companies

"His story and courage is sensational. A standing ovation from 190 dinner guests and very few dry eyes in the house is something I have never seen."

Farm Management 500

"Your presentation was superb; thank you for painting a picture for the blind and vision impaired volunteers, it has made a big difference to their employment. You are an inspiration."

Vision Australia Foundation

"We love the bloke – he's our hero."

Skilled Engineering

"Excellent. Vinny was an absolute delight! Very natural, spontaneous and entertaining. Had the audience laughing in tears, and then laughing again. The hit of the conference!"

The Association for Competitive Employment (A.C.E.)

"Excellent. Vinny was outstanding."

Westfarmers Landmark

"He was amusing. Certainly held everyone's attention and was very approachable. He left people thinking and that was our aim."

Oracle Corporation Australia

"Excellent. Our people were very impressed with Vinny. He was easy to relate to. His story was most inspiring especially given the challenges currently being experienced in our industry."

HR Leader

"The client absolutely raved about Vinny. She said he was the best speaker they have ever had & they've had some great speakers!"

Happenings

"Excellent. Vinny's story is remarkable and truly inspirational, achieved against tremendous odds. What an amazing individual – we were all in awe."

K.W. Doggett Fine Paper

"Vinny was a brilliant speaker. Emotional & inspiring story – truly moved his audience."

Dare

"Excellent. A very down to earth talk from a 'great' and 'inspirational' man. His very likeable nature made us all smile at times and shed a tear at other moments."

Australian Scholarship Group

"Excellent. Vinny received a standing ovation. He was most inspirational. He made our night a most memorable one."

Marriott Support Services

"Excellent. Vinny's presence as our opening keynote speaker set the scene for an exceptional conference for us. He was an inspiration to all. 96% of delegates rated him excellent the rest very good."

Retire Invest

"We appreciate greatly that you shared your life with us, and in doing so you inspired and motivated all the people present. Your courage, your determination and your zest for life was the best message that could possibly have been delivered as a closing presentation to what had been a very successful seminar."

Retravisio Australia

"Excellent. The feedback I received from the staff members who attended the presentation was very positive. Vinny is an excellent presenter and a really nice guy."

VicRoads

"Excellent. The majority of the 75 people who attended our conference told me how much they got out of Vinny's speech and how much they admired him, what an amazing person!"

Adco Constructions Vic Pty Ltd

"Excellent. Many staff were emotionally touched by Vinny's story. His presentation made many realise that the challenges they face are insignificant to those he overcame."

Defence Force Credit Union

"Excellent. Best presenter we have ever had."

High Performance Consulting

"Excellent. Vinny was truly an inspiration. Any speaker that can keep almost 200 Lawyers enthralled for an hour certainly must have a story to tell."

Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association

Your presentation was extremely well received and your session proved to be a great drawcard for the conference. The delegates seemed enthralled with your story, which evoked a great deal of interest and emotion."

Institute of Hospitality in Health Care

Vinny's presentation was a surprise, he's great – from the Formula One Drivers to the Heads of Major Corporations all 700 stood and applauded after he had spoken."

Mercedes Benz Dinner - Australian Formula One Grand Prix

Excellent. Very inspirational.

Justice Department

"Your evaluation result of 4.8 out of a possible 5 was exceptional. You moved many people including myself. It was an absolute pleasure to meet you. I look forward to seeing you excel in your next project. Comments included were: 'fantastic speaker, a real inspiration', 'and fantastic presentation! Makes one believe in oneself and that anything is possible', 'hooked on Vinny', 'recommended again: can't beat true-life experiences', 'incredible individual'.

CPA Australia

"The presentation by Vinny was simply amazing, he captured the hearts of everyone present. The appreciation of the audience was demonstrated by the standing ovation given to Vinny."

Australian Institute of Building

"Excellent. Vinny had a very relevant story to tell and did so with humour and interest. I have had nothing but very positive feedback from all participants."

Ericsson

"Vinny was inspirational, motivational, and just so down to earth and humble in his presentation. He addressed a group of principals and business managers in schools and had them riveted to his every word. I would highly recommend that anyone who had the opportunity to hear his presentation do so."

Arthur Reed's Photos

"Excellent. What a great guy, down to earth and inspirational, his courage, determination and discovery of himself was amazing. Everyone was touched, moved and motivated by his presentation."

Banyule City Council