

## Power vacuum

By Ruth Ostrow

LIKE many, I've been very upset by John Brogden's suicide attempt. There but for the grace of God go any of us. In this brutal world of machismo, where being a winner is everything, and flaws are disallowed, shame and failure become a hangman's noose. But it's our failure as a compassionate society that is shameful.

When I was a finance journalist I wrote about men like former NSW Opposition leader Brogden – defined by society for what they did, not who they were. Driven, obsessed with power, many became the subject of fascination during the '80s for their rags-to-riches achievements, echoing a desperate need to prove themselves that ignored exhaustion and burn-out of either themselves or their families. A new book, *The Hypomaniac Edge* by Dr John D. Gartner, claims that many men in power are unhealthily pumped up.

The results are often devastating. George Herscu, the man behind Hooker Corporation, told me: "I love it. I am an entrepreneur, a workaholic . . ." He ended up in jail. Head of FAI Insurance, Larry Adler, father of Rodney, told me: "I absolutely love it and if another heart attack is the price I have to pay, then I'll pay it gladly." He died from a massive coronary. Respected property developer Floyd Podgornik told me: "I never sleep . . . I hate wasting time. I get frightened that another day is passing me by." He took his own life.

Their demise reflected the fate of many entrepreneurs: Bond, Holmes a Court, Skase; my own father, a fine businessman and workaholic, dead at 57. Yet in this capitalist world only the powerful and adrenalin-driven are rewarded or respected. And yes, as Bill Clinton exposed, sexual misconduct and silly miscalculations often go with the territory.

Being a reformed work-junkie, a chip off the old block, I've had my own battles with highs that never lasted and subsequent depression. I understand the pain and lack of inner peace that must have haunted John Brogden. And I want to tell him this: Having come off adrenalin, and slowed down enough to patch up my family and soul, I'm finding life deeply satisfying.

John, you don't know it yet, but you are the luckiest man alive. You are the mythical hero Odysseus and this may be the beginning of a magnificent voyage home to a gentler, more rewarding place. There are many in this society who'll be buoyed seeing you emerge a deeper, richer soul for your struggles. Safe sailing, Captain!

[www.ruthostrow.com](http://www.ruthostrow.com)

© Ruth Ostrow

First published in *The Weekend Australian Magazine* September 24, 2005