



Geoff Holt

Inspirational Sailor



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## **Geoff Holt, MBE**

Yachtsman, Speaker & Disability Sports Ambassador

'What Geoff achieved was quite extraordinary and took an awful amount of courage.'

***Her Royal Highness, Princess Anne***

'Your voyage was nothing short of exceptional, but to me that journey is simply a reflection of you.'

***Dame Ellen Macarthur***

Geoff Holt is an inspirational yachtsman who has pushed back the boundaries of what was thought possible. Geoff entered the history books on 5 September 2007 when he sailed 1,445 miles, solo, around Great Britain in a fragile 15-foot dinghy. This was hailed a groundbreaking, courageous achievement because Geoff is a passionate yachtsman who uses a wheelchair. Paralysed from the chest down when he was just 18 years old after a swimming accident, Geoff lives by the mantra of 'no excuses' and continues to challenge what seems impossible. Another world-record was to follow. In January 2010, Geoff became the first quadriplegic to sail across the Atlantic. As someone once joked, Geoff is now the most admired disabled sailor since Nelson!

Recognition of Geoff's achievements came swiftly. He was voted BBC South Sports Personality of the Year (2007); short-listed for the prestigious Yachtsman of the Year (2008); received a British Airways Great Briton Award and the RYA Francis Elkin Award (2009). In June 2010, Geoff was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to disabled sailing.

Geoff's record-setting voyage across the Atlantic in December 2009/January 2010 received international acclaim. Geoff sailed a 60ft wheelchair-accessible catamaran named 'Impossible Dream' across the Atlantic. The 2,700 mile voyage across some of the most hostile waters in the world took 28 days. In completing his latest 'Personal Atlantic' challenge Geoff became the first quadriplegic sailor to sail solo

across the Atlantic unassisted in every aspect of the sailing. Symbolically, Geoff finished in Tortola in the Caribbean on the very beach where he originally broke his neck 25 years ago. Geoff hopes that his voyages will inspire others to push their own personal boundaries.

Geoff's story is highly motivational and told with humour, thoughtful insight and great photographs and film footage. He has faced adversity, challenged limits and continues to inspire others to maintain a positive attitude no matter what the challenges ahead.

Key themes are:

- Courage in tough times
- No excuses
- The right attitude makes achievement possible
- Overcoming adversity & facing a challenge
- Working alone in a hostile environment
- Appreciating the importance of your team
- Embracing diversity

Geoff's marketing background ensures his business messages are rooted in his experiences both on and off the water – a powerful combination. Clients across all sectors enjoy both his after dinner/after lunch talks and conference keynotes.

Geoff's story has some powerful messages about overcoming adversity and staying positive in tough times. At just 18 years old, Geoff Holt had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean three times, completed several solo voyages and sailed over 27 thousand nautical miles. And then his life changed. All hopes, dreams and expectations of earning his livelihood as a professional yachtsman were brutally destroyed after diving into the sea and breaking his neck. Geoff spent a year in hospital and then, with characteristic spirit, he retrained in a different career and went on to lead the marketing department of an international firm of chartered accountants for 12 years. Geoff later became a qualified auctioneer and valuer (specializing in early European ceramics) and eventually returned to his first love of sailing. He is the fastest disabled sailor to circumnavigate the Isle of Wight and firmly re-established himself as a yachtsman with his

successful Personal Everest challenge. Geoff visited 51 destinations and took 109 days to complete his voyage in testing and hostile conditions.

Geoff has a very inspirational view of life and the opportunities it holds. His positive outlook comes over strongly in every speaking engagement when he shares his 'personal Everest' story.

Geoff is passionate about creating opportunities for others through a long association with the charity Sailability and the Paralympics. Geoff represented the UK on the International Disabled Sailing Committee and was Chairman of the RYA's Paralympic Steering Committee that selected the Gold medal winning team in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics. He has competed successfully himself too representing Great Britain in Australia and America. In 2003, Geoff was awarded the prestigious RYA Award for 'Services to Yachting' and in 2006, Geoff became the first person to gain a powerboat licence while using a wheelchair. Geoff's autobiography 'Walking on Water' was published in September 2008 to critical acclaim.

Geoff is a disability sports ambassador who has inspired countless others. Geoff's personal philosophy is 'no excuses' and this lies at the heart of his story: motivating others to live life to the full and conquer challenges no matter what they may be.

### **Accolades**

'It was a tremendous effort and we are all very proud of you. You have set up a great marker for others. Well done.'

*Sir Robin Knox-Johnston*

'I am really excited about your accomplishment of your personal Everest. Congratulations! You have proved to the world, in true British style, that sailing is a sport open to all.'

*Dee Caffari*

'Just to say a big AWESOME!!' –

*Dame Ellen Macarther*

## **Testimonials**

*'The conference went well and was hugely enriched by your presence and wonderful presentation. Throughout my (long!) career, I have run many events and had to evaluate them and their impact. Never before have I recorded a 100% 'excellent' for the keynote speaker.'*

*'The place is buzzing today with people sharing their response/feelings to what you had to say. The words 'Inspirational' 'motivating' 'emotional' have been used over and over in the evaluation forms along with comments as to how staff will now respond to the challenges that they face.'*

Shropshire NHS PCT

*'Geoff had the whole audience fully engaged – he was highly professional and motivating and we would recommend him to anyone looking for a fantastic speaker.'*

J.P. Morgan

*'Exposing our R&D staff to new ideas and challenging accepted thinking is part of our continuing commitment to be innovation leaders. Your insights and personal story were an inspiration to all who attended.'*

Syngenta

*'Geoff's talk was impressive and entertaining. He is truly an inspiration.'*

*'Geoff's speech was absolutely excellent. It's not often in life that you get an opportunity to listen to such an inspiring individual.'*

Business Networking Event: Chiswick Park

*'Geoff you are amazing what you have achieved with your life. You clearly demonstrated that there really are "no excuses" and that we can achieve so, so much more. Thank you for inspiring our team and making such a powerful finale to the programme - you are a true inspiration!'*

Successfactory

*'Geoff's story spoke for itself – he has not allowed his personal disability to prevent him from tackling and achieving goals that many able-bodied individuals would think twice about. Geoff's presentations to both staff and clients at a number of events have been inspirational.'*

Blake Laphorn Tarlo Lyons

*'The feedback has been excellent and the words that come across time and time again are 'inspirational' and 'excellent'. The lecture is designed to get people thinking and to inspire them – you certainly did that!'*

The Len Pick Trust

*'As a conference organiser the quality of your guest speaker is paramount. With Geoff, there are no worries - he is professional, totally inspiring and great to work with - thanks!'*

Clifford Solutions

*'Thank you. It was great to meet you and hear about your personal everest – truly inspirational.'*

Bupa

*'Geoff was excellent with a humble approach. His talk was riveting and extremely thought provoking. The majority of our staff rated it as very good and excellent and said that it was inspirational and motivational.'*

Synergy Housing Group

*'I have received the most wonderful feedback for your presentation. I think its true to say you stopped people in their tracks. One of my colleagues said that she was going away to compose a list of all the excuses she makes and then work out how to blitz them... I thought that would please you! My most sincere thanks - it made for a session that is all that I dream about - inspiring people and urging and challenging them to move on.'*

The Lifeboat College

*'Geoff's after dinner talk was very entertaining, thought-provoking and from the feedback I had on the evening, very well received.'*

Citigroup

*'You will have sensed from the immediate reaction how well your talk was received but from the feedback that I have received I can tell you that many of those that attended rate it as one of the best they have heard. The word inspirational is easily used but in your case, well earned and deserved.'*

Southampton & Fareham Chamber of Commerce & Industry

*'We were delighted that Geoff was able to give one of our 'Boating Heroes' talks at the Collins Steward London Boat Show. From listening to his talk and listening to the comments received afterwards, it is clear to see that Geoff is a truly inspirational character and the story of his life and his adventures had the audience captivated.'*

National Boat Shows

*'I just wanted to send you a quick message to say how much we enjoyed hearing you speak. It was truly inspiring to hear about your challenge and we left feeling we had shared in the highs and lows that it had brought you.'*

RNLI

*'The best presentation I've ever seen in all my life. The best life lesson learnt at this Program. Congratulations!'*

Rotary Annual Conference