As I write this column, I’m in the midst of a biking excursion through the hills and valleys of the Lake Champlain region of Vermont. My husband and I came here to participate in a dragon boat racing festival in Burlington and we ended up bicycling for four days from inn to inn through the small towns of Brandon, Middlebury, Florence, and Shoreham.

My thoughts have primarily been directed at the beautiful landscapes and scenery that have surrounded me throughout this adventure. Luscious greens, lavenders and sky blues have popped up everywhere as we have traveled by fire engine red-painted barns and yellow-gold sunflowers standing tall and strong. Needless to say its been very inspiring.
Within this beautiful landscape, I’ve been reflecting on what it takes to be a successful and inspirational leader. The words grit, determination and resilience keep springing up in my mind. I imagine the Taiko drummers I saw at the dragon boat festival whose leader was born in the U.S. and raised in Japan and who has spent tens of thousands of hours mastering his craft and teaching others this ancient form of half dance, half music beating to hard, fast rhythms on a drum the size of a rain barrel. Form and endurance make for a successful ensemble with a leader who has passion, grit and determination to coach and teach others the beauty of this ancient form of art and physical skill.

In leadership, I imagine myself as the “Little Engine that Could,” when faced with tasks that appeared to be insurmountable said, “I think I can, I think I can...."

Well, this old girl (me) who has lived her last eight years riding a bicycle on the flat roads of Florida (and thinks Eau Gallie causeway is a mountain), rode to the top of many very steep inclines all over Vermont saying under her breath “I think I can, I think I can... I KNOW I can, I KNOW I can.” Without those words running through my head, I would’ve stopped midway (and, in fact; I did on the very first hill as I walked my bike up the rest of the incline).

However, with the above words challenging me the rest of the journey, I completed the next several hills chugging away at the VERY SLOW speed of four miles per hour, breathing extremely hard, sweat gushing into my eyes, yet feeling a great sense of accomplishment as I reached each peak knowing that grit, determination and resilience were with me on this journey. These emotions apply directly to both my personal and professional challenges in life.

Donna, our first innkeeper on this Vermont excursion, who at 60ish or 70ish and still a teacher, single-handedly bought a bed and breakfast here 14 years ago, uses her own grit, determination, and resilience (along with a great sense of humor) to get up at 4 a.m. every morning to prepare breakfast for her guests, work in the garden, make repairs on the house and provide excellent customer service for each of her guests. It’s not always easy, but she gets it done each and every day.

For those of us in business, inspiration – for learning to be our best selves and recognizing our potential to lead — surrounds us every day.

Locally, there is an event coming on August 28th that is guaranteed to inspire you the way this trip has inspired me. The annual IMPACT Business and Leadership Summit in Melbourne will give you a day to reflect, imagine and be inspired by others who have achieved much professional (and personal) success in their lives. A wide variety of inspiring speakers will be talking about authentic leadership and the grit, determination and resilience it takes to be successful as a business leader. I strongly encourage you to take some time out for yourself and consider attending this event with hundreds of other business professionals on August 28th. You’ll be glad you did!
To learn more about the upcoming IMPACT Business and Leadership Summit, visit http://wbc.fit.edu/events/impact_summit.php.

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