



# We can be heroes

After spending a day with fire-fighters, **Eugene Yiga** learnt what it means to be a hero.

I wake up in the middle of the night to catch a pre-sunrise flight. I'm wedged on a plane between two armrest hogs – let's call them "Loud Eater" and "Louder Snorer" – only to circle the runway because of weather-induced delays. I forget my phone charger at home.

Yes, every job has its inconveniences, as I discovered when I spent the day in Johannesburg on assignment. And yet the gripes don't mean much; not just because my work gives me the opportunity to meet amazing people and experience incredible things (for which I'll always be grateful) but because the mini-dramas we like to rant about ad nauseum online are nothing compared to the real challenges other people face every day.

Saving people from drowning. Running into buildings on fire. Being shot at while you're trying to do your job. This is just some of what the brave men and women of South Africa's rescue and emergency services have to go through in their work, as I learnt at the launch of an initiative that contributes to the training of emergency services personnel.

"The training that was put into me actually paid off in a big way," said Robin Fortuin, an NSRI volunteer rescue swimmer who saved six people from drowning when he was only 21. "It doesn't matter where you come from. Anyone can be a hero." Indeed, after the meeting, Fortuin, and other attendees got to take part in an adventure to see what heroes are made of. Dogs in action with the K9 search team. High angle rescue from a nine-storey tower. Extrication from a crushed car using the Jaws of Life. And let's not forget the "Flame Over"; you know, because what better way to spend a winter morning than inside a shipping container set on fire?

"Who are you with?" I was asked more than once as I watched the activities and jotted down my thoughts. It's a

question people often ask, but this time it wasn't about which publication I write for. It was about which emergency service I was from.

Most of the people wore identifying overalls – red, black, orange, blue – to make it clear they were paramedics, police officers, and so on. I wasn't wearing anything special. "Oh, I'm not with anyone," I said in an apologetic tone. "I'm just a writer."

But saying that made me realise there was no reason to feel embarrassed about having an 'ordinary' job. Indeed, just because your work doesn't require you to put your life in physical danger, doesn't mean you can't bring an element of bravery into it.

All the people I got to meet that day were ordinary men and women who made the choice to do something extraordinary with their lives. And it IS a choice. We can

be heroes if we're prepared to bring a level of excellence to our work.

And yet we so often waste the privilege. For some reason, we live in a society where fewer and fewer people seem to care about their work. You see it in the dead eyes of cashiers and you hear it in the dull voices of people in yet another pointless meeting at work.

I see it all the time: unprofessional behaviour from people who see no reason to follow through on the promises to do what they said they would.

Seriously, if the toughest thing about your life is that you get too many emails, you've got it easy. Either do something to fix your career (and your life) or stop complaining about being overworked and underpaid. The world expects better of you. And you should demand better of yourself. **TBI**

