

Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

Welcome once again to my backyard and Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint. How many times have you actually heard that expression in the last period of time? A lot I bet, and it does ring true, but I got to thinking, what can we learn from preparing for running a marathon that's relevant for us if we are in the middle of a marathon?

Now I have a little experience here. I did run and finish one marathon about 10 years ago, but that's it, just one. And I wanted to hear from an expert, so I phoned a friend. My good friend, Patricia Goodwin from Iowa State University, has been president of The Twin Cities Marathon. She has run 45 marathons herself, she has run Boston, and she founded a non-profit to support young runners who were Olympic hopefuls, Minnesota distance elite runners, so yes, she is an expert. In our conversation about preparing for a marathon, she recounted the following three things as core to everything you do:

- #1—Create a plan for the week. Don't be afraid to modify the plan when things change, but have a plan.
- #2—Build a base. That is, you can't start if you haven't been running 30 miles a week with suddenly going from 10 to 30. Build a base little by little.
- #3—Be consistent. That means train every week, not just once in a while or every other week, but be consistent.

Those three things are the core. Now around that core, we're going to add some other elements:

- #4—Give yourself time to recover and recoup. Your body needs recovery time; you need recovery time, both physically and emotionally. Build in that time.
- #5—Another element that surrounds the core is doing the hard things at the start of the day. Think of what's on your to-do list. If you do the hardest thing at the start of the day, it's quite a psychological boost.

I can recall when I was training for the marathon that I had to train during the winter, which meant in Minnesota there are some 10 degree days when it really doesn't look very inviting to go outside, but I'd step outside the door as early as I could in the morning and start out. Often saying to myself, "This is really stupid; I can't believe I'm out here," but after about a mile, I'd warm up and the run would be enjoyable. So do the tough things that you have on your daily plan first. Pat also said, "You may eventually need to be your own coach, but in the beginning having a coach or a trainer can be beneficial for you." And bear in mind, there are support groups both online and in real time with our social distancing. And finally, think about marathon day as actually like graduation day. It's a celebration of sorts, so create some goals, some interim steps, that you can celebrate along the way. But what about lessons during the marathon?



When I asked Patricia about this, she said she had two mantras that she has used almost forever. One of them is to admit that it's hard. She said she actually has a sentence for that—it's called "Uffda this is really hard." Trying to pretend it isn't doesn't work.

Her second mantra is one she uses when self-doubt creeps in and she said it always will creep in. Then she says to herself, "If not now, when? If not now, when?" Finally, Patricia noted that she was scheduled to run Boston this year, and of course that didn't happen, and neither did some of the events for her young runners, which led her to her final point. She said, "As a marathoner, never ever ever give up hope." She said after all, running a marathon is 80% mental.

I love that reminder. I love that reminder about attitude, mindset, and optimism. So in all of your endeavors, I wish you the best of success and hope you can think of these two mantras: "Uffda this is hard" and "If not now, when?"