

What a Marathon Can Teach Us about Business

APPENDIX

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

In my article *What a Marathon Can Teach Us about Business*, I said that my experience in walking six marathons (and now in training for my seventh!) and raising money for cancer research through the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training (TNT) program has provided me with a template for achieving optimal results in other aspects of life, including the workplace. Below I explain how the eleven elements in this TNT-inspired template contribute to a successful marathon experience (i.e., training, fundraising, and completing the event) AND to optimizing business results.

Element	Marathon	Business
<i>Money matters</i>	The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society trains “regular” people for endurance events like marathons to raise money for cancer research. Fundraising is TNT’s primary goal.	Companies exist to make a profit. Even non-profit organizations must cover their costs. Unless there is sufficient money, the organization cannot survive to carry out its mission.
<i>The big picture</i>	Team in Training’s motto, “Saving lives...one mile at a time” clearly tells participants exactly how their training and fundraising efforts contribute to the big picture of eradicating blood-related cancers. During marathons, no one can miss TNT participants because the purple shirts we wear create a “sea of purple” that serves as a visual reminder of our cause.	Employees who see the organization’s big picture (i.e., vision or mission) AND can articulate their role in making it a reality are as committed to that picture as TNT participants are to our cause. It is management’s responsibility to ensure their employees see the picture clearly and understand their contributions to achieving it.
<i>Strategy development</i>	TNT marathoners embrace a strategy designed to enable us to achieve very clear short- and long-term goals. Short-term, our goals are to raise money for cancer research, increase public awareness of the blood-related cancers, and reach the finish line of our event. Our long-term goal is eradication of these cancers.	Organizations must identify specific short- and long-term goals that provide a road map to the successful achievement of their visions. Short-term goals are important indicators of progress.
<i>Measures of progress and completion</i>	For TNT marathoners, two short-term measures are: did we raise the funds we committed to raise, and did we finish our event? The long-term measure is: how much closer are we to eradicating blood-related cancers?	To ensure their employees’ decisions and behaviors remain aligned with business goals, organizations must have interim measures of progress that let them know whether they are on the right track. They also need measures of achievement that indicate when they have reached their goals.
<i>Strategy implementation</i>	Successful TNT marathoners implement the carefully planned strategy throughout the months of training as well as on event day. Implementation includes following the training schedule, engaging in fundraising activities, and generally being true to the plan in spite of temptations and distractions.	In the workplace, strategy implementation requires accountability, consistency, dedication, a motivating environment, and the perseverance to stick to the plan in spite of temporary obstacles or distractions.

<p><i>Focus on the present moment</i></p>	<p>Given the above comments about strategy and goals, which are forward-looking, “focusing on the present moment” may seem an odd marker of success. While marathoners do look forward to crossing the finish line, we also must pay close attention during each of the 26.2 miles that precede it. After training for so many months, why not enjoy fully this last part of the journey?</p>	<p>While focusing on goals is important, if we spend all our time looking forward, we miss some important elements in the present. For example, we don't want employees to be so focused on the “end” that they forget <i>how</i> we get there also is important. We don't want the haste to “finish” to override the need to celebrate the milestones along the way.</p>
<p><i>Teamwork</i></p>	<p>TNT marathoners rely on many others to help us reach our training and fundraising goals. We need ALL our team members: <i>coaches</i> to teach us how to run or walk long distances safely and efficiently; <i>mentors</i> to encourage us and help us meet our commitments; <i>Honored Team Mates</i> to inspire us; financial and moral support from <i>family, friends, colleagues, strangers</i>; and <i>people to staff the aid stations</i> during training and the event. Our success truly is a team effort.</p>	<p>The primary characteristic of a team is that it has a common goal. Organizations that rely on teamwork for their success must encourage and support team-like actions. Each person plays an important role that makes a unique contribution to the success of the team. A team cannot be successful unless ALL members are successful.</p>
<p><i>Motivation</i></p>	<p>When implementing the plan becomes difficult, TNT marathoners gain inspiration from our Honored Team Mates, individuals who have or had a blood-related cancer and who endure(d) their own form of marathon day after day. The evening before our event, TNT members from across the country gather for a pasta party that allows us to see in a visible way how many of us there are, all focusing on the same cause. We are inspired anew by hearing from those whose lives have been touched by blood-related cancers. How can we not go out the next morning determined to do our best to achieve our vision?</p>	<p>No one can motivate another person; the best we can do is provide an environment that employees find motivating. By tapping into things that their employees value, which change from person to person, management ensures such an environment. A few examples of things employees value include recognition by the boss, challenging assignments, autonomy in completing one's work, feeling part of something bigger than themselves, the ability to be of service to others, and believing in the product or service the organization provides.</p>
<p><i>Consistency</i></p>	<p>Training on a regular basis acclimates the body to the demands a marathon places on it. The time spent on your feet during the months of training determines the condition in which you finish – and even whether you finish.</p>	<p>Things like how you treat your employees every day, how they treat your customers on a regular basis, whether you do what you say you will do every time, help determine your organization's reputation – one way or another.</p>
<p><i>Resting</i></p>	<p>Marathoners must allow their muscles time to rest between training runs or walks AND they must get enough sleep if they are to minimize the likelihood of injury and increase the chance that their bodies will be able to perform at their best on race day.</p>	<p>Just as marathoners cannot optimize race results by running or walking on sore, overextended muscles, neither can an organization optimize business results with employees who are burned out, stressed, tired, and who leave because of the constant pressure.</p>

Celebrate successes

The journey TNT marathoners are on to help eradicate blood-related cancers is a long one. This makes it especially important to celebrate our progress along the way. During months of training we celebrate things like fundraising successes, each person's completion of our Saturday runs/walks, each new (longer) distance we run or walk, when we reach the top of a steep hill. On the evening of the marathon, TNT throws a victory party during which participants from all over the country come together to celebrate our collective contribution to the cause. While no single individual can find cures for all the blood-related cancers, each dollar raised, each person educated, brings us one step closer to that ultimate goal of eradicating blood-related cancers. That is why we celebrate each new challenge overcome in training and in fundraising. Those successes are what motivate us to keep coming back.

Because an organization's vision by definition is long-term in nature, it is challenging to keep employees focused and willing to continue their contributions for sustained periods of time. Creating small "wins" along the way enables employees to see that they are making progress and provides an environment that motivates them to continue their quest to achieve organizational goals. Regularly expressing your appreciation for others' efforts goes a long way toward creating dedicated and committed employees



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