

What a Marathon Can Teach Us about Business

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

What can training for a marathon teach us about optimizing business results? Plenty! 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 program has provided me with a template for achieving optimal results in other aspects of life, including the workplace. Here are the key elements of this training and fundraising template:

1. Acknowledging that money matters
2. Specifying individual contributions to the big picture
3. Developing a strategy that is aligned with desired goals
4. Identifying measures of progress and achievement
5. Implementing the strategy
6. Focusing on the present moment
7. Engaging in teamwork
8. Creating a motivating environment
9. Acting consistently over time
10. Taking time to rest and re-energize
11. Celebrating successes

Some of the above elements may seem counterintuitive to optimizing business results, especially in a "down" economy such as the one the U.S. is experiencing right now. My contention, however, is that they actually are critical success factors in achieving desired outcomes. For a side-by-side comparison of the application of these elements to Team in Training marathoners and to managers and employees, please see the appendix to this article

(*What a Marathon Can Teach Us about Business: Appendix*) on my web site. For now, let me address briefly two elements that often go by the wayside when organizations face tough times: taking time to rest and re-energize, and celebrating successes.

Just as marathoners must rest their muscles on a regular basis to avoid overuse injuries that would prevent them from completing their races, employees need a break from job-related stress if they are to perform at optimum levels. Athletes know that sufficient physical and mental rest is critical not only to maintaining, but to increasing their performance over time. This same concept applies in the workplace: neither employees nor organizations are well served when those who make decisions are burned out and feel stressed. Illness, increased absences, and dysfunctional turnover are other undesirable consequences when employees are not permitted to refresh themselves physically and mentally.

Another key element to optimizing business results is celebrating successes, including progress made in achieving final goals. Just as the mile markers along the course let marathoners know (and celebrate!) how many miles they have completed, your creating small "wins" along the way enables employees to see that they are making progress and motivates them to continue their quest to achieve organizational goals. So the next time they make progress (i.e., reach another mile marker) and especially when they cross a finish line, be sure the crowd cheers! ➔

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