Train for success

By Bridget Behe

In September I finished running my first half-marathon (13.1 miles) in Akron, Ohio. My time was 2:13:45, a full minute ahead of my goal of 2:15. I couldn’t be more proud of actually finishing, my time and my investment in training. It was all worth it. As I reflected with my running friends after the race, I realized the parallels between preparing for and running a race and managing a business.

Setting a goal

Deciding to run my first half-marathon didn’t come quickly. I’d run several 5ks in my four years of running, and those were goals accomplished, too. But after you accomplish a goal, you need to set the next one to give yourself something to work toward. Once I’d won or placed in some 5K races the thrill wasn’t the same. I needed a new goal, something to work toward.

The same is true in business. Whether it’s a financial goal, a customer goal, an employee goal or a profit goal, we work better when we have a goal to strive for. Once you establish a goal, don’t keep it to yourself. Tell people about the goal to help keep you accountable.

Share your business goal with the appropriate people. Share the employee retention goal with your employees.

Share the profit goal with your investors and employees. Share the customer satisfaction goal with everyone, including your customers. The more people who know about your goal, the more it will stay at the top of your mind.

Do your homework

Seek advice, professional or experienced, on the best way to reach your goal. I didn’t go from running a 5K race to a 13-mile race alone. I sought information online and subscribed to a running magazine to get even more insight about nutrition, mental preparation and training. I talked with other runners who’d finished half or whole marathons. Seek professional advice or advice from experienced persons. They can tell you how to prepare, what stumbling blocks or set-backs they encountered, their approach to reaching the goal, how long it took to achieve it and what they would do differently if they had the same goal today. Get lots of input and process it into a plan that will work best for you.

The need to train

Training stretches your capacity to reach a goal without compromising the means to achieve that goal. Train as
you act and then you will act as you've trained. Marathon runners know this. Business people know this too.

Training really is the hard part. Do you have the discipline to do things according to your plan? Do you have the integrity to put in the time to reap the benefits? Ask anyone who has finished a race about the hard part and they'll admit it isn't the race — it's the training.

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Training is your ability to put a plan into practice. It’s easier to execute the plan if you know what to do. Having the discipline to do it is the hardest part of training.

Appreciate the support you get for achieving your goal and don’t be surprised when it doesn’t come from people you’d expect. Most people with whom I shared my race goal were very supportive.

What also surprised me was the lack of support from some friends who knew about my goal, knew how important running had become to me, but never bothered to ask about my progress. Not all of your employees, suppliers or investors will be as excited about your goal as you are. Your employees will have different motivations for helping you achieve your goals. Those reasons are varied but all valid. Take the support where you get it and don’t expect it from everyone.

**Avoid tunnel vision**

Like running a race, work isn’t all about reaching the goal, it’s about the adventure. I tend to look down as I run...
so I won't trip or fall. During the race I realized that I hadn't been looking around at my surroundings. I made an effort to look around to take in the big picture.

Get out and see what beauty you bring to the world.

**Those final steps**

That last push may be where you need the most encouragement. Two of the last three miles of the race were uphill. About a half mile from the finish line, people were cheering and ringing cowbells. I wasn't prepared for so many spectators. Nor was I prepared for them calling out my name, encouraging me on. The race organizers had the runners' first names printed on the front of their race bibs so spectators could encourage the runners personally. It really helped. Personalize your message and cheer your employees on to bigger things.

**Reaching your goal**

Finishing felt great. When I saw the time clock was near my goal, I began to cry. It was awesome to finish and finish on time. It was an emotional ending I hadn't anticipated. I went to see how my friends were doing. Then I went back to a spot where there were spectators and began to cheer on the other runners. It helped me and I hope it helped them. Cheer on your friends and colleagues. You never know how much it will help them achieve their goals.

I plan to enter another half marathon next year. I believe I can stay in great shape and reduce my time. Look for me at the Detroit half-marathon finish line next October.

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