

I Ran a Marathon Without Training. Here's What I Learned and How It Made Me a Better Entrepreneur.

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Physical exercise has always been an important part of my routine. In the course of starting my company, I've used long-distance running and cross-training as a means to de-stress, socialize and insert some level of control and predictability into a professional lifestyle that is pretty chaotic.

I'll preface this with the obvious: I'm an average athlete. However, as I've gotten older, my approach to physical activity has actually taught me a lot about how to be a better company founder and entrepreneur.

These are a few of those reflections and lessons I've learned along the way:

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Put in the miles

In the process of building my last company, I picked up David Goggins' book, *Can't Hurt Me*, in which Goggins outlines his personal transformation from a potato chip and chocolate-shake-drinking, gelatinous pest exterminator to a badass Navy SEAL and Ultra Endurance Athlete. I was fascinated by Goggins' story, particularly with how he was able to train his mind to

push through pain to achieve his goals. His most famous (and insane) feat was running a 100-mile ultra-marathon in under 19 hours without formal training, which ultimately led to kidney failure and broken feet.

Nevertheless – I thought, what the hell? If this Goggins guy can run 100 miles without training, why couldn't Justin Vandehey, an average athlete in decent cardio shape, finish a marathon without formal training?

So, that's what I did, and boy, was that stupid.

First, I attempted to condense training. I was doing CrossFit four days a week and purchased a weighted vest to strengthen my legs. According to my math, if I ran five miles each day with a 20lb vest for three months, that SHOULD equate to the wear and tear that my body would experience over the course of 26.2 miles.

The result? I finished my marathon time at the same time as Oprah. What's more, I had stress fractures throughout both my legs and broke three toes.

What did this teach me? For one, I'm not David Goggins. More importantly, as an entrepreneur, the miles really matter. Whether it's fundraising, sales or building products, how you train matters. There are no silver bullets to learning these functions or building an exceptional company. Find a coach, mentor or advisor who can help you build a plan toward achieving your outcome in each of these crucial aspects of your business. Put in the miles.

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Take the rest when you can

In my second marathon attempt, I was committed to a plan. I purchased an online training program from Hal Higdon, updated my Apple Watch and began actively tracking my miles and

heartbeat while putting in the work, including the long 20-mile weekend runs.

My goal was to qualify for Boston, a 3:05 marathon finish according to my age bracket. I was feeling really good. I was maintaining a seven-minute race pace during my training runs and had read on running forums that adrenaline usually pushes runners to an even faster pace during the race.

I wanted to put everything I had into training for this race, so three days before the event, I elected to get two non-prescribed squat training workouts during my taper week.

The result?

On race day, the adrenaline kicked in, and I maintained a 6:45/mile pace through 18 miles. However, I came out way too fast – and ultimately, those two additional leg workouts taxed my IT band to the point where I couldn't put any pressure on my left leg. That pain led to further GI issues, which arose (literally) at mile 23. My pace for the remaining eight miles fell to nine minutes/mile. I finished the marathon in under four hours but fell incredibly short of my goal

What did this teach me?

Take the rest when you can get it. Ignoring taper week and doubling down when my body needed to recover was incredibly stupid. As entrepreneurs, we often can't force an outcome by pushing all of the time. When you need to rest, or when it's prescribed that you rest, do it. You're working toward the best outcome for your business, and there is no extra credit if you're overextending yourself.

What's more, you can't control all of the variables that occur when things start to go off the rails. I had trained to eat during the race, but the pain that I was experiencing in my IT band triggered reactions from my body that I could have never anticipated. Sometimes negative momentum is just as powerful

as positive momentum. Embrace it for what it is, and be kind to yourself when things aren't going as expected.

Related: [How Marathon Running is Inspiring Present Day Entrepreneurs](#)

Embrace the suck

After a handful of marathons and half marathons, two of my friends convinced me to join them as a third teammate in a CrossFit competition (Hey bro, did I mention I do CrossFit?) I entered the competition confident, knowing that I had just come off hardcore marathon training and felt good about my strength endurance. The competition consisted of four lifts, all of different movements to test an athlete's fitness level.

For the first lift, I absolutely smoked the field, which contained a heavy cardio component and a long outdoor run. However, for the second lift, we were asked to do a single rep maximum lift of a clean and jerk movement. This was purely a strength exercise, and I am without a doubt an endurance athlete with poor shoulder mobility.

The result? I came in dead last out of 35 people on the heavy complex lift. I was pretty embarrassed with my individual performance. However, my other two friends on our squad crushed their individual lifts and raised our average to the middle of the overall competition.

What did this teach me?

It's okay to suck at something and just fully absorb that failure. It keeps us honest and humble about our abilities and gives us something to build on. It also reminded me of how critical a diverse team is to overall success. We all have things we're going to excel at, so focus on doing those things well and lean into the strengths of the others on your team. For what it's worth, I did come in eighth place in the heavy

farmer's carry, which I'm assuming comes from some combination of hauling groceries, growing up on a dairy farm or carrying little humans (a.k.a. my kids) around.

As entrepreneurs, we question the impossible and challenge the limits that are set for us. Many people think we're programmed for success (nature) or that we're born into circumstances that forecast excellence (nurture). I'd argue that this process is an evolution, not a static moment in time nor something that we inherited or are born with. It's also a process that we should try to enjoy.

As I train for an Ironman competition this Fall and have already discovered my lack of buoyancy and the inability to move my hands and feet at the same time, I'm trying to remember that. So, if you're reading this and know a good swim coach, you know where to find me. I'm the lanky guy in the pool with poor shoulder mobility, laughing and crying while trying not to drown, fully embracing the suck.

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