

Conquering Your Personal Everest

BY TROY SATHER

Four lessons that can propel you toward achieving what you thought was out of reach.



What is your “Everest”? What is the one thing you’ve always dreamed of achieving? Running a marathon? Becoming a CEO? Starting a nonprofit?

Each of us has our own Everest in the back of our mind, but often, those dreams are accompanied by thoughts such as, “I am not fit enough to do that,” “I don’t have the skills for that level,” or “I am too old to start that now.”

I had similar thoughts as I embarked on the journey to conquer my Everest: competing in an Ironman triathlon.

“I have never swum a lap; how am I going to swim 2.4 miles?” I asked myself. “I have not ridden a bike since high school. There is no way I can endure 112 miles.”

“I have run off and on for years,” I noted. “But running 26.2 miles after swimming and biking? Are you kidding me?”

With some focus, I was able to push aside those thoughts, set out on my journey, and complete an Ironman. Along the way, I learned a great deal about myself and what it takes to endure. As I reflected on the journey, I identified four lessons you may find helpful as you pursue your own Everest in life — and business.

THE BIGGEST STEP ... IS STARTING

With all the nagging questions in our heads, often the biggest hurdle to beginning the journey is just starting. For me, that moment occurred as I completed the forms on Active.com to officially sign up for Ironman Louisville. I hesitated: “Am I really going to do this?” With a little uneasiness, I pressed the button, and the journey began.

Takeaway: The biggest step in pursuing a key achievement is not a time-consuming step. Actually, it takes just a split second. It is, however, by far the most important and typically the most difficult step. It is that moment when you commit yourself to pursuing

your goal. It may be the journey toward becoming a CEO. Or the decision to lead a global IT transformation program. Or the choice to pursue an Ironman. The act of a one-button click is all it takes to make the decision to pursue your Everest.

Are you ready to take the biggest step, or are you still finding it difficult to click the button?

BEST ‘INDIVIDUAL’ TEAM SPORT

As a fellow athlete said while nervously setting up transition for my first-ever triathlon, “You are going to love it. This is the best individual team sport.” The Ironman triathlete endures up to 17 hours of physical exertion and crosses the finish line alone. However, the achievement is far from an individual accomplishment.

Takeaway: No achievement, even an “individual” achievement, is truly accomplished on our own. Building a strong team in triathlon is similar to building a strong team in business. The first member of the team was my family. Gaining their commitment was as critical as training for the Ironman. With training ranging from five to 20 hours a week, a whole family commitment was necessary.

The second member of the team was an experienced coach and mentor. I needed someone who could assess my skills, define a plan to leverage my strengths and improve on my weaknesses, and provide expert guidance throughout the journey. The final members of the team were the fellow athletes and training partners who endured the same long training days, pushing and motivating me along the way.

Whatever your Everest, commitment from those close to you, an experienced mentor to support you along the way, and trusted peers pushing and motivating you are all critical in setting a positive trajectory toward accomplishing your goal.



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Do you have a strong team, or are you attempting to push ahead on your own?

FAILURE IS AN OPTION ... AND A REALITY

We might not like to admit it, but at some point in the pursuit of any major accomplishment, things will not go as planned. It is inevitable because we cannot control all the variables. It is the reaction to adversity and failure that determines our ability to stay on target toward reaching the goal.

To keep myself on target toward the Ironman — and during the event itself — whenever adversity got in my way, I addressed it with a simple framework of “assess, adjust, and move on.”

Takeaway: When faced with failure or unplanned outcomes, one of two reactions commonly occur. The first is over-analysis — spending more energy and time than necessary trying to understand why the failure occurred. The second is regression, instead of moving forward. If uncorrected, this can put your goal at risk. A slow shift away from those tendencies to a framework of “assess, adjust, and move on” allows you to quickly learn from the experience and stay focused on achieving your Everest.

Do you assess, adjust, and move on, or regress in your progress forward?

BE PRESENT

When setting out toward a seemingly impossible goal, the initial reaction is to think, and often worry, about the larger challenges to be faced in the distant future.

“I can’t hike to the top of the hill by the house without stopping. In four months, I need to hike 19,341 feet to summit Kilimanjaro.” “I only have two people on my team, and in 12 months, we are going to need to ramp up to 80-plus and deliver phase one of the business transformation.” Or in my case: “I can only swim two laps without stopping. In eight months, I need to swim 84 laps.”

Takeaway: It is important to look forward, keeping the end in mind. However, it is more important that your thoughts about the future do not inhibit the present. The path to achievement, as the phrase goes, is “not a sprint, but a marathon.”

Preparing for any marathon means tackling the tasks that must be done today and not the ones that must be done two weeks or two months from now. Instead of fixating on the 100-mile bike ride required in training week 30, be present and focus on the 30-mile bike ride this week. That’s the mind shift required to sustain the long journey.

Are you focused on the present, or on the long bike ride in week 30?

So, what is your Everest? What is that one thing you have always dreamed of achieving? This time, I hope there are no nagging thoughts and you are ready to take the biggest step.



VIDEO EXTRA

To hear more background from the author, visit jabian.com/video/Everest



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