



Helping leaders and organizations live up to their promise

Olympic Spirit

OK, I admit it - I've gotten hooked by the Vancouver Winter Olympics. Beyond the displays of athletic ability, excitement, suspense, spirit and medal counts, I can't help taking away some lessons for life and leadership:

Passion. You've got to love something a lot to dedicate the time, make the sacrifices and live with the challenges that come with competing as Olympians. Many of the athletes or their friends and families tell of something the athletes were almost inexplicably drawn to from an early age that they just couldn't not do. Sure they've all taken lessons since childhood, received excellent coaching and compete with the finest equipment, but many others have too who never attain the Olympic level. How great the Olympians pursued their passions and received support from others to make that possible.

What are you passionate about that's just hard not to do? What support are you getting to pursue your passions? How are you supporting others to pursue theirs?

Discipline. I suppose it's easier to be disciplined about something we have a passion for, but Olympians set the standard. It's hard for me to imagine the discipline of most Olympians who practice four or five hours or more nearly every day, often starting before dawn. I'm sure that for some, regular reminders of goals set and establishing effective routines work; obviously the right coaching can play a huge role as well.

What arenas in your life or work could benefit from more discipline? What reminders or routines might help? Who might serve as your "coach" - even if just a supportive friend?

Excellence. Most of the winners I've heard interviewed don't seem to be motivated as much by what medals they're awarded or what color they are as much as by whether they gave it their all. They set their own very high standards to meet or exceed; they stay focused on doing the very best they can versus being distracted by others' achievements or the score.

For the things that matter most, do you consistently give your best? Do you set your own high standards to use for a "yardstick" and not confuse "the scoreboard" with what really counts?

Focus. Whether it's Shaun White entering the half-pipe, Lindsey Vonn at the top of the downhill or Apolo Ohno at the start of the short-track, have you noticed their near "otherworldiness?" They're "in the zone" as one put it, oblivious to the noise and distractions around them. In a sense they are in another world - their future world and vision of a perfect run. When asked how she performed with so many distractions and expectations, one of the women half-pipe medalists responded that she "just pictured her perfect run, then tried to replicate it."

Do you have a vision for your life and work - a "picture of your perfect run?" How might you increase your focus by eliminating some of the noise and distractions around you?

Courage. Perhaps courage should be at the top of this list; as Winston Churchill said: "Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others." Think of the courage it takes to just proclaim the goal of being an Olympic champion, or to get back in the game again and again after serious injuries and play through the pain, or to attack an icy hill right after three top athletes just before you crashed. What makes them do it? I'm sure that part of the answer is everything above. I also remind myself once in a while that our word "courage" comes from the French "coeur" for "heart." Our heart is a muscle, and muscles get stronger with more use; whether in the Olympics, life or work, we all need to build up our "courage muscle" by challenging ourselves each day to do what we find hard.

What's a right thing for you to do that will require courage? Can you tap in to some of the Olympian qualities discussed here to help? What else, or who, might help you muster the courage you need?

Soon the XXI Winter Olympics will come to a close, but the Olympic spirit need not end. Let's learn what we can from these tremendous athletes and vow to do all we can to keep the Olympic spirit alive.

Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.

T.S. Eliot

Every game is an opportunity to measure yourself against your own potential.

Bud Wilkinson

Success is about having, excellence is about being. Success is about money and fame, but excellence is about being the best you can be.

Mike Ditka

If you are going to be a champion, you must be willing to pay a greater price.

Bud Wilkinson

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