

frankly FUNK



Ron Funk

Isn't winning only possible within a context that compares you against the performance of your competition?

But how can an athlete control for the performance of other competing athletes on game day? He can't. A new "personal best" however, is the exact measure that any athlete can target, and be held accountable to

I'll admit it. I am an Olympic games junkie. I love it all. I love both the individual and team competitions, I love the awards presentations, I love the television coverage...all of it. But most of all...I love the obvious preparation, determination and commitment of the athletes. I love hearing their individual stories. When I witness the sheer focus and determination on their faces... I feel inspired. When their personal aspirations are shattered by defeat... I feel heartbroken. When against all odds these athletes find glory... I am elated.

I know that I'm not alone.

What is so amazing to me is that these athletes simply transcend an environment that is burdened by both political distractions and assertions of corruption in some form or another. I'm speaking of the realities of all Olympic games. Every four years there is this media search for either organizational and/or executional failures. Always positioned as being symbolic of incompetence and mismanagement, this sort of content fills our screens in the days before the competition begins.

You'll remember; "own the podium" was un-Canadian. Vancouver had no snow. Sochi would never be ready. Russians shoot stray dogs. Which Heads of State from what countries, do or don't come. "Let me tell you what it means!", our journalists cry. Well, in my view folks, none of that noise means a damn thing. It's all about the athletes.

A day or two into the games and we are all reminded of that fact.

Let me state right up front that no one has ever accused me of being an athlete. So, in fairness, I must advise you to continue reading at your own risk.

As far as I can tell, these Olympic athletes all seem to have one goal in mind. They are each working to achieve a new "personal best", that day, in their event. And they are each hoping that this one new "personal best" will be good enough for a win. Are you with me here? I'm arguing that the athlete does not lead with the objective to win in mind. Rather, the athlete's objective is to do better that particular day than he or she has ever done before... and then hopes that this performance level will be good enough to win.

In what other manner could they possibly measure progress towards their goal?

achieve. No semantics intended here folks; I think that this distinction is important.

By defining the objective as "winning", we introduce an uncontrollable performance variable - competition. Of course, you can't solve for a variable that you can't control. When athletes choose instead to have a singular focus on the performance variables actually under their control, they set up the "conditions to win".

To do so, our athletes must first understand the finest details of the technical elements that contribute to world-class performance. Through trial and error and with lots of help, our athletes perfect their techniques over time, for each of these elements. Through constant repetition, near flawless technical execution becomes possible and is of course the intended outcome of this training.

When this standard of excellence is achieved through training, physical conditioning and an ability to focus the mind become critical. I imagine these to be the only meaningful differentiators on game day. At least, I suspect that's true for those individuals who are winning medals. The measureable performance differences are just so small at this level.

Imagine. Years of preparation at this level, and if you're lucky, a single appearance at one winter's Olympics, in an event that (on average), lasts less than 2 minutes. Such is the life of a world-class athlete.

I suppose that's part of the reason I feel quite conflicted about using sports analogies in a business context.

What can be great about using a sports analogy is the familiar imagery that is evoked. Invariably there is an opportunity to link commitment, determination and the importance of the individual to a final resulting successful outcome.

What's bad about linking sports to business is that businesses are involved in a very long game. It is exactly the opposite of most sporting analogies where the outcome is determined by a singularly staged test between competitors.

When the good folks at Cstore Life asked if I'd write a little something about "winning" in our channel, I found it hard to make that very choice. At first I thought about occupying your time today by describing my views on best practices from a retailing perspective. You know, what

it might take to win. Alternatively, I considered drafting the same sort of thing, but from the perspective of a manufacturer selling into our channel. In the end, I decided that either group could easily imagine their own articles with content that was likely to be more relevant than mine.

That's when it occurred to me to think about the firms that I consider to be

“winning” and to search within that list for any common threads to be found among them. Discounting for product or service differences between industries, my candidates could all very clearly express what they thought were the key business drivers within their industry.

I suspect however, that most people don't have all that much trouble knowing what it is they have to do. The difficulty I think that many of us have is the challenge of staying focused long enough to refine the things we do into an absolute, “best practice”. If we do get that

far, this “project centric” environment of ours seems to leave us with little time to follow up on the quality of our execution.

That's when it occurred to me that athletes identify the technical elements for success and measure their next performance against their last “personal best”. In other words,

while you might be able to learn the elements of a best practice from your competitor, a singular focus on winning against them (while a great benchmark), is the wrong strategy.

If we were to take one lesson from our Olympic athletes, I think it would be to identify the best practices for your business and to make each successive execution over time your new personal best.



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