

26.2

Tips to Win your Business Marathon



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Huberty Performance Learning



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Business
Marathon

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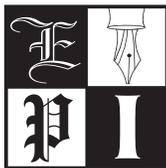
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Warm-Up

The strategies you use to run a marathon are the same strategies you need to make your business successful over the long haul.

My story:

I have been a marathon runner for almost 25 years. I have run some very fast marathons and some very slow marathons. I have "just finished" many times. When I analyze my best performances, I see that I ran, start to finish, with the expectation of doing well. I guaranteed a superlative performance by having a vision of success that pulled me through all the training miles and allowed me to be "race ready" on marathon day. I am not your typical skinny runner. I haul a lot of groceries 26.2 miles when I run a marathon. I have been blessed with the ability to stay relatively injury-free so I can run 2-3 marathons every year. I have been able to stay reasonably fit over the long haul.

I've worked hard to help organizations improve for over 20 years. First as an internal consultant and in the last several years as an external consultant, I have helped businesses and non-profit organizations improve their operations and harvest more sales. I've guided those businesses in implementing strategies for great RE\$ULT\$. I have helped some organizations more than others. When I analyze my consulting performance, I see that I'm able to give the best assistance to those organizations whose senior leaders are committed to a positive vision over the long haul, the business marathon.

This booklet offers 26.2 tips for using your running strategies to help you win the business marathon. As tips, they are just the "tip of the iceberg". You will have to do more work beyond these preliminary suggestions to keep your organization competitive. Huberty Performance Learning is ready to help you, to be your partner, as you pursue performance excellence.

Have a good run!



Mile 1 **Begin with a Vision**

Before you ran your first marathon, you began with a vision that you could successfully complete the task. Your vision pulled you through the last two miles of your 20-mile training runs. On marathon day, your vision got you to the starting line and then pulled you toward the finish line after months of training.

Your business needs a vision also. The business vision that describes where your organization is headed will pull you through the actions you need to take each day. If you have a vision for your business, review it and determine if it needs updating. If you don't have a vision for your business, what are you waiting for?

What is the vision of success for your business down the road?



Mile 2 **Get a Physical**

Just about any guide you can buy about exercise begins with advice to have a physical examination before you begin. When you get a physical before beginning a running program, your doctor will check the various systems in your body.

That good advice applies to your business, as well. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria for Performance Excellence is best source of information for your business physical examination. Get the Baldrige Award criteria at www.nist.gov and give your business a physical.

Has your business had a physical examination lately?



Mile 3 **Build a Base**

Beginning runners are advised to build a base of several miles a week when they plan to run a marathon. Author Jeff Galloway has demonstrated that most runners can build an adequate base of weekly miles to run a marathon within six months of starting their running programs.

The base or foundation for your business is a set of guiding principles, values and behaviors that reflect and reinforce the desired culture of the organization. If you have a solid base of principles and values, you can better weather the stormy days in a global economy.

What values and principles provide the base for your business?



Mile 4 **Know Your Key Performance Factors**

As you developed your vision for running a marathon, you began to evaluate the factors that would contribute to a successful outcome. You made a list of performance factors: training schedule, training routes, food, shoes, and running clothes. The point is, you KNOW what it takes to be competitive.

Knowing your Key Performance Factors (KPF) is very important to your business, also. An examination of best practices in successful companies shows the following KPFs: customer-focused employees; strong relationships with suppliers; customers' trust in the company's promises; brand recognition; superior technology; a culture of continuous improvement; and team work.

What are the Key Performance Factors that will keep your business competitive? What changes are necessary so you can focus on three or four KPFs that will make the most improvement in your organization?



Mile 5 **Identify Course Segments**

When preparing to run a marathon, it's a good idea to review the marathon course to gain an understanding of the various segments of the racecourse. When you know the hills, curves, road surface, and scenery, you can use this information to develop a strategy for addressing the special requirements of each segment.

The best businesses REALLY KNOW their customers and group them into segments. This allows you to develop very specific attributes in your products and services that, when delivered, will turn your customers into "Raving Fans." Those customers tell others about your excellent products and services. It's better than adding headcount in the marketing department.

Have you truly segmented your customers and do you REALLY know their requirements and expectations so you can design the best products and services for them?



Mile 6 **Develop a Strategy and Balance Resources**

Running a marathon requires a strategy to balance your resources. You have to successfully manage your pace, liquid and food intake across the 26.2 miles of the race. You don't want to "go out" too fast. You want to run a pace you've planned. You don't want dehydration to reduce your performance, so you plan to drink water regularly.

Your business needs a strategy to operate efficiently. You have to balance resources to serve the needs of your customers. Cash flow is the race pace of your business. You can't spend too much in January on marketing and just hope you will have the revenue and the customers to pull you through the end of the year. You have to replenish cash through the year. In the best businesses, the revenue from the sales of products and services more than replenishes the cash spent on operations. You need to balance people, marketing, sales and operations to get a positive bottom-line.

What is your business strategy? What are your plans for balancing your resources across the business year?



Mile 7

Run with a Team

I joined a running club as a beginning runner and it really paid dividends over the years. On days I didn't feel like running, I'd still hit the streets to run with Al, George, Jack, Nort, Mary-Jo or Vic because I made a commitment to run with them. Running with a team also helps you during the marathon. Some of my most enjoyable marathon experiences have been shared with Joe and Dave.

In your business, teamwork is very important to your success. Working as a member of a team with a commitment to a common goal challenges you to deliver your best.

Who is on your business team? Are all your teammates competent to go the distance? Is your business team aligned and focused on a common vision?



Mile 8

Create Action Plans for a Great Performance

As soon as you circled the date of the marathon on the calendar, you began planning for your race. Perhaps you consulted a guidebook that recommended a training program geared for your expected performance. Typically guidebooks recommend alternating easy and hard days of training and gradually extending each week's longest run. The training regimen specified the distances and the time you should expect to spend each week of preparation. These training schedules are action plans for a successful marathon. The training schedules may also recommend speed work, hill workouts, or time trials.

Action plans are a MUST for business success. Strategic plans are typically divided into several objectives. Action plans are roadmaps that detail how you'll achieve those business objectives. Action plans identify the individuals responsible for each action and the date each action must be completed. The action plans should have performance projections or targets (See Mile 9) with time scheduled for periodic reviews to see if the business is "on pace" for the plan.

What are your action plans for your business objectives this year?



Mile 9

Set Realistic Performance Projections

Typically, as marathon day approaches, you have given a tremendous amount of thought to your split times, the clock time at particular points during the marathon. These performance projections for your marathon will help you judge your pace. If you find you are a little behind your projected time at a particular mile mark, you can make an adjustment in your race day strategy.

Performance projections are essential in determining if you are on pace for revenue and sales while holding the line on expenses. Successful organizations set quarterly or monthly targets. If you find your business a little behind the targets, you can make strategic adjustments and pick up the pace for sales or slow the rate of expenses.

What are the performance projections for your business for the next 12 months?



Mile 10

Map Your Routes

Most runners have their favorite running routes. When you started running, you might have driven the streets near your home to record mileage and significant mile markers. This allowed you to run some time trials to test your improving capability.

You need to map the routes of your business also. These are your key business processes. Use a flowcharting technique to identify the steps your orders take as they move through your business. You will see where you have extra steps or redundant steps that waste time and money. Just as in your running, speed counts when beating the competition.

What are your key business processes? Have you flowcharted your processes?



Mile 11

Clock Your Running Times

In races, your greatest competition is the clock. As soon as the starting gun goes off, you are racing against the finish line clock. You are more likely to measure your performance against the clock than a particular competitor.

The clock can be the greatest competition in your business, also. Use the flowcharts of your processes you completed in Mile 10 to calculate your average delivery time for your major products and services. Review those charts again to see where you can reduce your delivery times.

Are you able to deliver your products and services faster than your competition?



Mile 12

Set Qualifying Times

If you want to run the Boston Marathon, you have to run a marathon within the qualifying time. Men between the ages of 18 and 34 must run a qualifying marathon of 3:10 or faster; women between 18 and 34 must run 3:45 or better.

There are qualifying times for business as well. Your salespeople will be more successful when they spend more time qualifying sales prospects over the phone before making that in-person sales call. If you don't qualify prospects as people who want and need your product, you're just wasting time. When you are running a race against the competition, why waste time with people who can't or won't buy your product?

What questions do you ask to qualify customers? How could you make your sales qualifying more effective?



Mile 13.1

Set Performance Reviews

The half marathon mark is a good point to review your race performance. Is the day unfolding as you expected? Are you on pace? How do you feel? If the race is going well, you get a little boost, a little spring in your step, as you hear your half marathon split. If the race is not going as planned, you make adjustments to fit the conditions of the day.

You need to set periodic performance reviews for your business, too. Many set performance reviews quarterly; however, the best businesses monitor performance monthly. The performance review requires a thoughtful consideration of business conditions and product and service performance.

Is your performance meeting the targets you set at Mile 9? What adjustments can you make for better RESULTS?



Mile 14

Take Walk Breaks

Jeff Galloway, former U.S. Olympic marathoner, has written two books about running, the latest about how to run a marathon. His best advice is to take walk breaks. Jeff has data that suggests that short periods of walking will actually improve your overall marathon performance because you will extend the time before your body becomes totally fatigued and you "hit the wall."

Periodically walking through your business helps you better compete. In their book, *In Search of Excellence*, written several years ago, authors Tom Peters and Bob Waterman highlighted the concept of "Management by Walking Around" (MBWA). This gives the business leader a sense of what leadership messages are reaching the average employee and how the organization can benefit from employees' insights and perspectives.

When was the last time you walked through your business, pausing to listen to your employees for performance improving ideas? Did you act on those ideas?



Mile 15

Practice Waist Management

I run to eat. Most who meet me are amazed that I have run over 80 marathons, usually three to five marathons a year. I haul a lot of groceries to the finish line. Perhaps running has helped you maintain a slim body. Congratulations. Some research suggests that carrying an extra 10 pounds to the finish line costs you about a minute per mile pace. If your weight has fluctuated over the years, you know how important it is to practice waist management for your running.

In business, you fight a different kind of waste, the waste of resources and profit when you tolerate inefficient systems and processes. If you have product defects, you may be paying twice to get a good product out the door. Another way of looking at the problem is to calculate the Cost of Waste (COW™) for your business. For more details on finding the COW hidden in your business, visit www.betterruncompany.com and click on the COW.

Where are you hiding the COW in your business?



Mile 16

Run for a Cause

Many charitable organizations have organized running events as fund-raising opportunities. Typically a runner solicits sponsors who donate to the charity based on the miles covered or a flat-fee for the entire event. The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of America has organized teams of runners who are organized locally and train together. Called "Team in Training," the charity has raised millions for research. Not only does the charity benefit, the runners benefit as they have training partners that can help them survive the marathon.

You can profit by running your business with a commitment to your local community. Strong communities support good businesses and vice versa. Get involved in your community. Join a civic organization like the local Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary or Optimist club, or volunteer to help a local school. Your neighbors will see you as an asset and the networking opportunities may turn into sales opportunities that help your business grow.

What commitments have you made to improve your community?



Mile 17

Stay Injury-free

Over-training is more likely to produce injuries than success. Marathon training requires long-distance running, but some beginning runners train too much and end up harming themselves. Author and Olympian Jeff Galloway cautions runners to take a day or two off at the first sign of injury to avoid weeks, or even months, of no running.

Your business needs to stay injury-free. Workplace safety is no accident. You should conduct periodic audits and train your employees to spot and eliminate unsafe work practices. Creating a safe workplace, according to the US Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) administrator, "Can be the difference between operating in the black or running in the red."

Don't run your company in the red. Conduct a safety assessment. Plan and train for workplace safety and reduce your workplace injuries.

Has your company had a workplace safety physical lately? What can you do to help all your teammates be safer and healthier?



Mile 18

Increase Your Capacity Through Speed Work

Perhaps you've used speed work and hill workouts to sharpen your marathon performance. Once you established your base miles (Mile 3), you found you could get a little faster by visiting the track once a week or doing hill repeats. In no time at all, you found your race pace in short "trial" races became 15 or 30 seconds per mile faster.

The speed work inside your business occurs with expedited orders. There is always a customer that needs your product or service immediately or yesterday. Because they are so customer focused, your salespeople committed your business to "pull out all the stops" and deliver that order to your customer's schedule. The point here is speed work. If you can push one order through quickly, consider what kind of process improvements you can implement to push ALL orders through more quickly.

Have you "stapled yourself to an order lately?" What can you do to eliminate bottlenecks that cost you speedy service to your customers?



Mile 19

Mentally Rehearse Your Finish

I run my best marathons when I visualize my performance at various points in the race. For several weeks before each race, I take time to sit, get quiet and visualize myself running past each mile mark. I also have a laser-like focus on the time recorded on the finish clock. During the race I find my mental rehearsal gives me a vital lift toward a great performance.

You are probably a veteran in your business. With your new vision (Mile 1), pause every so often to visualize your company passing each milestone until the vision is fully achieved. Focus on the specific performance you want at the end of each month or each quarter. You will find your mental rehearsal, combined with a laser focus on bottom line success, will propel you forward.

When was the last time you conducted a mental rehearsal for your business?



Mile 20

Don't Hit the Wall, Get Past It

Most say that running a marathon is really running two races back-to-back: a 20-mile run and a 10K. Often running the last 10K is the hardest part of the race, particularly if you are running on empty. In other words, you are flat tired and may be emotionally and mentally depleted as well. Most people get through the wall by focusing on their vision of completing the marathon AND following a strategy to properly balance their intake of liquids and food (see Mile 6) so they have the strength to finish the race.

Your business or career can "hit the wall," too, if your energy gets depleted because you aren't able to follow your strategy. Or maybe you realize you're in the wrong race. Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic, Inc, writes about running the wrong race and hitting the wall in his career in his book *Authentic Leadership*. He stepped out of the race for Honeywell CEO and chose to run a different company, one in tune with his principles. At Medtronic he found a place that offered him everything he wanted: values, passion and the opportunity to help people suffering from chronic disease.

Are you hitting the wall in your business or your career? What new strategy can engage your passion once again?



Mile 21

Motivate Yourself

Sometime during your first marathon, the committee in your head questioned your sanity. That internal committee enumerated every single ache and pain and suggested you just quit and go home. Because you anticipated the internal committee's Greek chorus of whines and anxieties, you armed yourself with positive messages and themes to drown out those negative voices. You thanked your committee for sharing and then promptly continued to turn one foot over the other to the finish line.

Your business needs the same type of ongoing positive messages and themes to keep opening the doors every day. For many, the best motivation is to be running a mission-centered business. Check your leadership behavior against your vision (Mile 1) and your Values (Mile 3).

What mission motivates you? Are you running a mission-centered business? Does your organization communicate a sense of purpose that keeps employees attending to customer needs each day? Are you "walking your talk"?



Mile 22

Weather the Storm

I hate to run in the pouring rain, but I don't mind running in a light drizzle. I ran one of my best marathons in a light drizzle at Grandma's Marathon along Minnesota's North Shore several years ago. I have run some wonderful training runs in the midst of snowstorms, usually with a friend, making the experience doubly enjoyable. Runners need a plan for where and how they will find shelter if needed. Sometimes just the comfort of having a plan allows you to weather the storm and go the distance.

You probably have weathered several storms on your way to running a successful business. Successful businesses have contingency plans so they can endure rough financial weather. Consider how you flew through the turbulence of the 2000-2003 economy.

Will your contingency plans see you through the next unforeseen disaster? How have you weathered storms in the past? How can those characteristics serve you in good times, too?



Mile 23

Dress for Success

From head to toe, you probably have exactly the right equipment to help you have a great race. You have just the right hat to keep your ears warm in the next chilly marathon. You picked out a running singlet and shorts in matching colors so your family can spot you and cheer you on at various points during the race. You know you need to use the shoes and socks that are the most comfortable during your training runs to manage blisters during your marathon.

Despite the trend to "business casual," you can't ignore the importance of dressing for success in business. Every guidebook will tell you to dress appropriately, but business casual makes it more challenging to figure out what "appropriate" is. If you are selling to the C-level in corporations, you better have a suit and a tie. When you are networking on the golf course, your suit is obviously out of place.

Are you dressed for success each day in your business? Who do you know that gets it right every time and how can you emulate that person?



Mile 24

Get Help From the Government

The 24-mile mark of the Twin Cities Marathon is right in front of the Governor's Mansion in St Paul, Minnesota. Every year while he was governor, Jesse Ventura would stand in front of the mansion to cheer runners on as they pressed their way on Summit Avenue to the finish line at the State Capital.

Contrary to the thinking of most business people, government can be friendly to your success. Every year, state and local governments invest in the economic development of their region. The government might fund the development of an industrial park or provide assistance for workforce development. Government organizations, particularly the federal government, buy from a variety of suppliers using several different contracting vehicles. You might be amazed at the help you can get or the products or services you can sell to the government.

How might your state and local officials cheer you on to success in your business? How can you explore the opportunities of working with local, state and federal governments?



Mile 25

Focus on Your Competition

In the 1982 Boston Marathon, Alberto Salazar and Dick Beardsley ran almost stride for stride through the last 9 miles of the race. Recalled as the "Duel in the Sun," that race was won by Salazar, who beat Beardsley by a mere 2 seconds. Both runners broke the 2-hour, 9-minute barrier, unheard of before that marathon. The competition pulled each man to run faster than either might have run alone. Perhaps you're lucky enough, and smart enough, to train with a runner whose capabilities are so similar to yours that's difficult to predict who will finish first in any given race.

Likewise, you can use your business competition to keep you striding forward. Many successful organizations continually measure the success of their competitors. Measuring yourself against your competition tells you if you have adequate market share, if your products and services need improvement, if your costs are too high, if you're doing a good job of keeping your customers happy, and so on.

What comparisons can you make with your competitors to spur your business to greater success?



Mile 26.2

Celebrate

There is nothing like crossing the finish line of the marathon. Whether it's your first marathon or your 50th, there is nothing like running under the finish line clock. You have realized your vision. All of the hours you spent in training and working toward your vision are behind you. You are finished.

The finish line for your business is usually at year's end when you look at the income statement and see a profit. If you did not quite meet your goals, you should look for clues where you need to make adjustments in your strategy and action plans. Even if you didn't meet every goal, keeping your doors open for another year is cause for celebration. Celebrating success motivates you and your team to keep achieving it.

How will you celebrate your success? How can you translate your lessons learned to be even more successful next year?

Cooldown

There is No Finish Line

You've probably seen the Nike ad that asserts, "There is no finish line." The ad has a picture of a single runner going up a country road with the ribbon of road laid over a series of small hills in the distance. There really is no finish line for your running program.

There is no finish line in your business, either. The sun will come up tomorrow and you will be selling your products and services, serving your customers. I hope tomorrow will find you looking for ways to keep your business thriving, ways to turn these 26.2 tips into useful action steps in your business.

Good luck. I'll see you on the roads because there really is no finish line.

Tom Huberty can help your company RUN Better. He can help you with strategic planning and operations process management. Call him at 612-801-2847 or e-mail him at Tom@BetterRunCompany.com.

