



### **TOPIC: GOAL SETTING AND STAYING ON TRACK**

### **TITLE: LESSONS FROM THE CHICAGO MARATHON**

October 9, 2001

I watched the Chicago Marathon this past Sunday, and it was great to see thousands of people who set out to meet such a big challenge, as well as the hundreds of thousands who came to cheer them along.

I noticed too how the runners' experiences relate to our lives. We're all running races - in our careers, our personal lives, our goals and our dreams. Each of these may seem like a marathon - they take a long time to complete, they're physically and emotionally challenging, and they require focus, discipline and tremendous energy.

Running a marathon is an amazing physical and mental accomplishment. It requires commitment to a goal, a willingness to establish and stick to a training plan, and intense physical and mental conditioning, as well as patience and perseverance. Many of our goals and dreams demand these same things, but they don't always get them. I'd like to share my thoughts about these factors, and challenge you to look at your own life in the process.

#### **Commitment to a goal**

The commitment to finishing a marathon begins many months before the race. Each runner must make a personal commitment to achieve their goal. For some the goal might be simply to finish; for others, it's finishing within a certain time frame; the goal for elite athletes is to win the race or set a new world record. Those who are watching have their own goal - to cheer and support their friends, their loved ones, or even total strangers. The goal doesn't matter, but each person must be committed to achieving their own goal, and their simple presence is proof of that commitment.

How committed are you to what you want to accomplish? Are you proving it?

#### **Establish a plan and stick to it**

The marathon process began several months before the race when the runner establishes a training plan and sticks to it. Each runner has times when they find it difficult to stick to the plan. Perhaps they were physically fatigued, or they had other priorities that needed their attention, or they found it hard to find the time to train. Whatever the challenge, their commitment to their goal and their discipline in sticking to their plan led them to Sunday's race.

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What is your plan to achieve your goal, and how well do you stick to it?

#### **Prepare, prepare, prepare**

The runners were prepared for race day. They laid out their clothes and their running shoes beforehand. They mapped out their plan, determined what they needed, and were ready for what they thought might happen. They knew that you can't succeed at this kind of race just by showing up and winging it.

#### **The power of positive reinforcement**

Those who cheered for the runners were a hundred percent supportive. I didn't hear any negative comments, such as, "You'll never finish", or "It's too hard," or "Your goal is too high." Instead, hundreds of thousands of people were shouting, "Go, go, go!" "You can do it!" "You're doing a great job!" "Keep going!" The power of those words was amazing. You could see tired faces turn to instant smiles the minute they heard that encouragement.

Where could you offer more encouragement to someone?

#### **Water stations and conditioning**

Water stations were positioned every mile along the marathon route, where the runners could stop, recharge and refuel. Some of the runners paused, drank and walked a bit; others kept going. But at some point along the way, they all stopped to refuel and add energy to their bodies and their minds.

What water stations have you set up to condition and refuel your physical and mental self?

#### **Support**

Everyone taking part in the race and everyone there to support the runners had similar interests. Even strangers who didn't know each other supported each other. There was an amazing sense of community because they were all in it together and surrounded by others with similar goals. The same goes for the race supporters. The louder the cheering got, the more people cheered. It was contagious -- and incredibly motivating.

Who are you surrounding yourself with, and to whom could you offer more support?

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#### **Celebrate accomplishments**

The finish line was really impressive. Not only was it the end of the race, it was the place for the runners to cheer, celebrate, cry and revel in their accomplishment - even if they didn't achieve their exact goal. Not just the runners, but the fans, too. We could feel and experience their emotion along with them as every one of them crossed the finish line and celebrated their accomplishment.

How often do you celebrate your accomplishments?

#### **A greater purpose**

For many people, their participation represented something greater than the race itself. Each person in the marathon had a reason for being there. They were running for themselves, for someone else, or for America. They weren't doing something just to do it. It was that greater purpose that pulled them through.

As I reflect on what I watched this past Sunday, I realize the importance of these principles in our daily lives and how easy it is to overlook them. My congratulations to those who took part in the Chicago marathon, and thanks to all those who helped the runners achieve their goals.

I challenge you this week to look at the race you're running and your purpose in doing so. I invite you to stop and look at how you're putting these principles to work in your life.