

Ruminations on Motivation

By Dave McGovern

Most sport psychologists will tell you that athletic success is 90% mental. I've always been a little skeptical of that assessment, and three-time Olympian Curt Clausen agrees, saying that physically preparing for the race by getting out the door and doing the training is 98 or 99% of the game. (Of course Yogi Berra famously split the difference, saying "Baseball is 90% mental—the other half is physical." But I digress...) There's no doubt that getting out the door and walking is the key to performing well in races or achieving whatever other goals you may have for your walking. But what if finding the motivation to train is keeping you from getting out the door? That's where the power of the mind comes in. Techniques like visualization, relaxation and arousal are important psychological devices for elite athletes, but I find the most important mental tool is the mind-over-matter power of motivation.

Personally, I'm motivated by *fear* and *fun*. Fear of the next race will always get me out to do the hard miles, and the chance of making an international team or traveling somewhere fun can get me to do the hard workouts even if I'm otherwise "too busy" or not in the mood. But if no big races are on the horizon or if the weather is particularly lousy I can get as lazy as anyone. Here are some ways I get myself jump-started if I fall into a rut.

Go to Camp

I recently had the opportunity to spend a week at the Olympic Training Center near San Diego. Sure, it was a great way to escape New York's winter weather, but it was also a terrific way to jump-start what had been a lackluster winter of training. Coming off of a two-month layoff for an injury and a bout with Lyme disease I was having a hard time getting going again. I started training again just in time to run smack into New York's winter weather, "real life" commitments kept getting in the way, and the "why am I doing this?" demons started creeping into my psyche. Immersing myself into a training camp environment was just the thing to get the fire back in my belly.

Unfortunately not everyone can put life on the shelf for a week or more to avail himself or herself of the motivational magic



Dave McGovern, left, with Coach Enrique Pena and Olympic racewalkers Philip Dunn and John Nunn.



Training with a group is a great way to stay motivated.

that is our ice-cream-for-breakfast, all-you-can-eat-Pop-Tarts Olympic Training Center. You may, however, be able to find ways to set aside a week for yourself, either at home or away on vacation, where you can put a little extra focus on your training. A vacation can give you time to try two-a-day workouts. Get your main workout of the day out of the way in the morning, then try to do an extra few miles before dinner. With a little support from friends and family you can do the same at home for short stretches—perhaps for a week or so. Be sure to get to bed early, don't schedule any early or late appointments, unplug the television and dole out chores to the spouse and kids in exchange for reciprocation "next week." Then spend the extra free time out walking instead of folding laundry or watching *Figure Skating with the Stars*.

Have a Goal

Having a goal—be it a weight-loss target, a new personal best time in a local walking race or the objective of completing a marathon or half marathon—is one of the best ways to get you to stick to a training program. If I wasn't trying to make another World Cup team or qualify for the Olympic Trails again I'm not so sure I wouldn't be sitting by the pool with a Margarita instead of getting ready to lace up my shoes for a 10-mile walk.

Start a Training Log

Keeping track of your miles in a training log or daily diary is a great motivator. Actually having to write down "had three bowls of ice cream for breakfast at the Olympic Training Center then sat on my butt all day watching cartoons" is enough to shame just about anybody into lacing up the walking shoes. I write down just about everything remotely related to my training, from the mileage and pace of the workouts, to heart rates, weather, and even what I ate before, during and after if it's relevant.

Find a New Route or try New Types of Workouts

I guess some people find comfort in monotony, but I like to do something different every day, including training on different

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Cure

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training for six months and plans on continuing her walking routine, even after the half marathon.

"I can't let myself get too stressed out about goals and pace," Alanna says. "This is about a lifestyle and a desire to exercise."

Lindsey enjoys watching the progress that TNT members experience. "Participants feel rewarded knowing their efforts are making a difference—not only in the funds they raise, but in honoring the patients they have helped," she said.

Mackenzie's leukemia is now in remission. She is aware of her grandmother's efforts and enjoys helping work for the cause.

She recently was named a TNT "Honored Teammate," a title awarded to local blood cancer survivors whose courage provides inspiration for others.

"Mackenzie enjoys being the center of attention," her grandmother says. "She is a curious, busy little kindergartner who loves school and playing dress up." Mackenzie's mother, Susan, has been able to return to work. Her father has returned from Iraq and is now stationed in central Ohio. Alanna is grateful for the support team at the Columbus office of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. "They offer so much personalized attention," she said. "My daughter drops by the office a lot. It's kind of a safe haven."

Alanna and her family are encouraged by Mackenzie's progress. "After Mackenzie's chemotherapy treatments were completed, the doctors were hoping for remission within 30 days," Alanna says. "She was in remission within the first two weeks. That's a good sign for future success." ♦

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Mackenzie keeps Alanna company during a training walk.

To learn more about The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training program, visit www.teamintraining.org

Team In Training recruits four times a year offering different events each season for four different sports (walking, running, triathlon, cycle).

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Mission: to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma and to improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

Coach's Corner

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routes and doing different workouts. Some days I go short, other days I go long, some days fast some days slow, some days I'm on the track, other days I'm on the roads. I love to travel because I get to train in a variety of great locations, but when I'm home I always keep my eyes open for new courses. If I like the new route I'll measure it out and mark it with kilometer and mile marks—more information for the training log!

Find a Training Group

Having training partners makes walking more enjoyable and adds a layer of accountability. It's harder to blow off a workout when you have others relying on you to be there, whether they're human, or even canine. I don't have a daily training group, but I do have a network of friends I can call and wrangle into a workout if I wake up lacking the motivation to go out to train alone.

Get a Coach

Joining a training group like The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training marathon and half marathon training team can provide training partners, but also a coach who can hold your feet to the fire if that's what you need to get yourself out walking. To find a local Team In Training group visit www.teamintraining.org.

Buy a New "Toy"

Granted I'm more of a geek than you could ever hope to be, but I have heart rate monitors, sports watches and GPS devices to help me through my training. I thrive on information and knowing my split times, heart rates and distance from the nearest geosynchronous satellite helps to occupy my mind. I also find that new clothes or shoes are a great psychological boost. I'm always eager to get out for my next workout when I find a big brown UPS box by my front door.

Reward Yourself

Have you ever walked in a road race and questioned the propriety of a bunch of supposedly healthy runners and walkers flocking to the beer truck that rolls in for the post-race party? They'll tell you it's all about carbohydrate and fluid replenishment, but it's really a matter of reward. This walking stuff is supposed to be fun, right? If knowing that your hard race will be rewarded with a cold brewski, or if a Margarita awaits at the local post-workout dive, there's just a little bit more reason to get out there now isn't there? Of course your reward after an extra-hard workout can take the form of a soak in the hot tub, a professional massage or a bowl—or three—of ice cream if you choose.

If you have a particularly interesting motivational tool you'd like to share with us feel free to drop us a line. And if you can't swing a room at the Olympic Training Center, there's always space for you at one of my "Dave's World Class" race-walking weekend clinics or week-long camps. Details at www.racewalking.org. Pop-Tarts are always on the menu... ♦

Dave McGovern is a member of the U.S. National Racewalking Team and the author of **The Complete Guide to Racewalking** and **The Complete Guide to Marathon Walking**. Visit his web site at www.racewalking.org.