

If you want the secret to this sport, just go to Carnegie Hall

Written for Jack and Adams Newsletter 08/2006

By Patrick Evoe

I find myself frequently searching for the secrets to this sport. The more I explore, the more I learn, the closer I find myself to the answers. Each year's experiences usher in new personal themes for the next year's training and races. I find that as I slowly gain knowledge, I change my perceptions of this sport. After learning from friends, competitors, coaches, racing, and training, it's become apparent that there is no secret. This sport is about consistency, but didn't we already know that?

I've found there to be two schools of triathlon advice in articles and books: simple and complex. It seems that advice offered by the most successful athletes is often the most straightforward and logical, while other talking-heads seem to overcomplicate the issues. The most prolific thinkers in any field are those able to simplify the most complex matters. God gave Moses only ten rules for man to follow. Einstein simplified the relationship between mass and energy into five character equation. Our country is built on only three profound "self-evident" truths: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In our sport, consistency is one of these fundamental virtues.

Reflecting on my fitness gains and growth over the last five years, I find that the underlying theme is consistency. I started my journey six years ago, 45 pounds heavier, and laboring to run a mile. Since then, my transformation and successes can be most attributed to consistency. It's a simple process of building on incremental gains practice after practice, ride after ride, not giving up, not breaking the rhythm, taking a planned recovery week or taking a vacation, but NEVER falling off the wagon.

Jim Collins lauds consistency as a supreme virtue of those who are successful in his book *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*. "Consistency distinguishes the truly great – consistent intensity of effort, . . . , consistency with core values, consistency over time." He uses a metaphor of a heavy flywheel to illustrate his point. The flywheel moves ever so slowly forward with days, weeks, and months of effort. The successful keep pushing the wheel, maintaining the effort over time. It starts to gain momentum, turn after turn, you put in more energy and the wheel spins faster and faster. He continues "each turn builds upon previous work, compounding your investment of effort. The flywheel moves forward with almost unstoppable momentum. This is how you build greatness." To Jim's assertion I add, this is how you build greatness in this sport.

I argue against any notion of get-fit-quick schemes. Staying consistent in your training over time is the best way to make gains. This is not to say that one should have a weekly routing without ever changing. Continuously modifying your training and workouts is an import piece of the overall puzzle to build on your incremental gains. My contention here is that if your goal is to get faster, you must make the commitment to stay consistent in your training. The strongest and fastest people I know are also the most consistent in their training. We'll all miss a workout now and again, but such is life. Those hiccups are the exceptions rather than the rule. Those who find a way to juggle life's commitments while continuing to push that flywheel are the ones who get faster – simple, yes; secret, no.

Toyota recently unseated Ford for the number two automotive manufacturer in the world and now threatens to dethrone number one General Motors. One important

component of their world class manufacturing system and culture has been the notion of *kaizen*. It is the concept of continual improvement over time. This is a fundamental value in their corporate philosophy. By continuing to focus on fixing small problems over time, the sum of incremental gains leads to great results – simple, yes; successful, extremely.

Preaching about training consistency is easy, but acting on it is the challenge. Napoleon once said “strategy is for amateurs, logistics is for professionals.” He was stressing that formulating a good idea is simple, implementation is the true test. Each of us needs to find our own means to stay consistent in our workouts. It becomes easier as you establish the sport’s activities into your daily life and create a lifestyle. We each need to play with goals and motivators, but those topics are two different articles altogether. We each need to find how to keep our workouts despite life’s complexities.

One example: I’ve heard countless people speak of work travel as an excuse for losing “falling off the wagon.” Travel complicates but does not have to ruin your training routine. Running shoes and stretch cords easily fit in any suitcase. Most cities have gyms with purchasable short-term memberships. With some visibility to future travel, you can plan intense training weeks prior to the trip, then use the travel as a scheduled recovery period. With a little effort you can always find places to run or stationary bikes to ride. Last year while training for Kona, I had to go on a work trip for a week. Understanding that consistency was important for my long-term goals, I was able to find a hotel a short distance from a high school track and a YMCA with a gym and a pool.

Work travel is only one of life’s matters that can complicate your training. With the right focus and a little extra effort, acceptable workarounds can be found. Maintain focus on the long-term vision of maintaining your consistency. Remember to continue to push the flywheel. Each workout and practice adds to its momentum. It’s reminiscent of the old anecdote: how does one respond when asked the fastest way to get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.

Patrick Evoe