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How to Win the Gold in Business and in Life

by Four-Time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

In today's fast-paced business environment, change is a constant. You have to be mentally strong and nimble to get to the top and to stay there.

The principles I used to make it to the Olympics will help you develop the mental toughness and attitude of a champion.

1. Don't worry about what others think.

Athletes are advised not to read their press clippings. Why? Because you don't want your attitude to be affected by other people's opinion. What other people think is completely subjective because it's based on where they are in life. Some people will think your performance is stellar, and others won't be impressed. Just focus on your goals and your daily actions.

2. It's OK to make mistakes.

If you're not making mistakes, you're playing it too safe and you're not trying hard enough. View them as learning opportunities. Without mistakes, you'll always be average.

At the beginning of the luge season, we slide on sharp steels. Sharp steels have a lot of traction, but they cause you to slide slow. As the season progresses, we gradually round our steels in order to slide faster. We trade traction for speed. When we start crashing, we back it up a bit.

You must be willing to take risks so you can see what your true limits are.

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3. Don't try to impress others, perform for yourself.

As soon as you take your eyes away from your "why," you'll lose your passion and your motivation. Keep your why fresh in your mind, and don't waste time trying to impress others.

4. Focus on what you can control.

The only things you and I can control are our thoughts and our actions. I can control how hard I train, what I eat, who I associate with, what I read, etc., but I can't control what my competition does. On race day, if I know I did everything I could to prepare, I can feel proud of myself regardless of the results.

Don't worry about your competition or the economy. Focus on what you can do in the next 15 minutes to move your business forward.

5. Don't get hung by the tongue.

Watch your self-talk. Keep it positive. Don't badmouth yourself or others. What you say determines what you think, and what you think determines what you do. Your actions become your habits, and your habits predict your results. It all starts with your own self-talk.

6. Take responsibility for your performance.

The luge is the only Olympic sport timed to the 1/1000th of a second. We take four runs, and the athlete with the lowest total time wins. If we have a slow time, we can't blame the judges, the wind or anything else. It's all about how we prepared our sled and how we drove the course.

If you're not getting the results you want, talk to your mentor and make an adjustment so you can improve your performance next time.

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7. Aim for improvement, not perfection.

Perfectionists seldom accomplish much because they wait for everything to be perfect before they even get started. But conditions will never be perfect. You just have to start.

Take a step forward and get some coaching from someone who has already done what you want to do. Get feedback, then take more action and continue. By alternating action with feedback, you'll constantly improve, and the results will take care of themselves.

8. Celebrate your successes.

Take time to celebrate the small successes on the way to reaching your big goals. Celebrating lets your subconscious mind know that you did well and refuels you emotionally for the next push. And don't forget to have fun. The more fun you have, the better you'll perform because you'll be looser, less stressed and more likely to get in the zone. Next time you're about to accomplish something, ask yourself, "What would be a fun way to do this?"

9. Stay in the moment.

Put on your blinders and focus only on what you are doing right now. When you're at work, focus on work. When you're at home, focus on family.

At the beginning of a luge run, I focus on one thing at a time. When I'm pulling from the start handles, I focus on the pull. When I'm paddling, I focus on the paddles. When I'm settling down on the sled from sitting down to laying down, I focus on the settle. And then I focus 100% on steering the section of the curve that I'm sliding on. That's the only way I have a chance of doing my best down the whole run.

Focus on what you are doing right now, and you'll perform to your higher potential.

10. Focus on the journey and the destination.

Focus on the journey to enjoy the road to success. Stay clear on your purpose and your destination so you stay on course.

Looking back, I can see that getting to compete in four Winter Olympics was incredible, but my favorite moments were the good times our teammates had when traveling from track to track. The friendships I made and the person I became were byproducts of pursuing the Olympic dream.

Follow these simple tips, and you'll win the gold medal at work and in life.

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