

Olympian Ruben Gonzalez Talks and Companies Listen



“I was working in sales and figured that if I could sell a copier, I could sell myself.”

**Corporate Speaker,
Business Author and
Olympian Ruben Gonzalez**

By Ann Azevedo - 2009

At age 47, Ruben Gonzalez is training to compete in the luge in the 2010 Winter Olympics as part of his quest to become the first person to compete in four Winter Olympics in four different decades. At the same time, Gonzalez continues to write business books and serve as a professional keynote speaker for corporations and organizations around the world through his business “The Olympic Speaker.”

As the bestselling author of three books - and a fourth one in the works - Gonzalez commands high fees for his international speaking engagements. Closer to home he has spoken for employees of such high-profile companies as Coca-Cola, Dell, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Continental Airlines, Microsoft, New York Life, Wells Fargo and ConocoPhillips.

Gonzalez, a former copier salesman, took some time to talk with the Houston Business Journal about his quest to set a record in Winter Olympic History while inspiring people to be successful in business, even as the economy continues to falter.

HBJ: How did you go from selling copy machines to competing in the Olympics?

GONZALEZ: I always wanted to compete in the Olympics, ever since I was 10 years old and saw the Olympics for the first time. It wasn't until I was 21 and watching the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics and saw Scott



“Every success you’ve ever had or will ever have is the product of your courage to act and the courage to endure.”

- Ruben Gonzalez



Hamilton win the Gold Medal in figure skating. I thought to myself, “If that little guy can do it, I can too. He gave me hope. I told myself that I was going to be in the next Olympics on matter what. I just need to find a sport.”

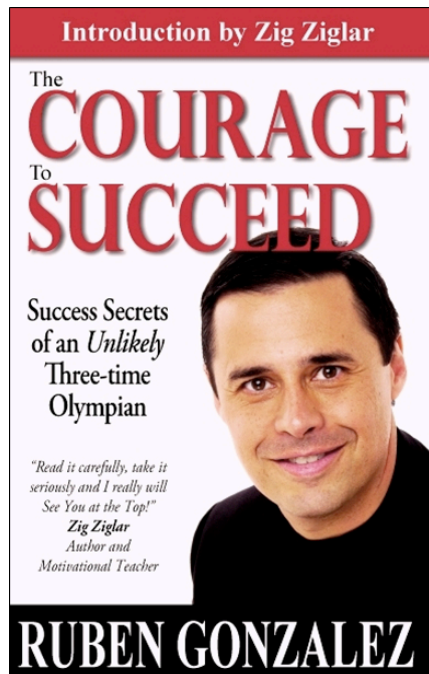
I was never a great athlete and was always the last kid picked for P.E. my whole life. But I was always very persevering and tenacious. I never quit. So I looked for a sport that fit me, something where you had to be tough and where there were a lot of quitters. I ended up picking the sport of luge.

I applied to a luge school in Lake Placid, N.Y. At first they didn’t want to take me because I was too old, but I wouldn’t take no for an answer. I got into a beginner’s class on wheels. The first two years I was crashing four out of five times. But by the end of the third year I was crashing only one out of 100. By my fourth year I had cracked into the top 50 in the world and qualified for the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.

I went on to compete in the 1992 Albertville Olympics in France and in Salt Lake City in 2002. By that time I was so much older than everyone else that almost every day someone asked me if I was a coach.

HBJ: What led you to become a professional speaker?

GONZALEZ: In 2002, right before the Salt Lake City Olympics, a school kid in the neighborhood asked me to be his show-and-tell project. I spoke at the school and the principal said, “You have a gift. You’re better than the people we pay. You need to do this for a living.” So it got me thinking. Who knows? Maybe I can inspire other people to go after their dreams and goals. Maybe I can get people to become more productive at work.



The bestselling book “The Courage to Succeed” is a manual on how to become a high achiever.

**"I didn't make it
because of superior
athletic ability.
I made it because
I refused to quit."**

- Ruben Gonzalez

I was working in sales and figured that if I could sell a copier, I could sell myself. I started hitting the phones and called 700 schools, following up with emails and faxes. My first year I only spoke at schools. The second year I started focusing more on corporations and associations. They had bigger budgets and didn't close in the summer.

That first year was tough. We almost lost our house and were on food stamps. I got a job offer for twice what I had made selling copiers but I turned it down so I could focus 100% on building the business. Around that time I met a very successful speaker in Houston and asked him to be my mentor. He told me the first thing I needed to do was to join Toastmasters and give 10 speeches for them in one year. I joined four chapters of Toastmasters and got it done in two months. I wanted to show my mentor that I was serious.

After that, we'd meet once a month for an hour. He taught me the speaking business. Today, I get calls from companies all over the world that want to bring me in to speak for their people.

They see that through my story they can get more people to be accountable and self-leaders and more productive. They see me as a great investment because my story takes people's excuses away.

My goal when I speak for a group of people is I want them walking out thinking, "If that guy could make it to the Olympics, I can do anything."

HBJ: Was it hard to write your first book “The Courage to Succeed”?

GONZALEZ: At first I didn't think I could write a book because I made Cs in English. My mentor told me “Ruben, you have an incredible story. Write the book. They we'll give it to some A



“You have to develop the attitude that you are willing to outwork, outhustle and outdo the competition.”

- Ruben Gonzalez

students to fix it up for you. It's called editing.” That book has sold over 100,000 copies. It's been translated to over ten languages. Now all the proceeds from its sales are going toward building libraries in Third World countries. We've been able to build libraries in Vietnam, India, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Nepal by partnering with RoomToRead.org. Our business has really grown so I feel I'm in a position to give back.

HBJ: What is your travel schedule like? How do you juggle your professional speaking with training for the Olympics?

GONZALEZ: Between the Olympics and speaking, I've been to 49 countries. I travel on average about once a week, but I'm usually only gone for one night... except when I train for the Olympics. Throughout the year I work out to stay in shape. This October, I head out to Europe for a month of luge training. Then I will compete in four World Cup races in November and December. After all those races they will tally up the points and if I'm in the top 40 in the world, I get to go to the Olympics in Vancouver in February 2010. I don't know yet, but I have a good feeling. I've always been on the bubble but always made it. In between training, I already have a couple of free weeks already filled with speaking engagements. Most of my books were written on an airplane. My wife home-schools our kids and I office out of the house so even though I travel a lot, I actually spend a lot of time with them.

HBJ: What does it feel like to be one of the oldest athletes training for the Olympics?

GONZALEZ: I pinch myself. This is the second time I'm coming out of retirement. I'm starting to feel like the Brett Favre of the Olympics. I'm glad my old body can still handle it.



"If you will do whatever it takes for however long it takes and refuse to quit, success is only a matter of time."

- Ruben Gonzalez

Some of the guys I'm competing against weren't even born when I first competed in the 1988 Olympics. I expect most people at the Olympics will think I'm someone's dad!

HBJ: Given the current economy, what is the market like for motivational speakers? It seems like companies are cutting back in a lot of areas, so how are you keeping your revenue stream?

GONZALEZ: In 2009, the whole speaking industry was down 50% overall. Last year (2008), I had an incredible year, and this year it's been about half. But it's still a good year compared to some of the first ones when I was just getting started. I think it has already bottomed out in our business. The phone is starting to ring more again. I expect 2010 to be a great year.

HBJ: What do you believe is the one quality all successful people have?

GONZALEZ: Perseverance. I read lots of biographies when I was a kid. Everyone had the same story: Dream, struggle, victory. They all had one thing in common: Perseverance. No matter what you're working on, if you will give it two solid years where you're taking massive action while learning from your mistakes, in time you'll be in the top 10% of your profession. It takes a lifetime to be in the top 1%. But top 10% pays well and more importantly, that's when you get noticed and promoted. Then you do it all over again.

Note: At the age of 47, Ruben went on to compete in the 2010 Vancouver Olympics becoming the first person to ever compete in four Winter Olympics each in a different decade.

To watch a video filled with highlights of Ruben's most popular presentation visit:

www.FourWinterGames.com

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