



How to Benefit From Other People's Success

Have you ever had a mentor or someone more experienced than you tell you something that made no sense? Did you listen to them or did you try to reinvent the wheel?

My first time to Lake Placid was in the spring of 1984; right after watching the Sarajevo Winter Olympics on TV. We trained for a few weeks on wheels (the wheel training was done to learn the fundamentals of steering a luge). Later that year, in the winter of 1984, I returned to Lake Placid for my first ice training. Lugging on ice is completely different from lugging on wheels. On ice there is hardly any traction, therefore, ice luge is much more unforgiving. It's like the difference between walking and ice skating.

When you are first learning how to luge on ice, the coaches have you slide from the bottom third of the track; where you're only traveling at about thirty miles per hour. As your skill improves, they slowly move you up the track. It takes about 100 runs before the coaches will let you slide from the top of the track.

My goal for my first luge season back in the winter of 1984 was to be able to luge from the Men's Start at the top of the track, by the end of the season. My goal for my second season, was to qualify to race in the Lake Placid World Cup. My plan for the second season was to spend all winter in Placid, take as many runs as possible, and see if I could qualify for the race that was to be held on February 1986.

As soon as I got to Lake Placid my coaches set me straight. They said, “If you stay here all winter, your progress will be very slow. If you want to progress fast, you need to be constantly challenged. If you train at any track for more than two weeks, you’ll get bored. Once you get bored you stop improving. You need to train here for two weeks, then two weeks in each of several tracks in Europe, then come back to Lake Placid and you’ll be a whole second faster.”

What they were telling me made absolutely no sense to me. How could training in Europe possibly help my times in Lake Placid? But I’d promised myself that I would humble myself to my coaches’ leadership and not question them. I had promised myself that I would take **all** of their advice on faith. After all, who was I to question the U.S. Olympic Coaches? That season I trained in Europe. I learned different things from every track. And when I returned to Placid I was a full second faster than before. The athletes who didn’t listen to the Coaches and decided to train in Lake Placid all season never caught up to me.

Thank God I was smart enough to listen to my coaches. If I had let my pride get in the way, I might have missed out on competing in the 1988 Calgary Olympics. Don’t let pride get in the way of achieving your goals and dreams. Find a mentor who has done what you aspire to do and then faithfully follow their advice. You’ll be glad you did.

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