

The Forbes logo is displayed in white serif font on a dark grey rectangular background.

Protecting Your Ambitions from the Influence of Small Thinkers

by Four-Time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

Success is simple, but it's not easy. One of the hardest parts of doing something special, great or unique — like building a business, creating a new product or exploring the far reaches of the world — is facing naysayers, those people whose goal is to stomp on other people's dreams.

When I was 21 years old, I was a benchwarmer in my college soccer team. I had a lot of heart, but I was not very athletically gifted. In fact, I rarely played more than five minutes a game. Inspired by watching figure skater Scott Hamilton win the gold medal at the Sarajevo Olympics, I decided I would take up the sport of luge and set a goal to compete in the Calgary Olympics. By the way, I lived in hot and humid Houston, not exactly the winter sports capital of the world.

When I started telling people about my goal, I was surprised at how many people laughed at me. Some said I was too old to take up a new sport. Others said I was not athletic enough, and others pointed out that I didn't even live close to any of the luge tracks. Very few people encouraged or supported me.

It didn't take long to figure out that there are two types of people: those who are on your team, and those who are not on your team. So I made a decision to only hang around the people who believed in me. I couldn't afford to let the critics erode my self-belief. By associating with positive people who were on my team, I was able to stay mentally strong no matter what challenges I faced.

TheLugeMan.com

Dreamers And Non-Dreamers

A dreamer will never be understood by a non-dreamer, so don't waste your precious energy trying to make your critics understand you. It will never happen. The now-famous 1997 Apple "Think Different" commercial said it best:

Here's to the crazy ones... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

How You Look To Average People

Imagine you're in a field that's covered with high grass. There's a large hunting dog running left and right, back and forth, barking like mad. You think he's lost his mind. But the dog has a goal, a dream, a purpose: He's chasing a rabbit. That's why he's darting back and forth. Only you don't see the rabbit because of the high grass.

To average people, you may look like the dog. They think you're crazy because they see you, but they can't see your dream. And even if they could see the dream, they can't understand why any reasonable person would want to risk and work and fight for that dream.

Great leaders think big, think differently and know that they may be misunderstood by average people. That's why one of the skills great leaders develop is the ability to passionately communicate their vision in exciting word pictures so that other people will begin to buy into the vision.

Take John Lennon's song "Imagine," for example, and you'll see that Lennon is painting a word picture of what the world could be like. That's exactly what great leaders do — and it's not a gift. It's a skill that anyone can learn.

TheLugeMan.com

Only once people start buying into the dream can the leader set goals for everyone so that they too can realize the leader's vision.

Stand By Your Vision

It's important that you don't give in to every critic. Don't let average people talk you out of pursuing your purpose if they just don't understand. Disassociate from the naysayers, and associate with other big thinkers like you. Find those like-minded leaders who will encourage you and help you reach your goals.

Start a mastermind group of similarly ambitious leaders, and regularly meet with them. Identify an accountability partner, and call them weekly so they can hold your feet to the fire and make sure you are making progress and staying true to your vision. Read biographies of great leaders so that you'll see that you are not alone.

Every night before falling asleep and every morning upon waking up, close your eyes and think about what it's going to feel like, what's it going to look like, what's it going to be like when you finally achieve your vision.

If you persistently and consistently do these simple things, you'll become like a guided missile that has its coordinates and can't miss. Stick to your guns, follow your heart, pursue your dream and change the world.

TheLugeMan.com

© Ruben Gonzalez

