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The First Steps on the Way to Realizing Your Dreams

by Four-Time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

One day in February of 1972, I turned on the TV and I saw something that changed my life: the Sapporo Winter Olympics. After watching the pageantry of the Opening Ceremonies and the thrilling competitions, I turned to my younger brother Marcelo and said, "I'm going to be in the Olympics!"

It takes two types of courage to realize your goals and dreams: the courage to get started and the courage to not quit. The courage to get started comes from your belief. If you believe something is possible, you'll get started. If your desire is strong enough, you'll commit to doing whatever it takes to reach your goal. Nothing will make you quit.

When I got excited about the Olympics, I was a 10-year-old with a lot of desire but not an ounce of belief that I could actually do it. After all, in school I was always the last kid picked to play sports in gym class. I was even on the bench when they played kickball.

So, I didn't do anything. I talked the talk but I didn't walk the walk. My dad knew that I liked to read, so he encouraged me to read biographies of great people. He told me that if I did, I would discover how I could succeed as well.

Reading biographies led to reading personal development books like *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, *The Power of Positive Thinking* and countless more. Slowly but surely, I started learning the principles of success and growing as a person.

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My dad also encouraged me to associate with successful people so I would pick up their habits and start thinking like them. He said that once I started thinking and acting like successful people, I would be on the way to my own success.

Over a period of time, I started believing more in myself. I started facing my fears and taking more risks. I started becoming a person of action and I became tenacious and perseverant. Kids in high school started calling me “bulldog.”

I was a completely different person from the 10-year-old kid who had a pipe dream of competing in the Olympics. And then, I saw something that drove me to action.

In 1984, while watching the Sarajevo Winter Olympics, I saw Scott Hamilton win the gold medal in figure skating. I said to myself, “If that little guy can win a gold medal, I can be in the Olympics.” For the first time, I believed. I knew that I knew that I knew I could do it. I was finally ready to take action. I went to Lake Placid, New York, and took up the sport of luge. Four years and a few broken bones later, I was competing in the Calgary Olympics.

What about you? What’s your dream in life? What’s in your heart, in your spirit, in your soul? There’s a purpose for your life. Are you going after it?

If you’re not pursuing your dreams, you’re not living -- you’re just existing.

Henry David Thoreau said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” He was talking about the people who are afraid to pursue their dreams.

Those years when I didn’t do anything to pursue my dream were hard. I was stagnant, bored and miserable. I was stressed, unfulfilled and angry. I didn’t like myself. I was living a life of quiet desperation.

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I had potential but no drive, no purpose and definitely no courage to face my fears and take action.

Once I started taking action everything changed. All of a sudden, my life had purpose. I had joy in my life because I was working toward something that was important to me. I went from existing to living. All I had to do was start taking action. If fear of failure or fear of the unknown is holding you back, do what I did.

- Start reading personal development books, success principles books, self-help books and biographies.
- Start associating with people who are making things happen — successful people. Find someone who's already done what you want to do and ask them to be your mentor.
- Whatever you do, don't focus on what you don't want to happen. Focus on how great it will be when you finally realize your dream. Whatever you focus on will get bigger in your life. Focus on what you want.
- Finally, get mad, get passionate and get busy taking massive action. Before long, you'll become known for your dream, you'll attract helpers and eventually, you'll realize that dream. The process of pursuing your dream will help you grow into the type of person who can reach that dream and will make you hungry for your next dream. It's all about the person you become.

Don't become known as a person with a lot of potential. People with a lot of potential don't do anything special with their lives. They waste their God-given gifts and talents and regret it later. Be known for your purpose, your drive and your passion for your dream. Do that and you'll live a joyous life as you make a huge impact in the world.

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