



Resilience Lessons from the Olympic Luge by Four-time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

Have you ever had something happen that took all the wind out of your sails? What did you do? Did you respond right away, or did you crater and quit?"

When I saw 21-year-old Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili crash to his death at the Vancouver Olympics, I was shocked. We were all shocked. In 27 years in the sport I'd never seen anyone fly out of a luge track. My first thought was, "That could have been me." Then I thought about his family, who must have been waiting anxiously to watch their son realize his Olympic dream.

We didn't have time to process what had just happened. After all, our Olympic race was taking place the next day. We had to find a way to get our heads back in the game.

I had always known how dangerous luge racing could be. I just needed to focus on what I was going to do, how I was going to do it and never get into the "what if the worst happens" hypothetical questions because I had a job to do.

Olympic athletes are a very resilient group of people. We have all experienced injuries and have come back over and over again. So I'm not surprised that most of the other lugers responded and raced the next day. We dedicated our race to Nodar, who we knew was watching us from a better place.

Business and Life are a Lot like a Luge Run

The principles that will help you excel in the Olympic luge are the same principles that will help you succeed in business and in life.

1 - When Life Knocks You Down, Get Back Up - QUICKLY

Life is tough. You need to be tougher. In business and in life, when bad things happen, you need to get up - quickly. By getting back up and in the game quickly, you don't lose your momentum and drive. If you whine and have a pity party, you lose all your momentum. When a boxer gets knocked down he has 10 seconds to get back up. If he gets back up in 11 seconds, he loses the fight. Remember that. Be like a boxer. Get back up quickly so your competition does not have a chance to get ahead of you.

2 - Focus on the Right Things

Your focus determines your results. When you are lugging, you don't focus on the speed. If you do, fear sets in, you tense up, and have bad runs. The thing to focus on is what you need to do on every section of every curve to have the best time.

In business, don't focus on the economy. Focusing on anything you can't control will hurt you. Rather, focus on what you can do in the next 5 minutes to take your business to the next level. Who do you need to call? What can you do right now to get ahead of the competition? How can you develop your people so they can be more productive in the future? How can you improve your processes so you can be the best in your industry?

3 - Learn from Your Mistakes

At the end of every luge run we debrief with the coach and watch videos of our runs to see how we can be faster next time. In business you need to measure everything so you can analyze how to be more effective, more productive and more profitable in the future. What gets measured gets improved. You never settle for good. You always strive to be great. It's an attitude of constant improvement.

4 - Take Advantage of Tough Conditions

The economy created a shakedown where the strong survive and the weak go out of business. This is not the time to coast or slack off. This is the time to work harder and smarter than ever. It's actually an opportunity to shine. It's not the time to cut down costs. It's the time to invest in your people and improve processes so that your business can come out on top – regardless of how tough conditions may be.

The same is true in the luge. Out of the 16 luge tracks in the world, a couple of the tracks are fairly easy to get down on – they are not very technical at all. But there are three tracks that force you to be on your toes the whole way down. If you can get down in the tough tracks, you immediately earn the respect of the top lugers in the circuit. Tough conditions give you an opportunity to shine - to prove yourself.

5 - Create a Dream Team

Create a dream team of people – a personal board of directors who will help you during tough times. I never would have made it to the Olympics by myself. I had luge coaches, strength coaches, sports psychology coaches, sled mechanics, doctors, chiropractors, and a special entourage of people who helped me keep going when the going got tough.

Have the courage to get started and the courage to not quit. Become relentless. When you do, success is just a matter of time.



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