

## **COB feature: Running a business is like running a marathon**

by Dana Baumgart - Monday, October 31, 2011

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The number of ways to compare athletic events and business are endless. One can look at anything from having the right training program to never losing sight of the competition to find the similarities.

Four University of Wisconsin Oshkosh College of Business alumni and one retired faculty member share how they take what they have learned in the boardroom on the road to be successful competitive athletes.

### **Race day conditions are not always ideal but the race goes on**

Marathons take place during torrential downpours, heat waves and snowstorms.

“There are very few things in life that you can control,” said Melissa Putzer (BS ’92, MBA ’09), a patent facilitator for Kimberly-Clark and Oshkosh resident. “But three things you can are your attitude, your choices and your preparation.”

Competitive athletes like Putzer know there is only one choice when conditions are not ideal stay focused on the course for the long haul and push through to cross the finish line.

Putzer remembers the day of her fourth Ironman. It was only 50 degrees.

“Everyone was faced with the same challenges,” Putzer said. “However, I could control my attitude, had made the choice to pack things like a rain jacket and had prepared by not being a fair-weather rider in my training.”

Each year Paul Frederickson, UW Oshkosh College of Business professor emeriti and competitive bicyclist, competes in a 12-hour distance race in Ohio as a training event. He recalls one race day when the weather was windy, rainy and cold and many of his competitors did not finish the race.

“Relative to the competition, I had the best day ever because I was able to ride through adverse conditions,” Frederickson said.

In relation, business professionals are faced with less than ideal conditions when markets crash and the economy takes a turn for the worse. Frederickson believes the best business professionals strive to be successful even in such conditions.

"Good business professionals succeed even when the market is down because they capitalize on the opportunities opened when their competitors drop off," Frederickson said. "The best portfolio managers will make money and the best real estate agents will sell houses. Be the person who succeeds in adverse conditions—expect them and be prepared."

It was during a time when conditions weren't favorable that Putzer decided to return to the UW Oshkosh's College of Business to pursue her master's degree in business administration.

"I chose to not feel depressed and angry about the job cuts I faced at work," Putzer said. "I knew that I couldn't control the decisions my employer was making or the economy, but I could control how marketable and educated I was."

### **Success takes training**

Competitive athletes know if they don't make the time for the proper training, they will pay for it on race day.

"I change my training when I find myself performing at the same level and try different endurance events to keep me on my toes," said Kathy (Allen) Fredrickson (MBA '99), a marketing consultant in Neenah and running enthusiast.

Last September, she achieved her goal of running her first half-marathon and is focused on training for a 90-mile bike race around Lake Winnebago next year to celebrate her 40th birthday.

She prefers to use training programs designed by professionals, doesn't cut corners and has recently discovered a love for running in the morning.

"I am always striving to get better," she said. "I challenge myself to do more speed and hill work. It does not feel natural, but I know I need to do it to get faster."

Most competitive athletes agree that pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone garners the best results on race day.

"Physically, my workouts are structured and always have a purpose," Putzer adds. "They include things like recovery rides, intervals, base building, break-throughs and warm ups to build endurance and teach my body to be efficient."

Putzer compares this to the way she operates as a business professional.

"Meetings in business should always have an agenda even if it is just open discussion," Putzer said. "Just like my training schedule, every meeting I organize has a purpose, a process and a desired outcome."

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