

How often do you score a personal best?

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Narrow Margins, Defining moments

Perhaps like me you've been caught up in the excitement of the Rio Olympics. What an inspiration it is to see people raise their level and perform at their absolute best, sometimes scoring a personal best *as well* as clinching that much coveted Gold medal - or indeed any medal. And as well as the huge joy of hope fulfilled, we are also seeing the great disappointment of those failing to meet expectations. Which gets me thinking about what it takes to perform at your absolute best, and perhaps how often we settle for an average score in whatever we are doing or simply "muddling through". Now few of us have the dedication, commitment, and lets face it, natural talent of an Olympian, and yet we all know what its like to to have a great day, to be in just the right job, to experience something like "flow" or to be in the zone. "I belong", "I can do this", "I'm in the right place" are all great feelings to experience at work, at home, in fact anywhere we find ourselves. And of course the converse is also true. "I cant do this"; "I'm not sure I am in the right place"; "What if I fail?" are all too common experiences.

What's more, when we work with a leader who is leading well - at the top of their game - and when we ourselves are leading at the top of our game, it is a great experience for all involved, full of energy, purpose and sense of accomplishment - setting goals, and winning, on a regular basis. But when a leader comes unstuck, when they or we are no where near the best we can do, its like coming last in a race, or maybe even more like a disqualification. Those familiar with personality profiling will know that it is often our best qualities that end up derailing us and interfering with our goals and best intentions. The studied and careful approach can become too cautious - the confident can become arrogant, the shrewd too mistrustful, the charming can be manipulative, and the diligent overly dutiful. In essence, what makes us good, can end up making us bad, or at least falling fall short of our best. And for many people, there is a need to make changes, just like those Olympians do, in order to stay on track.

As Marshall Goldsmith put it in the title of his famous book on coaching, "What got you here wont get you there". Some of us need help figuring out where "here" and "there" actually are. Others know where they want to get to, but need a helping hand to get there. Few athlete compete in the games without a coach. And yet there seem to be many different kinds of coaching.

What kind of coach are you?

At some point or other, we all find ourselves in the position of coach. But are you the hands on "shouty coach" barking orders at every turn or are you so distant as a coach (read manager, leader, advisor, parent, friend) your presence isn't even noticed? It strikes me that in some Olympic sports, the coach is very visible and almost as famous as the athlete - in others we don't even know if there is a coach, but we somehow assume there must be.

In Football and other team sports, the coach is often very visible, but has to stay on the sidelines. Many of the dramatic moments in the game are accompanied by a picture of the coach, remonstrating, expressing high emotional delight or despair, but frankly unable to do much to influence the outcome.

In Boxing, the coach is there at the end of every round - this could be after every difficult meeting or every presentation or every 1-1. They give immediate feedback, and lots of direction about what to do next.

In Cycling and Rowing, you sense that it is really a coaching team that supports the elite athletes. Whilst in rowing the coach seems far from the action, and the emphasis is all about the performer, in cycling, the coach is a bit closer to the action, sometimes even steadying the bike right before the start.

In Athletics, there is great variety of course, but images come to mind from say the Heptathlon, where again advice is sought after every throw or jump, but even then, when it comes to the running events, they have to let the athlete get on with the job, and trust that the coaching sessions many days before and even after the event, have helped the athlete to focus on what matters most.

I wonder who is there to encourage and support you along the way. Who gives you feedback, encouragement, and who holds up the mirror so you can see yourself as others do? And who gets you through the difficult times, ready to face new challenges that lie ahead. I am equally struck by the support team around those performing at the top of their game - how complete is your support team, and what part do you play in the support of those around you?

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