

A Path To Success

Lessons (and Inspiration) From An Olympic Gold Medalist



(left to right) Katie Shak, Kaillie Humphries and Kristina Hess at Lockton's San Diego office.

When Gold Medal Olympian Kaillie Humphries was invited to Lockton San Diego's monthly 'Recharge & Rejuvenate' event, she left a lasting impact on everyone with her inspiring story. "She not only broke barriers for women in bobsledding but also demonstrated to the world what can be achieved through grit and determination—all while remaining true to her core in the face of adversity," says Kristina Hess, a member of Lockton's Women in Leadership (WIL) group. Hess and fellow WIL member Katie Shak met with Humphries to explore what it takes to become a high performer and overcome obstacles for success—valuable lessons for anyone in the business world.

Q: We'd like to start by discussing your aspiration to become an Olympian. When did you first set this goal, and what fuels your determination?

Kaillie: My journey toward realizing my dream started in skiing, and at age nine, I set my sights on the Olympics. Despite my determination, I faced multiple setbacks and failures, but I wasn't ready to give up on my dream. At the age of 17, I discovered bobsledding, a sport that seemed like a perfect fit for my physical abilities. Growing up in Calgary, I was familiar with the Olympic bobsled track from the 1988 Winter Games. So, I decided to try out for bobsled, and within three years, I made it to my first Olympic Games. As for what fuels my determination, it's becoming the best version of myself, both physically and mentally. I thrive on challenging myself and pushing my limits to reach my fullest potential.

Q: Few of us pursue our 'dream,' thinking it's too difficult or impossible to achieve. What did it take for you to realize yours?

Kaillie: My approach has always been to ask myself, "Why not me?" Going into the 2010 Olympics, I was told it wasn't my time; I was just a rookie in a sport where it typically takes 8 to 10 years to excel. A fellow athlete reminded me that someone was going to win and there was no reason it couldn't be me. People often impose their limitations on us, saying something can't happen or it's impossible. I firmly believe that there's no limitations that dictate our future.

Breaking down big dreams into actionable steps is also crucial, controlling what you can while leaving out what you can't. Whether it's high performance, my equipment, or assembling the

right team of specialists, these smaller goals help me stay on track. That's how I've approached my Olympic journey, one step at a time.

Q: Having goals are important, but it takes a lot more to get to the finish line. What drives your success and what tips can you offer?

Kaillie: Success, whether in sports or business, is a journey that doesn't happen overnight. It takes a good deal of commitment and discipline to stay the course.

One of the most helpful strategies I've used is to not fixate on the end result. Instead, focus on the actionable steps required to reach your goal and execute your plan. For instance, in bobsledding, I focus on the first 16 steps of a race. Once those are executed flawlessly, I move on to corner one, then corner two, and so on. I give my full attention to each step, hitting the angles, nailing the marks. By concentrating on what's immediately in front of me, I can be the best in that moment. When you add up all those moments, that's when you achieve excellence at the finish line. It's about having faith that all those small steps contribute to the success of your overall performance.

The key is to concentrate on what's within your control. For example, I can't control others' performances, but I can control my own. This approach helps me handle high-pressure situations and consistently achieve my goals.

Q: As a professional athlete, you've had to deal with setbacks, challenges and disappointments. Thinking back on your career, what challenge stands out to you the most?

Kaillie: One of the most significant challenges I experienced was leaving a 16-year career with Team Canada and starting over again with Team USA. My experience with Bobsled Canada had taken a toll on my confidence and self-worth as a woman. Instead of fighting to prove my abilities or allowing someone else dictate the course of my career, I chose to step away. I knew there was more I could achieve in my athletic career, so I took that daunting leap with no guarantee of Olympic eligibility due to my immigration status.

Moving to a different country and rebuilding my career from the ground up was a humbling experience. I wasn't granted any exceptions, which I respected and appreciated. I had to earn my spot on Team USA just like any other American athlete. I knew I had the technical skills to get back up, but adapting to a new environment was tough. Ultimately, I'm glad I made the decision, and I went on to win three World Championship titles and an Olympic Gold Medal for Team USA.

Q: Your decision to leave Team Canada must have been difficult, and yet your achievements since then are truly remarkable. What insights can you offer about overcoming adversity?

Kaillie: While leaving wasn't an easy decision, I knew it was the right one. I also knew that regardless of the outcome, it would be on my own terms.

During that time, there was a lot of people, including close personal friends, telling me not to do it. They thought it was impossible to start a new career with Team USA and reach the top again. I didn't get the support I expected, and quickly learned that sometimes you have to look beyond.

Kaillie Humphries



5x World Champion

3x Olympic Gold Medalist

1st female in Olympic history to win Olympic gold medals for two separate countries (United States and Canada).

The most decorated woman in bobsled history:

- 1st female bobsledder to win a double world title.
- 1st woman to pilot a mixed gender four-person bobsled competition.
- 1st woman to drive an all-female team against men in a four-person World Cup bobsled race.



Joining Team USA was a game-changer. I found a very supportive environment where I could be myself and strive for excellence. My teammates and the leadership had my back; it was incredibly empowering. It allowed me to step into a leadership role and give back to the community, something I couldn't do in a place where I was constantly questioned or made to feel small.

My decision confirmed what I've always believed: never fear taking risks. Not every risk has led to immediate success, but I've always learned from the process. I spent two years trying to establish a women's four-man bobsled event. That perceived failure paved the way for women's monobob, which wouldn't have happened without breaking down gender barriers and proving women's competence in the sport. Pushing myself to compete against men made me a better pilot, and in doing so, helped me win the first-ever Olympic monobob competition for women in 2022. Challenges can pave the way for new opportunities, and sometimes the benefits come indirectly.

To sum it up, here are some key takeaways from my experience:

- First, trust in your abilities and self-worth; don't let detractors diminish your confidence.
- Second, embrace challenges as opportunities for improvement and never fear taking risks; it can lead to professional growth and unexpected opportunities down the line.
- Third, seek support from those who believe in you and surround yourself with the right team or community that supports your goals.

In the end, taking risks and pursuing goals on your terms can result in greater empowerment, positive change, more fulfillment, and, ultimately, success.

Q: In business, we're always dealing with change and uncertainty, particularly since the pandemic. How do you thrive in the face of change?

Kaillie: Dealing with change can be uncomfortable if not overwhelming. It forces us out of our comfort zones to grow and learn. My approach centers on adaptability and continual improvement.

I like to envision myself as having an invisible tool belt filled with skills and strategies that I've accumulated over time. When circumstances require a pivot, I reach for the right tools to get the job done. Sometimes, what used to work needs a different combination in the current environment. Sometimes, it involves assembling a new support team or seeking guidance from mentors. When I'm facing change and need to adapt, I'm not afraid to try a new approach, knowing I'll learn through that process too.

The fact is, change is constant, and standing still isn't an option. I've had my share of ups and downs. I went from winning gold at the 2014 Olympics to coming in fifth at the World Championships the following year. It was a wake-up call that what works in one setting might not cut it in another. You can't just stand still and hope for the best. If you're not actively working towards improvement, you'll get left behind.



Inspiring San Diego Businesses to Reach the Finish Line

Kaillie Humphries, one of the most-decorated Olympic bobsledders, has an unparalleled track record of overcoming challenges and triumphing against all odds. Now, she is sharing her journey and empowering businesses in San Diego with valuable lessons of perseverance and mental fortitude.

After immigrating from Canada and settling in the San Diego area, Humphries is passionate about giving back to her community. Through speaking engagements, such as the recent presentation she made at the San Diego office of global insurance broker Lockton, she aims to inspire companies and their employees to achieve greatness through grit and tenacity.

"It's a pleasure getting to know Kaillie and Travis, an Olympic couple living in San Diego. Kaillie represents that rare combination of true physical gifts, sustained mental toughness and the determination required to already be a three-time Gold Medal winner," says Jim Skeen, founding CEO of Lockton San Diego. "Together, they are sacrificing what it takes for Kaillie to once again represent the United States, for which we are grateful. This is all while preparing for life after the Olympics and the prospect of raising a family. Kaillie has an important message to share that's applicable to all of us."

Q: We know you are training for the next Olympics. What are your aspirations and goals, both in the immediate future and beyond 2026?

Kaillie: First, I have my sights set on competing in both events at the upcoming Olympics. I also want to become a mother between now and the games. Balancing family and career in the world of sport is a challenge all on its own. If I can successfully strike that balance, I hope to prove to future generations of female athletes that they don't have to choose one over the other.

I'm also excited about inspiring the next generation of bobsledders. I see my leadership role within Team USA as an opportunity to give back to the sport that has given me so much.

Ultimately, my sense of purpose and accomplishment comes from knowing that it's not just about my personal success. It's about improving the sport, creating greater opportunities, and changing lives for the better. I want to continue championing these causes, inspiring both women and men to be the best versions of themselves. ■



Women in Leadership was founded in 2002 to foster personal and professional growth among all our people and provide a unique leadership and development environment to enhance business diversity within Lockton. Among its initiatives are career guidance, networking and business development, personal and professional development, advocacy and sponsorship, charity and community, empowering employee engagement and championing DE&I.



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