

When to Quit -- From People Who Hate to Quit.

By Joe De Sena - Founder & CEO of Spartan Race | Posted: 09/29/2015

Lessons in Overcoming and Navigating the Obstacle Course Called Life

There seems to be a misconception that quitting is failing.

We grow up thinking of our achievements as being either successful or a failure. Believe me, I've spent my life unwilling to quit things. Those who are stubborn will often go far -- too far -- to ensure it's not a failure. But that is not always smart. In fact, there is a time to quit.

Truly incredible individuals can vouch for this with stories of perseverance, resilience and success. These same people have also taught me that, if you believe failure is the easy way out, quitting can often be far more difficult than continuing.

Learn to save yourself from yourself. Dan Richards is the CEO of Global Rescue, a company dedicated to rescuing people caught in perilous situations. The people he saves are not quitters. In his line of work, people underestimate the severity of the environment while overestimating their ability to survive and get through real struggle. Global Rescue deals with people who flirt with danger -- the ones who attempt to climb Everest, traverse the Sahara Desert, or scale insane rock formations.

Richards teaches the importance of real, honest risk-assessment. That involves correctly calibrating your perception of the environment you're entering. Those who do not set realistic expectations -- be it on Everest or in business -- quickly find themselves in real danger that can cause harm.

Realize you're in the wrong race. Professor Robert Sternberg, Psychologist and Psychometrician at Cornell University, believes valuable qualities for success are not tested for in school. One such quality -- the ability to think critically -- is essential when deciding when to quit and when to push through. Professor Sternberg teaches people to realize when they're "in the wrong race."

That means recognizing that achieving success does not always result in reaching the original goal. Sometimes the path was right, but the goal was wrong; or the goal was right, but the path was wrong. Constantly reexamine your path and your goal. Understanding you're in the wrong job, marriage, race, environment makes all the difference. Knowing this isn't the hard part (you will feel it) -- the hard part is creating reasons to stay in the wrong environment.

Persistence pays off. Zach Even Esh, Founder of The Underground Strength Gym, knows what failure looks, sounds, tastes, and feels like. When he started training athletes, Zach recalled the lessons from his youth when his dad lost job. Sometimes, you don't have a choice to quit, you are forced to. His father chose to get right back to the task of getting a new job rather than wallowing.

Zach never let circumstance be the boss. He believes that momentum is everything, and the little things add up quickly. When confronted with the choice of cutting your losses or pushing on, find ways to make "it" happen while avoiding the excuses. That means knowing when you are truly at the end of the road, versus when you are trying to find an excuse to get out of something.

Have a cup of tea. Sir Ranulph Fiennes is the World's Greatest Living Explorer [Guinness Book of World Records]. He holds numerous records of achievement because he knows when to push through and when to make the right call to quit. He is direct, bold, and persistent. It took him three attempts to climb Everest. So you may assume he attacks obstacles head on, right?

If Fiennes approached life that way, it's likely he'd be dead. As an exceptional explorer, he avoids unnecessary risk, opting for the smarter approach. Have a cup of tea, he recommends, and find a way around obstacles. Don't let ego get in the way. Grit is a word Fiennes pairs with arrogance. It may sound noble, but it could lead to disastrous outcomes.

Burnout and boredom are the result of poor goal-setting. Gracie van der Byl is an endurance swimmer who approaches distance-based tasks the way others ought to approach work and life decisions. Many people view goals as giant accomplishments -- the culmination of all that hard work and sacrifice. Gracie takes a different method, one that ensures she finishes what she set out to originally accomplish -- she lives in the now.

Rather than quitting when she is tired, she approaches a 100-mile swim one stroke at a time and chips away at the task at hand. Perspective is everything. What looks like an insurmountable task at first is often just a series of smaller attainable goals that can be reached.

Reframe your perspective. The only race that matters is the one you're in. Tyler Wren is a 33-year old professional cyclist. In 13 years, he's learned a thing or two about competitive cycling that can be applied elsewhere. In a sport marred with controversy, constant competition for sponsors, funding, and, of course, a spot on the podium -- Tyler understands the harm in letting external influences take away from your perceived goals.

Wren has learned that, while hard work, dedication, and sacrifice are all requirements for driving success, success is not guaranteed. To Wren, success is personal and extends beyond the realm of professional cycling. "Set goals, work hard to achieve them, and you can make good, consistent decisions to get to those goals -- that's success to me. There is always going to be negativity, and naysayers and cheaters out there, but if you can focus on your own decisions and what's meaningful to you, that is success to me."

Align your values with your beliefs. While working on Wall Street, I saw people succeed by going with the flow and subscribing to an ideal that could be less-than-rewarding to one's health and relationships. The people who most often succeed set values that align with their beliefs. These are people who chase dreams and ideals, not money.

Simply working a job you hate, or continuing on a path because you 'don't want to fail' is a dangerous game. Don't forget that quitting is an option -- and it can be the right thing to do. It takes as much energy to rationalize why you are doing something, as it would to fix it. Quitting does not show weakness, the inability to quit does. If you are going down the wrong road, stop, evaluate, and fix it.

Follow Joe De Sena on Twitter: www.twitter.com/spartanrace