

Spiritual Keys to Finishing Your Race Like a World-Class Olympian

A TV sportscaster was interviewing a retired Olympic runner just before one race at a big track and field event. One runner they were discussing was the favorite, but evidently, a strong competitor was in the lane beside him.

“What do you think he needs to do to win today?” the interviewer asked.

“He just needs to run his own race,” was his answer.

Frankly that seemed a bit on the obvious side. How could he run anyone else’s race? The more I’ve thought about it, however, the more taken I find myself with this advice. At first glance it may seem a consummate example of overstating the obvious, but it is more nuanced than one might think. It is also good advice for life and leadership.

Paul said “I have finished my course” (2 Tim. 4:7b).

1. Before each of us stretches a race; an obstacle course might be a clearer metaphor. That race track is ours alone. No two courses are exactly the same. Were someone to attempt to duplicate ours, they would only become frustrated and confused. It is impossible to run on two race tracks at the same time, just as it is also impossible to keep switching back and forth. Someone else’s race track may look easier, more fun, more rewarding or more whatever, but trying to run our own while gazing at someone else’s is a recipe for certain failure. That will also lead to envy and eventually even to making an accusation against God that He is unfair. Such bitterness is highly destructive. Run your own race.

2. There is also the issue of style. Others may run in a flashier way or at a different pace. Keeping up with Jones on the race track is a serious mistake. For example, I find it very embarrassing to hear someone preach and know immediately who they've been watching on TV. I don't really know why it embarrasses me. I'm not the one preaching.

Run your own race. In leadership and management, it is no less important. Explore the frontiers of your own leadership style. Why be a second-rate Donald Trump when you can be a first-rate you? Let envy drive you to expand faster than is wise, and you will regret it. In business no less than ministry, run your own race.

3. Finally, and that is finally, literally as well as figuratively, St. Paul tells us how a race is supposed to end. Exactly. It is supposed to end. Remember? He says, "I have finished ..."

The point is, seeing it through has almost become un-American. We have become a people who abort things. Babies. Carriers. Marriages. Businesses. Relationships. Whatever. Finishing the course seems to many today like an antique value of a bygone era. Yet great leaders will stay the course. In every business, ministry or life, there are times when the desire to just plain quit is overwhelming. Indeed, there are times when cutting your losses is the only sensible thing to do, but I truly believe that too often, discouraged leaders just give up the ghost too soon.

St. Paul's journey was long and full of pain. Rejected, persecuted, shipwrecked, snake-bitten and imprisoned. Yet he never quit, never stopped, never lost his nerve. Encourage yourself in the Lord and press on. A great basketball coach told me one time that he had never lost a game. He just ran out of time sometimes. If you are reading this now, you're not out of time.

Do not leave the task undone or the trail half-traveled. Press on. If you are going through a bad time, then go on through. Go all the way through. {eoa}

Dr. Mark Rutland *is president of both Global Servants () and the National Institute of Christian Leadership (). A renowned communicator and New York Times best-selling author, he has more than 30 years of experience in organizational leadership, having served as a senior pastor and a university president.*