

My Reflections of running a Marathon

I have been watching Mumbai Marathon for some time and have been intrigued with the spirit and stamina of running and runners and often wondered 'will I be able to do it? It was the last week of January when I heard about runningandliving.com from a friend and came to know that they organize marathon events right here in Gurgaon. I visited the website and registered for the half marathon when there were exactly two weeks left for the run. I saw the trainer tips on the website and said to myself, 'two weeks practice will be enough for me.'

Declaring the intention:

The following week I had two workshops with two different clients (I facilitate training programs for corporates) and I shared in the opening session that I am running in a Marathon on Feb 22 and I don't know how. My co facilitator who was with me at the moment was quite surprised; 'Are you sure? You have no practice. Why are you making a declaration in front of 25 people?' She told me later. I dismissed it. Then in the second workshop I did the same. I shared about my intention to run with the participants yet again with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm. My colleague gave up on me. Till then I had practised only one day that too about three kilometers, which was more of walking than running. The following week which was the last week before the marathon, I had to travel and all I could manage in the name of practice was a bit of stretching and walking whenever I could squeeze in some time.

But this did not deter me from the thought of running the marathon; I was so excited with the sexiness of the idea of running that I was talking about it to whoever I met.

The reality of the beginning:

I got tired in the first 3 kilometers and the realization came strongly to me that I was relying too much on the power of my 'mind' and 'intention' to pull through this. I had not prepared my body adequately. A very nice old man in white kurta was standing with the policeman on duty on the track (he must be a villager from nearby and was there throughout till the end). He watched me running-walking, breathing with such effort. I heard him say 'tumse yeh poorā nahin hoga'. My friend kept following me in the car and offered to pick me up at 3.5 km. She was sure I will not go beyond 5 Km. I had not practiced enough. I just did not have the stamina.

The tipping point:

I started having a conversation with my mind what if I 'had' to do it? What if there was no option to stop 'no matter what'? I said to myself I keep talking about the power of 'mind and thoughts' over 'body'. Now is the time to prove it to myself. I had to do it for 'my own sake'. I had to do it to be in 'integrity' with myself. The moment of decision came. I told my friend

who was following me in the car 'please go and come after 3 hours to pick me up'. I wanted no one to distract me. I had to complete the run.

I started counting my steps: 100 steps running, 50 steps walking and kept moving. I managed 7 Km. with this strategy. Then I slowed down, watched my breath and pace. I had to do something different otherwise I will not be able to make it. I realized I was getting tired because I was running with too much effort: I started taking small steps with steady pace and found this was not tiring me. Throughout the journey, the other people kept passing by and kept cheering; 'you are doing well' and this would reaffirm.

'Wow' I discovered a formula for myself: keep running slowly with small steady steps... don't stop...

Building the strength:

At 10 Km, my left knee gave away. By the way, I do not have very strong left knee. And my doctor has told me not to do any strenuous activity with it. I started running on the power of my right knee. It was getting difficult and I had a choice to stop at 14 when I completed one full round. Then I thought what story will I tell my nieces and nephews? How will it feel? I could just visualize one thing...completing the marathon and the feeling thereafter and there was no way I would compromise on my word.

The journey from 14-17 required just about everything in me to continue. My right knee also started hurting. I could feel pain all over my legs knees down now. I could not stop or walk. My legs were feeling heavier and heavier with every step. The only option was running at slow pace. Walking was even more effortful. For the first time I experienced running as flying, it required less effort than walking.

Mind over body:

At about 17 and a half, both my legs gave away. A volunteer just appeared from nowhere on a cycle and asked 'Do you need a Vovran spray?'... it was just the help I needed at that point. He also offered me a banana and I welcomed it as I needed some energy at the point. I kept dragging my feet and kept running for another half kilometer till the water station where I took a few sips of water. After that momentary pause for water, the pain in my legs worsened. My legs were not getting enough power and momentum to run and therefore I started walking. At the milestone of 2, a very handsome young boy of 6-7 years came on a cycle and said.. 'Keep it up.. you are going good' and gave me a cheery smile' It brought happy tears in my eyes. 'How did he know I needed those words?' Then the same old man in white kurta reappeared who was giving company to the police man at the crossing and I heard him say "Bahut dam hai". Only one kilometer left, scorching heat of the sun, my mind was empty now: there were no questions, no thoughts now. My body did not exist.

When I was approaching finish line, I heard 'Smile and run for the camera' I smiled and ran once again. I don't know where I got the energy from for that last piece. I crossed the line, tears welled in my eyes, could not believe it was over. I was happy that I kept my word:

despite complete absence of practice I completed the run. I passed my own test of endurance. I reaffirmed my belief to myself that mind and thought drive the body.

My reflections on parallels on leadership:

The analogy of the experience came so close to life and leadership. Here are some of my thoughts:

1. It is vitally important to dream, visualize the end point
2. Share the dream, say it aloud... to yourself and others. Had I not shared my goal of running with many people, I might have chickened out the last minute. The fact that I shared it aloud helped me relate to it better and not get out of it. It cemented my relationship with the dream. The dream not shared means nothing. Sharing is important
3. My lack of practice, for whatever reason was a potential roadblock in fulfilling my dream. I realized the areas in my life where I was doing that. Not putting enough effort in planning, finding and nurturing the resources. A major insight for me in this area.
4. Resources... take care of the resources, understand the rules of the game, the technology and follow the processes. It is so helpful. I slept at 12 in the night on Saturday. I did not cut my toe nails and I realized that I had made a mistake. Listen to the wisdom of others too. The role of volunteers, their spirit to help, provide all necessary support and cheer was so essential for the runners.
5. **Mind over body**... ultimately, not to give up no matter what happens, what comes in the way. Everything gets taken care of. Help comes when needed; a boy came with the medicine spray and the food. A young boy cheered me when needed.

Finally, this marathon for me was about me keeping in integrity of my word and endurance. It was about my life, stretching my boundaries, breaking barriers and having fun. In the process, I realized this experience is quite intoxicating and addictive. I am already thinking about preparing for the next one. The only difference being that this time it will be about bettering my speed and stamina which will come with lot of practice. Miles to go.....

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