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Kaizen

By Paul Martin

It's been 14 years since I lost my lower leg in a car accident. Without question this "tragedy" altered the course of my life; altered it for the better. Sparing some details, know that I'm a better athlete since becoming impaired. I didn't find myself disabled, but I was impaired.

Three short years after the accident I conquered my first marathon. At four and a half hours, that was slow compared to my standards twelve years later. Triathlons, bike racing, and a return to competitive ice hockey followed.

Through sports, I have absorbed the essence of some of life's more fundamental qualities: hard work, faith, attitude, and commitment.

At a half marathon (13.1 miles) last year, I started to understand a little something about patience. I approached this race with relative disregard, not expecting much of a result, using it as preparation for the

following month's Boston Marathon.

A stark contrast to what I would consider to be proper race preparation, on Saturday, the day before the race, I stood on concrete all day at the race expo promoting my new coaching company, Amplitude Multisport, and my book, *One Man's Leg*. ("Hey, you like to read? Can I tell you about a really good book?") That was the typical opener to the unsuspecting passersby.) I ran 20 miles the previous Monday, swam and rode on Tuesday, traveled on Wednesday, drove all over western Massachusetts and spoke to a couple of schools on Thursday and ran nine miles on Friday, including 3 x 10 minutes tempo with 10 minutes of recovery after each effort. This is called "training through" the event.

The next morning I manned my booth up until the last minute, sold a few more books, then walked out to the starting line. My tendency to lollygag landed me near the

2007 ANNUAL CONFERENCE KEYNOTE

SPOTLIGHT:

*Paul Martin will speak
Friday, July 20, at the
Bay Point Marriott Resort &
Spa, Panama City Beach.*

back of the pack. The gun went off shortly thereafter and I was immediately bobbing and weaving up the right side of the 7,500 other registered runners. In my head I was still treating it as a non-competitive event, just looking for a good, hard workout. I noted an 8:30 pace at Mile 2. Chalk this up to just plain crowded conditions. Things started to open up by Mile 4 and I was able to run the expected 7:15 pace.

By Mile 8 I noticed how great I was feeling, despite the lack of a rest preparing for the event. (I did, however, get in a great

KAIZEN continued on page 12

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- **Sam Horn: July 19**, Thursday morning
Tongue Fu® How to Deal With Difficult People Without Becoming One Yourself
- **Carol Price: July 19**, Thursday lunch
Leadership Begins With Me
- **Paul Martin: July 20**, Friday morning
The Ability to Overcome Adversity
- **Simon Bailey: July 20**, Friday lunch
Release Your Brilliance

continued from page 10

eight-hour sleep.) Then it happened: that competitive thing came out. I picked it up to a pace I thought might tap my abilities. Next thing you know I'm running a couple of 6:20s and feeling great.

At Mile 12 I decided to lay it down: I wrapped up the last 1.1 miles in 6:44. A 1:31:42 half marathon that included two pee stops (when am I gonna learn not to drink so much on 40-degree days?) and one hug-the-family-members/sip-sister's-coffee-for-no-particular-reason stop at the halfway point.

In the last few feel-good miles, I pondered how I could be performing at this level. I concluded that "kaizen" deserved all the credit.

I've recently learned of the Japanese concept of kaizen. The term represents a notion that skills are best developed through a series of ongoing incremental, barely noticeable changes over an extended period of time. In other words: practicing consistency and patience in an effort to acquire a certain trait or ability. I would imagine that this is not an entirely new concept to you.

Since that NYC Marathon finish line back in 1995, I've not only gradually learned more and more about sports, but I have also gradually grown more and more

committed to them. I started with the "Can I finish?" mindset. I then moved to one of "Can I be competitive?" I've recently entered the realm of "How fast can I really go?" While over the past 10 years I've claimed to be "committed" to being an athlete, I've recently realized that I was committed, primarily, to the lifestyle—with no regrets whatsoever, I might add.

I believe this new commitment, the one that is truly testing my abilities at the present time, could only have arrived in such a proper capacity through kaizen. The reason I'm racing faster is because I have gradually added skills, gradually added physiological adaptations and gradually added knowledge (tactics, techniques, and awareness of various physiological states), all the while avoiding burn-out and injury.

This is comforting for me, but more importantly this is a critical lesson for anyone looking for a solid career and a solid reputation: allow your skills and abilities to build. Be patient and dedicated in all aspects of your life. Understand that the results you desire in life will come if you stay the course while pushing the envelope ever so slightly.

Yes, it is sometimes necessary to push harder than you thought you could, just be careful when you do. ■