

# **Sailing Into Success**

## *30 Lessons From Sailing That Made Me A True Champion in Business*

It is not an accident that so many athletes not only excel in their respective sport, but also in their life after retirement. There is an expiration date on active participation in most sports, but the knowledge that true champions have gained over their years of victories and defeats is invaluable in their “life after sports”.

During my career, I won dozens of championships, sailed more seas than I can remember, and was treated as a heroic champion in multiple nations of the world. However, since my life has moved into a new chapter, I have realized that I have far more to show for my time on the water than a room full of trophies and a heart full of memories. I spent years of my life training to become a champion, and I learned countless things about myself along the way. I discovered the vast network of connections between work ethic, mental fortitude, determination, humility, ego, ambition, self-awareness, and a hundred other parts of my personality that eventually worked together to bring me my success.

When I say “success”, I am not speaking only of my athletic accomplishments. My lifelong passion for sailing made me into a more complete person, a wiser businessman, and a more capable citizen of the world. At face value, athletics and business may seem linked in only the most obvious or commercial ways, but in fact, the mental prowess needed to become a true champion of a sport is shockingly similar to the mental capacity and personality that businessmen of all levels and industries need to achieve and maintain their successful position.

The same lessons that I painstakingly learned over my years as a sailor, captain, trainer, and coach are applicable to more areas of business than I ever thought possible. However, when you break down the elements of success for any endeavor in life, you find similar requirements, challenges, and expectations. That is why so many sports stars go on to become successful businessmen, because they have already trained themselves to be the best, and to never give up until their goals have been realized. Realistically, there may be hundreds of cross over qualities between athletics and business, but in my opinion, this collection of my advice and life experience captures 30 of the most important lessons that I translated between sports and business.

Armed with this knowledge and the confidence to move from the pinnacle of athletic achievement to the towers of business success, you can seamlessly shift your attitude and status as a champion between these two major parts of life.

## **1: The Mathematics of Success = Talent x Training, Divided by Ego.**

When choosing your “path” in life, it is natural for it to involve something for which you have discovered a natural talent or a deep-seated passion. Few, if any, individuals begin their journey at the front of the pack, and most life goals require time, dedication, and training to achieve. The basic equation for success that most people understand and recognize is  $\text{Talent} \times \text{Training} = \text{Success}$ . It is short, simple, and appears to cover the necessary parts.

In sailing, I knew I had a passion for the sport from a very young age, and my father, as well as my early peers, recognized a natural talent on the sea. From my childhood to this very day, I pursued that passion through rigorous training and focus. I took my natural talents and bolstered them with tangible experience that I gained while actually sailing, as well as concrete knowledge of sailing technique and theory from the Naval Academy in my young adulthood. At an early point in my career, I only focused on those two elements, training and talent, but I had left out a very important variable – ego. When I began to find success in my craft, and the victories began to come more easily, I thought that I had “arrived”, that my years of work had paid off and that this would be my life. I enjoyed the parties, the champagne, the women, and the cars, but I was young and foolish. All the talent and training in the world couldn’t prepare me for the distractions and detrimental activities that fame and glory would bring.

I allowed my ego to dominate my personality for a time in my life, and I soon found that with the rise of ego and over-confidence, there was an inverse response in my talent and focus. I let my success go to my head, as they say, and I began to forget about the things that had gotten me to that spot in the first place. Having a dream and pushing yourself until you achieve it is one of the most important things we can do as humans, but it is weak and immature to allow ego to destroy or take away from all of the work and training that went into that success.

In business, success and failure can rest on a single decision, a single bad investment, or a single innovation. The stakes may seem higher in the world of business, but the equation remains the same. The work ethic involved in running a successful World Record campaign is not so different from starting a business from scratch. You must accumulate a supporting staff, your necessary materials, and the knowledge to embark upon the journey. You must educate yourself and your staff to the dangers as well as the opportunities, and you must focus on the goal. However, you must not allow your ego to distract you from your ultimate business goals. If you are beginning a business from scratch, perhaps you will find initial success in the form of a breakthrough product, or a particularly generous investor. At that point, you may be ready to celebrate, as though the

mission is accomplished, just as I did when the victories began to come so easily.

As a wise businessman, you must push your ego out of your mind and continue striving forward, training hard, and maintaining your focus on even larger goals. Being successful does not mean gaining a single victory, it means having the determination to build a consistent culture of success in everything you do. Business sectors grow exponentially every year, and there is plenty of room for new ideas and participants, but the equation for success must never be forgotten. Choose something you love, or something you are naturally good at. Then, devote yourself to mastering that industry knowledge or skill set. Finally, eliminate the potentially dangerous effects of ego and overconfidence by constantly setting new, more ambitious goals, so you are never fully satisfied or content with your position. Remind yourself that glory is fleeting, and that ego can be deceiving, so continue pushing forward, seeking out new versions of success in every new chapter of your journey.

## **2: Accept Defeat Before You Enjoy Victory**

There is an inherent link between victory and success, but few champions, in both business and sports, have enjoyed the thrill of success without the earlier tang of bitter defeat. One of the most important components of a culture of success that champions must work towards is the fortitude to move through the pain of defeat and learn from it. After losing a hard-fought battle or race, it is not uncommon to feel a nascent urge to give up, or to move into some other specialty or industry. This willingness to abandon your dreams can mean one of two things; you have been on the wrong path all along, and should have chosen a different goal from the beginning, or you are not mature enough to overcome the many challenges that lie ahead.

During my decades on the water, I don't remember the exact number of races I lost, or campaigns that eventually failed after months of preparation. I didn't dwell on the failures and let them consume me, nor did I ignore them and fail to learn from my mistakes. When we are young, and the vast possibilities of life are ahead of us, our response to failure is a good indication of what type of person we are destined to become. If I had quit sailing and pursued a career as a DJ or as a paratrooper after some of my early stumbles in sailing, I might have found a different path to personal success, but I would have been doing a great disservice to my true passion. I eventually learned to embrace my failures as necessary steps on the long path to success. Each challenge that presents itself to us throughout life should not be taken as a sign that we've made a mistake; each obstacle is a new lesson, and should be seen as an opportunity to grow and develop even further. Of course, there will be disappointment, and perhaps an

instinctual urge to blame someone other than ourselves, but that is a weak and unprofessional response to failure. We place our dreams on our own shoulders, and when we fall, it is unwise to shift blame to anyone else beside ourselves.

Each time we falter, we should take the time to analyze our actions and the course of our campaign, adjust our plans accordingly, and try again. There is a traditional Japanese adage that, loosely translated, says; *we must fall down seven times, but stand up an eighth time*. As I said, I can't remember every race that I lost, but I know that every single failure taught me something. Whether the lesson was great or small, I was never exactly the same competitor after a loss that I was before I began.

This is a priceless lesson in the business world. There are tens of thousands of failed businesses, ideas, and ventures each year around the world. Billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of hours are devoted towards projects that will eventually fail. The most successful businessmen do not simply throw their dreams away and move into a different sector, or step down as CEOs. They gather their teams back together, rationally analyze the points that led to their failure, and embark on a new campaign to find success. British business mogul Richard Branson has had dozens of outlandish and brilliant business plans that have fallen by the wayside in his long and impressive career, and each one has taught him something that helps him be more successful in the future. Despite his numerous falls from grace, he remains one of the most admired, wealthy, and influential business minds in the world.

Success must be measured over both the short and long terms, so while you may look at an individual venture and deem it a failure in the short term, the lessons you acquire through that microcosmic defeat may be just the thing which propels you towards eventual victory on the macrocosmic scale. Accepting defeat does not mean giving up, it is simply an admission that not everyone is perfect and mistakes can happen. Every person suffers the sting of failure, but not everyone responds to it in a productive way. The champions of the world, across all industries, will be quick to agree that far more is learned through failure than is learned through success. Ignoring your faults and trying to achieve a similar goal without making any changes or alterations is madness. This is what Einstein has to say on the subject; *"Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results"*.

Holding the unrealistic expectations that you will never fail, in business or in sports, is just as dangerous as lack of confidence that makes you believe that you'll never win. I could have allowed my spirit to be crushed decades ago after my first heartbreaking loss in a National Championship, or after my first unsuccessful bid to win the Tour de France of sailing, but I didn't. I accepted

those defeats as part of the natural path to my success, and turned the pain of failure into an opportunity to grow and move forward towards future victories.

### **3: Never Give Up**

In the previous lesson, I discussed the importance of recognizing the value of failure, and that is intimately connected to this third, vital piece of advice. Giving up is never something gladly done, because it requires an admission of failure, and our instinctive pride rebels against this. It would seem like our natural desire to achieve success would discourage people from simply giving up, but unfortunately, giving up or “cutting your losses” is often seen as a viable option, rather than going through the struggle of facing up to your own failures. As I mentioned earlier, failures provide an opportunity for advancement and learning from your mistakes. Before you can grow and develop from these painful losses, however, you must first come face to face with your own inability in a certain area, and that blow to the ego is sometimes too much to bear. Pushing that failure into the past and giving up on a dream in search of something else seems attractive to those people who are not mature enough to admit to their own weaknesses.

Throughout history, the most respected names in business, sports, science, politics, and every other lifestyle have not leapt from one dream to another, foregoing the learning process of defeat in exchange for some new venture. On the contrary, they dissected their failures and became even stronger for them. Giving up is like wiping the slate clean and abandoning all that you have learned in that specific area of life. I could have given up sailing in order to save my relationship as a young man, and I could have given up my dream of becoming a professional sailor when my obligations to the military put stress on my life. I could have given up halfway through my World Record attempt to cross the Atlantic in a catamaran when my partner became ill, but I persevered. There are countless times when I could have easily stepped away from my career and my dreams, and it would have been an easier option for me. However, in the long run, I would have been plagued with regret and self-doubt. Hard work is part of the journey, and failure is a natural part of any endeavor. If you are not willing to accept that and will quit at the first sign of difficulty, than you have probably chosen the wrong goals.

Unfortunately, our modern world occasionally encourages giving up. Filing for bankruptcy, quitting your job, divorcing your spouse, and so many other trends in the modern world create a sense that giving up is normal and acceptable. The process of giving up doesn't allow you to learn or grow, it simply piles your same issues and undeveloped personality into some new dream or path that you will find similar difficulties in. Most likely, you will come to fail in those ventures as

well. Everything worth achieving is worth fighting for, and, at times, that must come at the expense of your pride. Great competitors and champions in business, sports, and life are mature enough to take the blows of defeat and not roll over and play dead. They refuse to give up, because they believe in their passion and in themselves.

If you want to become successful over the long term, giving up at the drop of a hat and moving into something new, expecting different results, is foolish. If you genuinely believe in what you are doing, and trust in your own abilities to evolve and grow, than persevere as I did. You will come out of those defeats and those dark moments when you thought about giving up as a stronger, more capable individual. You will have been tested by the fire of failure, and by passing that test you will be ready for the next challenge, complete with the knowledge and the wisdom that you gained by never giving up.

#### **4: Reach Your Goals, No Matter What It Takes**

The pursuit of excellence and success is usually a long journey. If you are fully invested in achieving your dreams, than you must be prepared for all manner of setbacks that might come between you and your ultimate goals of success. For every aspect of life, there are bound to be obstacles and choices that must be made as we move forward with our goals. When pursuing higher education, people must choose between specialties and majors, and they may need to forego certain extracurricular activities that take up too much time. When we are trying to get a promotion in our profession, certain choices about how we spend our free time must be made to ensure our eventual success. In sports, the choice between an active social or personal life must be weighed against the determination to be a champion.

The various obstacles and issues that come up will threaten your pursuit of happiness, but you can't allow them to discourage you. Life is not simple, and becoming a champion is not easy. If that is your expectation, than once again, I urge you to change the direction of your life to something more suitable for laziness or a lack of work ethic. Achieving our personal goals is one of the greatest things we can do with our lives, and as individuals, there are few things as satisfying or fulfilling as seeing a goal grow from a simple idea into a culture of belief and eventually manifest into a reality. There are other, more tangible things that people praise, and that sort of materialistic focus is okay at times, but there is something truly profound about doing something your previously thought impossible.

Think of all the great innovators over time; human ingenuity and determination have shaped the world as we know it because the greatest minds of the past

were determined to make their dreams a reality. That tradition continues today, as technology and business continue to advance at the speed of light into realms we never thought possible. New, seemingly impossible goals are being made every day, and then driven, passionate people discover ways to realize those goals. In business, it is vital to handle obstacles in stride, whether it is red tape of bureaucracy or small-mindedness and lack of vision. There will always be those people and things that seek to keep you from advancing your own agenda and ambition, but a true champion will always find a way.

When I was training for the Vendee Globe race and my initial funding ran out, there are very few people that would have been surprised when I didn't give up that dream and move on. Instead, I saw money as just another in a long line of obstacles that I had overcome, and I found the funding from another source to buy my own training yacht. Although I eventually moved on from the pursuit of that goal for other reasons (which I'll cover later), the point is this; even insurmountable odds can still be overcome. There aren't many genuinely impossible situations, particularly if you are a creative and determined person. Thinking outside the box may be required, and approaching the issues from different angles will almost certainly be a part of your solution, but the goal is still possible. You may have to deal with criticism from friends, family, partners, and the media and you might need to sacrifice any number of less-important things, but eventually, you will reach your dream. And it will be glorious.

In business, the idea of being cutthroat is often associated with deceitful or merciless practices, but the concept of being ruthless in your quest for success is not necessarily a negative thing. Hurting others is never acceptable, but the occasional selfish streak is admissible, particularly when that renewed focus on your own ambitions provides you with a clear path to your goals. At a certain point in life, the most important thing in your existence will be the fulfillment of your wildest dreams, and you mustn't let anything get in your way. The people who care about and support you the most will understand your determination, and will not only get out of your way, but will also help you along on your journey.

## **5: Believe in Yourself Above All Else**

Finding a balance between ego and self-confidence is vital when you are pursuing any great goal in life, and it is a delicate balance to find. Believing that you are the best in your chosen field can be a huge boost to your abilities and your willingness to take risks, but at the same time, it can also begin to wear down your dogged determination to give your unwavering attention to your training and skills. Along with that are the perpetual distractions and detractions from your goals that often come in the form of other people.

When I decided to pursue professional sailing as a full-time job, there were dozens of people in my life who, in some way, tried to talk me out of it. Their arguments were often based in concern for my well being which was touching, but dangerous. I wanted to believe that their advice for me would be good, and valid, but I had to ignore their concerns and push forward with my own dreams, regardless of how risky they happened to be. The most common argument was always about money, and many people told me that sailing was for the privileged class of people who had already made their way in the world in some other industry, had amassed their personal fortune and could then afford to lounge about on a boat in the Mediterranean, or invest money in purchasing yachts for racing.

I came into the world of sailing with little more than self-confidence in my abilities and an extensive working knowledge of the craft. I had numerous setbacks, financially and personally, that could have easily swayed less determined people to leave the world of sailing for something more stable or traditional. No matter what happened to my personal life, and no matter what others in my life tried to tell me or warn me about, I chose to press onward and pursue my dream. You mustn't be afraid to disagree with those who would distract you from your goals, no matter how well-intentioned they may be. There is a rare element in people who are destined to be champions, and that unstoppable desire to excel and succeed is not something that other people can understand. When the people around you begin moving forward with their lives, settling down with their secure jobs and their seemingly perfect families, it is natural to envy that normality and comfort. You cannot talk yourself out of your own dreams simply because they are more difficult than taking the "easy way out". The belief in yourself and the validity of your own goals is far more valuable than any tangible item, and in some cases, it is even more important than personal relationships, marriage, or family. There are plenty of people who would disagree with me, but from a young age, I knew that I would do great things, and I didn't let anyone else stand in my way or distract me from that end result.

Failure is one of the most damaging distractions from your goals, because they provide you and other people with genuine arguments against continuing on your pursuit of happiness. After losing a string of races, some competitors would choose to move on, settle down, and leave their potential career behind them, turning it into a hobby rather than a profession. I could have counted myself among that number, except for the self-confidence I never let go of. Even during the darkest times during my career, when I was broke, single, yacht-less, and depressed, I searched for the core passions inside myself that reminded myself what I was meant to do in my life. When I was completely alone, I could shut out all of the words of wisdom from others and focus on what I had built and fought



and struggled for since I was a young man. I wasn't willing to give that up because I knew that I was capable of so much more.

In business, that hardheaded determination is just as necessary, within reason. I'm sure that the first man to strap wings to his arms in an attempt to fly was laughed out of town, just as the first person to propose a personal computer or a cell phone was met with serious doubt. Any endeavor in the world of business involves risk, and it will certainly involve some amount of resistance from the rest of the world. However, modern business is about innovation, change, and risk-taking. Belief in yourself has never been more important than it is in this generation, and listening to people you respect as they try to talk you out of your ambitions will be a necessary evil. Lack of vision and foresight is not a reason to dismiss these people as stupid or negative; it simply means that they don't share the same goals as you, or the same capacity for dreaming big. Never let someone talk you out of your own desires, particularly when you know in the deepest corners of your soul that success is not only possible, but if you continue working hard and learning, it is practically inevitable.

## **6: Success Requires Sacrifice – What Are You Willing to Give Up?**

As I've said before, success is not for everyone, nor is it for the faint of heart. When you create grand dreams for your life, there will always be things that get in the way. Sometimes, you must ignore the advice of family, friends, teachers, or teammates. Other times, the battle will be more internal, and this is where most people stumble. When we dedicate our time and energy into some activity, we become emotionally, financially, or psychologically involved. At a certain point, champions need to streamline their life in order to achieve the highest level of success. Being a jack-of-all-trades works for some people, but for someone interested in being a true champion, sacrifices must be made.

That sounds slightly contrary to my earlier point about never giving up, but there is a hierarchy of desire in every person's life. Interests, hobbies, and pastimes will always be on a lower level than ultimate goals and lifelong ambitions. When those two levels begin to conflict in an unhealthy or unproductive way, then the choice is clear – something needs to be eliminated. When I was in my early 20's, I had a successful career as a DJ, an ambition to be a member of an elite paratrooper squad in the Dutch military, and I wanted to stay in a relationship with my wonderful girlfriend. However, all of those things, when put together, were keeping me from dedicating enough time to my much older and deeper passion, sailing. It wasn't an easy decision, but I eventually had to give up my weekend job as a DJ and reduce my time commitment and ambition within the military. Eventually, I was even unable to fulfill my responsibility as a boyfriend, and I lost my girlfriend as well. That sounds like a horribly large amount of

sacrifices to make, but you must remember, sailing was a part of my soul. My life and my goals in the world of sailing were inextricably connected, and after having that self-realization about my passion, giving things up was no longer as frightening.

In the long run, I realized that being good at many different things was simply not my style of living. I could be interested in various activities, like surfing or music, but I never let it get out of control and take away time from my singular focus. The sacrifices that I have made throughout my life have been numerous, but that will be the same case for almost all true champions. If you are honest with yourself about the direction you want your life to take, and the variable importance of different parts of that life, than you will be able to find a balance that will keep you happy for many years.

In the complex world of business, focus is essential, which means many successful businessmen have less time for other activities and distractions because they are determined to find success in their respective field. From the outside looking in, it may seem like someone is “obsessed” with his or her work, but similar to the balance between ego and self-confidence, the relationship between obsession and passion is notoriously delicate. It can be just as dangerous to be overzealous as it can to be apathetic. At certain points in my career, I became so focused on success and self-improvement that I forgot to take care of my most important tool – my body. You must be willing to make significant sacrifices in the pursuit of your goals, whether they are in business or in sports, but that focus should not be allowed to become hazardous to your health.

Self-confidence and ambition must not stray into the realm of arrogance, or the belief that you are unstoppable. Your happiness may be found in the pursuit of your grand dreams, but it can also be lost in the same place if you don't find a healthy balance within your life. The point is to not become distracted by less important activities or hobbies; I am not trying to suggest becoming dangerously obsessed with your chosen goals. Self-awareness and self-analysis is vital to achieving your ambitions and eliminating those parts of life that will slow you down or stop you completely.

If you are honestly dedicated to achieving even your wildest dreams, you have to come to terms with the fact that other parts of your life might take a backseat for years, even decades. Not every man was created equal in terms of their ambitions, and making certain sacrifices is a natural part of being a true champion.

## 7: Preparation and Practice Win The Day

Natural talent is a beautiful thing, but not everyone is given the full range of abilities at birth to achieve all their goals in life. I am sure everyone is familiar with the phrase, "*Practice Makes Perfect*", and there is a reason that certain adages stick around through time – because they're true. When it comes to climbing every mountainous goal of your chosen path, there are dozens of things that must be done along the way, but there is nothing more important than preparation. Walking blindly into a challenge without having planned, prepared, and practiced for every potentiality that may arise is a recipe for disaster.

In my career, I believe in something called the 10,000 Hour Rule, which basically means that unless a person spends 10,000 hours training for something, they are unlikely to achieve the highest level of glory. This could be most easily seen in the Olympic campaigns that I was involved in. The teams that found the most success and even those that had a *chance* at winning a medal were all extremely dedicated to their sport, and had put in the time necessary to perform at the most elite level. Naturally gifted athletes can do truly amazing things, but the constant routine of practice and focus will nearly always win out over taken for granted talent and luck.

When I refer to preparation, I don't only mean physical training, but also mental preparedness. Certain journeys can tax the mind just as much as the body, so both must be ready to face the challenges and strain. When I crossed the Atlantic with my partner Gerard in the hopes of breaking the World Record, the toll it took on our bodies was tremendous, but the psychological battles we fought were just as difficult. We were constantly tempted to give up due to our fear and uncertainty, and our bodies threatened to shut down from the harsh conditions, but our training had been carried out diligently. We had prepared ourselves for the challenges that lie ahead, and even our large amount of preparation was almost insufficient. If we had simply gone into the transatlantic crossing with high hopes and experience, we would have failed, or even lost our lives. We planned for every eventuality, trained for the difficult lifestyle we would face, and steeled our minds against the dangerous temptations of surrender and defeat. This may sound dramatic, and crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a two-man craft is definitely an extreme example of the need for preparation, but it applies to all goals and projects.

In business, would it be wise to go into a pitch meeting for a new real estate development without the necessary facts and figures, the information about well-priced contractors, and plans for taking the correct legal channels to build property? Of course not! Preparation and contingency planning is an integral part of wise business theory, and the most successful modern leaders have a wealth

of experience in structuring and predicting relevant business practices. The physical training that is so necessary in sports may not be as applicable to the business world, but the principle is significant. Preparation is a sign of maturity, and dedication to a project. It is the willingness to invest time before the actual project or mission begins in order to guarantee a higher chance for success. Spontaneity and thinking on your feet is important if something goes wrong with the initial plan or design, but it shouldn't be relied on for the entire endeavor.

The way you behave on a daily basis shapes your instinctual behavior, so it is only natural that practice will be the best way to prepare you for the "real thing". There were times when I lived on my boat, eating, sleeping, dreaming, and working in the space where my dreams were being chased. We develop habits and comfortable behaviors when we repeat them over and over; this is a natural part of how our brains are wired. In the business world, the same thing can be true. If you consistently train yourself to be business savvy, professional, inquisitive, logical, and mature, that is the persona you will display for others, even unconsciously. As I said earlier, practice truly does make perfect, in every aspect of life.

## **8: Good Coaching Saves You Time and Elevates Your Success**

If there was one thing I wish that I had learned earlier in my career, it is the importance of a good coach to promote consistent and positive growth towards success. For much of my life, I chose to fly solo in my sailing career, taking advice from no one except my own instincts, and the occasional trusted partner or teammate. I didn't see the need for a coach for many years, because I was pushing myself so hard that I was basically doubling as my own coach, motivating and performing and responding in a cycle that led to improvement.

It wasn't until I had risen to the heights of success and fallen into the pits of despair and failure that I finally looked at the pattern of my career and saw the piece of the puzzle that I had been missing. After taking a step back and analyzing my greatest strengths and weaknesses, I realized that I hadn't had the correct distance and impartiality in the decisions I was making. I had made some glaring mistakes in my life because I was simply too close to the situation at hand. I was so passionate about being successful and rising to the top of the sailing world that I had ignored some of the most important opportunities for learning that had presented themselves to me.

During the harder times in my career, like the period of time after the death of my good friend in a race that I was forced to forfeit, or when the loan for the Vendee Globe campaign was finally called in and I went bankrupt, a coach would have been able to build me back up far quicker and more effectively than my own

feeble attempts had done. I had allowed my emotions, fears, and anxieties dictate my actions during various times in my life, and I had lost precious months and even years due my stubbornness. Passionate people can become blinded by their own goals, and I admittedly missed a few obvious signs that someone on the outside would have easily seen and corrected. We like to imagine that no one can possibly understand us as well as we understand ourselves; it is a natural conceit and is entirely normal. However, by welcoming a trusted advisor or coach into our lives and career, they can become familiar with the parts of our personality that affect our performance, and they can whittle away the flaws and help bring out our strengths in ways that we are unable to see. Self-critiquing and self-awareness are two different things, and recognizing a flaw is not always the same thing as actively eliminating it as quickly as possible, as a coach is paid and trained to do.

No matter how successful a person may be, there will always be someone with different kinds of experience who can offer words of advice, and true champions cannot be too proud to accept that wisdom. Great coaches may have worked with dozens of champions, and they understand what makes certain competitors rise while others fall. That is the sort of insight that individuals fail to have when their only real point of relativity is their own career and experiences. I made this mistake of pride for too many years, and since becoming a coach myself, it is a mistake that I strongly warn against. I had a very successful career as a sailor, but I know that it could have been healthier, happier, and even more successful if I had enlisted a coach as my guide and mentor along the way.

In business, the mistake of pride is just as evident in certain individuals. Being talented does not make you all knowing, and there is unlimited power in knowledge, much of which must be learned from others. Taking the time to listen to informed advice from experts, colleagues, and professional “coaches” is never a waste, because it will give you an outside perspective on your own ideas and philosophies, and possibly encourage you to change them to something even more efficient or insightful. It may require some small sacrifice of personal pride to ask for help, but in the long run, your ego will recoup the difference when your success increases and your productivity soars. The concept of being a champion is often seen as an individual pursuit, and having a coach sometimes feels like a crutch for an amateur, but get rid of that mindset. Humility is often just as important as confidence, and listening to the experience and wisdom of others who have walked in your same shoes and struggled with the same challenges can be a huge advantage in your own ambitions.

We are the sum of our experience as we go through life, and at the end of the day, we must fall asleep alone with our victories and defeats. Our family, friends, educators, and coaches all help shape us on our path to our goals, but in the

professional sphere, it is coaches who make the greatest difference between winners and champions.

## **9: Follow Your Instincts; Don't Doubt Your Intuition**

Over time, competitors develop a natural intuition, particularly in relation to their bodies and their special set of skills. This comes from years of carefully monitoring your physical and mental response to a wide range of stimuli. Some people call it their "gut", while others may call it their "sixth sense", but the meaning is the same. At certain times, a small voice in the back of your mind tells you to push forward, slow down, think further, or act quickly. This mental muscle gets trained just like any other one, and it is important to trust it. When you begin to outthink yourself and ignore the warning signs or urgent signals from your own body and mind, you are doomed to failure.

There were a number of times throughout my career that I became so focused and driven towards a single goal that I left caution and rationality far behind me, and frankly, it could have killed me. The first notable time was during my training season leading up to my unfulfilled Vendee Globe race, which, for those that don't know, is a one-man "round the world" race with no ports, no breaks, and no mercy. It is considered one of the most difficult races in the world, and only an extremely elite group of competitors have ever attempted it, let alone won. My mind had been set so squarely on accomplishing this legendary goal, that I ignored the warning signs of my body and my mind. The politics of my sponsors was confusing and somewhat unclear, my knees, back, and stomach were beginning to break down from exhaustion and stress, and my heart wasn't in the race any more. I ignored those signs until it was too late, and I fell into a spiral of economic disaster, physical damage, and psychological ruin.

The second time my instincts shouted at me to cease and desist was during my time as the technical director of the 2012 Olympic campaign for Holland's sailing team. My mind told me that something was wrong, that things were happening behind my back, and that this was not the right campaign for me any longer. I had grown up a bit more at this point, and had worked through similar periods of self-doubt, so I listened to my instincts and trusted my intuition. I stepped down as the technical director and coach of the Olympic team before it could bring me back to a dark place I had no wish to go again. It was one of the wisest decisions I ever made, despite giving up such a prestigious spot in the greatest gathering of athletes in the world.

You have to stay in synch with your body and mind. They will try to protect you, and as strange as it may sound, they are on your side! Your personality and will to win is a part of your psyche, but when your instincts tell you that something is wrong, pay attention. When your body begins to signal that it is in pain, and

possibly breaking down, stop and consider what you could lose if you don't ease off and take a break. We are not indestructible machines, and our conscious minds are not masterful computers that can ferret out every possible outcome of our choices, as well as the intentions of each person we work with. At that point, we need to trust in our experience to guide our instincts, and subsequently, heed the advice that our intuition gives.

In business, people often speak about having a "good feeling" about a stock or a new, innovative project. Some of that is simply optimism, but those instinctual reactions to new products or ideas also come from years of experience working within an industry and seeing what works and what doesn't. It seems like some companies and individuals always seem to strike gold with their business ventures and breakout products, because they follow their intuition, read the markets, and act on their instincts. They combine their conscious and unconscious mind in their decision making process, and they probably don't even realize they are doing it. A fully functional and in-touch individual has an undeniable advantage over those people who are constantly second-guessing themselves and overthinking situations. Sometimes, it is best to simply follow your gut, listen to your heart, and trust your unconscious archives of experience to guide you on the right path towards success.

## **10: Share Your Success With Others and Watch It Come Back To You**

It isn't unusual to think of the pursuit of success and personal perfection as an individual activity. In our minds, sharing the struggles and victories with others, in some ways, diminishes the accomplishment. However, it is also important to remember that no one accomplishes great things alone, and there are always those to thank that have helped you along the way. The "lone wolf" approach to life can be a good way to build self-confidence and self-reliance, but it can be a lonely existence, as the name implies. If you are successful in your bid for glory, than all of the credit can go to you, but if you fail, the disappointment and regret also lies squarely on your shoulders alone.

There are many different styles of sailing, some of which are team-based and others are for individuals. Even if you are sailing alone, there are still those who helped and guided you along the way, mentors, friends, casual advice-givers – all the way down to the technical experts who built and maintained the integrity of your boat. The benefits of spreading responsibility and delegating work when you are seeking a specific goal can be a rewarding way to get things done quickly and efficiently. As a captain, you are the head of a crew, and although the ultimate responsibility of the voyage or campaign rests on your decision-making abilities, the rest of the crewmembers are vital to your success. You want the

people around you to be as competent and confident as you are, not beaten down or disinterested in the end goal. If you are a passionate person, than try to instill that same pleasure and excitement in those working towards a common goal. By creating a much stronger atmosphere as a team that wins and loses as a single unit, you all become stronger and more accountable over the course of the campaign. Similarly, since everyone is sharing the workload to accomplish the goal, they also get to share in the glory of victory and success. A team should be a balance of hierarchy and collaboration, where people can learn from and respect one another, while never forgetting the important levels of authority that keep the team strong.

As a leader, there were times when I loaded all the blame onto myself and similarly congratulated myself during the victories. This was an unhealthy and stressful way to grow into a better sailor, and it was a selfish way to treat the good people who worked with me. By sharing my knowledge, expertise, and glory with other deserving people around me, we all became more talented and more passionate. Becoming a champion does not have to be a lonely adventure from the bottom rung to the top; there should be some measure of teamwork and camaraderie. Most importantly, by involving yourself with others and celebrating their abilities, you are investing in your own future success. Forcing people to work *for* you is much harder than allowing them to work *with* you, and the more people care about the project, the more likely it is to succeed.

Collaboration is an unavoidable part of modern business, and the era of the lone wolf entrepreneur is nearly gone. The globalization of business demands a group effort, which explains the growing importance of shared responsibility, accountability, and transparency. Swapping knowledge and brainstorming ideas is just as important a part of business meetings as stock reports and board member elections. The drive to be successful may come from within, but the means of achieving that success has ceased to be a strictly individual effort. By allowing others to share in your dreams, the chances of you reaching them are exponentially increased.

## **11: Challenge Yourself and Others**

For true champions, the thrill of new challenges is one of the most satisfying parts of life. Once one goal has been achieved, it is not time to rest on one's laurels and revel in success; it is time to set a new goal, even higher and grander to begin striving for. The life of a champion is one of increasingly difficult obstacles that must be overcome through sheer force of will and the determination to be the greatest. To outsiders, this constant search for challenges may seem almost masochistic, but the feeling of setting and



exceeding goals is like an addiction. Chasing the next, big dream is like searching for a perpetually stronger high.

This interest in finding things that will test our mettle comes from the inherent lessons that are learned during challenges, particularly when we initially fail. As mentioned earlier, failure is a far better teacher than success, and those invaluable lessons must be perpetually sought out through new ambitions and possible defeats. Someone who never seems satisfied with their success is actually just looking for the next profound lesson about themselves or their respective industry. Some people reach a certain level of notoriety or fame and then level out, content to remain successful at a certain level, but never try to climb any higher. After my initial run of success in my own career, I temporarily “dialed it in” and stopped pushing myself for the next horizon. I was in my mid-20’s and was thoroughly enjoying the life of minor fame, complete with its’ women, fancy cars and special parties. I liked the attention I was getting from charitable events, public events promoters, and the media. Basically, I stopped challenging myself because I was beginning to enjoy the benefits from my lifetime of hard work.

Fortunately, I snapped out of my boring reverie when I realized that even at that successful level, if I never tried to climb even higher, I would eventually just be average. True champions are never satisfied with average, so I put those distractions aside and began looking for my next great adventure. Through the many years of my life, I have not only pushed myself forward to new challenges, but also those around me. A strong leader has the ability to inspire those around him and bolster their confidence, assuring them that they too can do great things. This aura of confidence and ambition is intoxicating, and great competitors regularly raise the performance quality of those around them.

In business, a similar charisma is necessary for consistent success. If you want to have the support of an entire department or company, you must give them a reason to follow you. The prospect of facing a daunting challenge is not always an attractive concept, so you need to explain the benefits of a challenge and the potential for positive growth that they actually represent. There is no room in modern business for stagnation or hesitation. Although Latin is a dead language, the messages are still valid, so when you are seeking success in business, sports, and life in general, remember; *Audaces Fortuna Iuvat*, or as the phrase is more commonly known, “**Fortune favors the Bold**”. To be a true champion, you must not only push yourself constantly forward to greater challenges, but your strength of will must be so great that others are willing to follow you through the hard times and the difficulties you might face together. If you can inspire people to risk their time, energy, money, and even lives for a common goal, than you have become a great leader, and one who is ready to overcome those same challenges with grace and confidence.

## **12: Stay Faithful to Your Values for Your Health and Happiness**

The promise of becoming a champion is occasionally enough to make you change who you are inside. The temptation to pretend we are something other than our true nature is strongest when we think that by self-deception we may be able to progress even further towards our goals. At times, we think that if we can shut off certain parts of our ethics, morals, values, and beliefs that we will have the undistracted energy to achieve the impossible. Cutting corners doesn't work in any part of life; hard work and remaining true to your genuine nature should be the foundation of your existence.

When we are faced with failure, or a challenge too great to overcome, we must look inside and discover the strength within ourselves. That is easier said than done, because it is only when we have fallen down do we truly have the perspective to look inside and find our hidden strengths. The crushing weight of failure can convince even the most determined dreamers to give up or move onto something else, but it is at the bottom of everything that we can discover our full potential. We learn a lot about ourselves after taking a tumble into self-doubt or failure, and in the midst of that darkness, it is our true values that come out and reveal the path back to normality.

I fell into a few dark holes throughout my career, usually when my mind and body were spent and nothing seemed to be going my way. Again, I could have rested on the fame of my earlier years, but it would have slowly faded into some forgotten memory, and I would still regret my decision to give up to this very day. Instead, I focused on my core values, the principles that had been instilled in me through my life of determination, and I once again remembered how much I loved the sport. Anything was possible, and although I had slightly understood that phrase before, it had new meaning, and it filled me with hope and strength.

The unconscious part of our brain is where most of our instinctual actions come from, but as we discover and promote our core values throughout life, our actions also begin to adjust and adapt. You may know what some of your fundamental beliefs are, but you will never fully understand the power deep inside of you until you have hit the proverbial rock bottom. It is there that some people may begin to question their lives, debate changing some part of their persona, and force them to be something they're not. That sort of desperate response to failure must be avoided at all costs, because eventually, that choice will poison you.

You will resent your decision to change your path and deceive yourself into some new industry, away from failure and risk. Your true values can't be conquered or

re-written so they must be embraced after their discovery, and then put to use in achieving whatever goal had caused you to fall in the first place. This may sound like a lot of metaphysical and heady discourse, but each of us is gifted with a persona and a life; it is our duty to use those two things in symphony, not falsify our true nature in order to avoid another possible failure. The satisfaction of pulling yourself out of the depressive hole of defeat is even greater because you know that you've learned even more about determination, fortitude, and the indomitable human spirit. As I said before, we must trust our instincts and have confidence that many things do happen for a reason.

In business, switching theories or practices is considered highly unprofessional or inconsistent, and it is best to define your belief system and your professional goals, and then stick with them – no matter what. If your original intentions were admirable and honorable, then continue working hard to achieve your goals. When you feel that you've failed in some way, analyze the elements that brought you down and let your true values guide you on a new approach. In business, as in sports and other areas of life, it is best to remain true to who you are, rather than pretending to be someone else. Over time, that honesty will bring you to a level of success that you can be proud of, and one that truly represents your ideals and personality.

### **13: Accept the challenges that life offers you, or be doomed to repeat them.**

As I discussed earlier, the challenges you face in life are not randomly placed in front of you. There is a reason for each obstacle that you must overcome in your journey towards success. Instead of lamenting your bad luck at encountering so many difficult situations, embrace and accept the challenges that present themselves to you, and do your best to overcome them. These challenges represent important lessons that must be learned in order to grow and develop into a champion. Some people think that avoiding these challenges, or dodging them in some way is just as valid a solution as facing them head on and overcoming them, but that is a poor choice.

George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher and novelist, once said that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”, and those words still ring true today. When I was faced with challenges that I didn't fully understand or appreciate throughout my career, they inevitably came back to trouble me later in life. My unwillingness to realize my own folly in pursuing the Vendee Globe race led me to face the same difficult choice in my involvement with the Dutch Olympic Team. Luckily, I learned the lesson the second time around. However,

many people are not so fortunate. If you are faced with a challenge and make a mistake, that is alright, but you must channel that experience into a permanent mindset. Every time one of my teams lost a race, we trained and reworked every aspect of what caused us to fail, and once we pinpointed the weak point, there was no excuse for that mistake to ever happen again. If nothing is learned from failure, than it truly is just a failure, whereas if losing teaches you something, it can be labeled as a beneficial opportunity, no matter how painful it may have initially been.

For those who choose to avoid challenges or who cowardly back away from the difficult situations in life, they will move through life unprepared and untested by hardship. Failure and subsequent growth is a priceless part of life, and skipping those lessons will keep you from every fully knowing yourself, or fully understanding what it takes to reach and maintain the highest levels of success.

In the world of business, the classroom begins to prepare many people for the trials of the corporate landscape, but it is not until they are in the real world, struggling and succeeding in real situations, that they can fully comprehend the life they've chosen. When tough decisions need to be made, confidently make the most informed choice that you can, and if you fail, then so be it. Follow up by analyzing the events leading up to the choice and the things that happened afterwards. By establishing a complete picture of the situation, you can better understand what you did wrong, and guarantee that you won't make the mistake again. In my sailing career, there were certain "stock" challenges that all competitors need to experience, like physical exhaustion, team dissension, weak leadership, discouraging campaigns, etc. If a competitor is unable or unwilling to work through these difficult times and come out the other side as a more complete and wise sailor, than they would inevitably face the same problems and dig themselves into the same holes further down the line in their career.

To be a true champion, everything must be seen as a lesson, an opportunity, and a chance to improve. The process might be uncomfortable or even painful, and you must face a lot of hard questions about yourself, but in the end, the brave and determined competitors will show themselves to be up to the task. Those are the individuals who are ready to move into the higher levels, because they have risen above the

crises that all men must face, and have become stronger because of them, not despite them.

#### **14: Success is the Result of Work; Winning or Losing is not a coincidence.**

In recent years, there has been a plague of “get rich quick” schemes, particularly with the growth of the Internet, but over the course of my life and career, perhaps the most important thing that I’ve learned is that a person’s success is equal to the work they put in. My 10,000 Hour Rule is a perfect example of dedication and hard work eventually resulting in the highest honor of athletics, Olympic medals. I don’t agree with any of the overnight success plans that suck people into the deceptive mindset that success can be bought or traded for. Anything worth doing is worth fighting for, as I’ve said before, and that means that it is also worth working for. When someone says, “I guess I’m just lucky”, I often wonder about the quality of their success, or the long-term fate of their career.

If I had taken my natural talent and knowledge of sailing into certain competitions around the world, I may have gotten lucky once or twice and performed above expectations. However, to maintain a consistent and reliable level of success, you need to put in the work. Regardless of your natural gifts or inherent talent in business or sports, there is education, training, mental preparation, and even psychological conditioning that must also come into play. Some competitors want the fleeting sense of victory, and the glory that comes along with it, but that will quickly fade. In some respects, you are only as good as your last race, your last idea, or your last business venture. Your work ethic needs to be an important part of your life, something that you think about and focus on for years if you truly want to become a true champion.

In my first race on the Mediterranean side of the Tour de France, when my yacht was the first to reach the Buoy Degagemo, we felt like we were on top of the world. We sailed a great race, and yet we still came in third by the end of it. Some people would say that it was “bad luck” or it was basically a coin toss as to who would win. I don’t believe that winning or losing is ever a coincidence, and I didn’t believe it then either. If we had worked a bit harder, trained more for the Mediterranean conditions, or any of a dozen other things we *could* have done, than we would have won the race. Success does not come to people by chance, at least not consistently. Building a culture and mindset of dedication and focus is vital if you want to maintain a successful career.

We often hear that the top leaders of the business world are some of the hardest working people in the business. The top ranked CEOs in the world are those that constantly engage with their staff, participate in the innovations and

brainstorming sessions, oversee the work ethic of the staff, and make sure that the company is running efficiently and profitably. It is not by chance that today's most successful companies also have the highest employee satisfaction rates, and most involved leaders. That hard work, day in and day out, is what gets the job done, not flashy publicity, fancy cars, and an arrogant attitude.

Being successful in the short term is attractive, and can be distracting; believe me, I had moments in my life where I let the glory go to my head. That being said, the lesson learned from that mindset is that work and training can't slow down, and focus must be maintained. That is the key to long-term success, unwavering dedication to the cause. If a person is truly passionate about their goals, and is willing to sacrifice the superficial parts of fame in exchange for diligent training and a perpetual drive to improve, they will find the success they are looking for, and they won't have to rely on chance or luck to get there.

### **15: Success has a downside, but it can teach you a lot.**

In a similar vein to what I just said about the variable levels of success, you must also learn what success can teach you. I know that I've argued that the majority of lessons and self-improvement come through losing, because it stimulates you to focus on what went wrong and correct it, but there is also much to be gained when you do begin to find success.

In terms of my life, my mid to late twenties were a roller coaster of hard work and success. Following a string of victories including the Tour de France, a championship in France, and another in Belgium, I was on top of the world. At 27, it was hard to put my new life into perspective. Suddenly, everyone wanted to be my friend, my time was being parsed out and divided between publicity appearances, parties, and time spend with a number of beautiful girlfriends in my new Porsche. I was a very different person than I had been only a few years earlier. I thought that I had reached my goal, that of being a respected and well-known sailor in various countries of the world. I began to slack off, focus less on sailing, and generally get swept up in the distractions of success.

Don't get me wrong, being a champ was wonderful, and I have great memories of those times, but eventually, I began to step back and look at my life. For the majority of my life, I had struggled and worked and bled and strained to become a winner, and once I nailed down a few championships, I was acting as though that was the pinnacle of my life. I didn't need to own a Porsche, and I didn't need hordes of "friends" who were always asking for favors and demanding my time. I saw that success has a dark side, and that it can separate you from the goals you care about the most.

My success in those years was one of the greatest teaching tools throughout my life, because it taught me about the downside of winning. Most people associate winning with happiness and losing with sadness, but when you are only part of the way through your journey, winning can be far more detrimental to your chances of becoming a true champion than losing. Losing may be discouraging, but success can be a temptress that permanently moves you off course. Being successful taught me to be more discerning in my friends, once I realized that they wanted their moment to shine next to me, rather than actually be my friend or advisor. It taught me to develop self-control, and better time management between my personal and professional lives. Being successful also taught me the beauty of humility, and the importance of not putting yourself on too high a pedestal when there are still so many more important mountains to climb. People that I genuinely cared about didn't want to burst my bubble of success, so they weren't telling me about the changes they saw in me, but luckily, I picked up on the dangers of success before it was too late.

That same dangerous temptation of success is present in all levels of business. The quick Internet start-up company that brings in millions of dollars is nothing compared to becoming a multi-national, world-changing corporation. Unfortunately, some people are only looking for a shot at some fame, however fleeting it is, and they will eventually fall back into obscurity. Success can be a harsh teacher, and the lessons break many people. True champions need to immerse themselves in the perils of success, learn their own lessons, and come out with a renewed sense of purpose and determination to move even further up the ladder towards ultimate success.

As I've said before, it is important to fail, to fall off the ladder, and then learn something through the experience. Success can teach some surprising lessons that are just as necessary and influential as those gained through failure.

### **16: Use cause and effect analysis to learn more about your greatest achievements, as well as your worst disasters.**

The story of a career is a cumulative narrative of every moment and decision, every win and loss. As you move through life, you should spend time reflecting and contemplating the events that brought you to that point, whether it is the pinnacle of success or the gutter of defeat. It is foolish to simply move through life, allowing things to happen or not happen without considering the causes and effects of each specific situation. That not only makes it impossible to learn from your mistakes, but equally impossible to duplicate the positive things that brought you victory.

For example, during my career, I often stepped away from the hustle and stress of my daily routine of training and coaching to analyze where I stood in terms of my goals. I often took myself away to the mountains in Switzerland for a few days or a week of serious self-reflection, particularly when I was in the midst of a major decision or following a major letdown in my career. This time away from the world I become so involved in allowed me to clear my mind, and reassess whether I was on the right path to achieve my goals. This solitude brings clarity, and an opportunity to be honest with yourself about what you've been doing, both right and wrong.

I often took these small escapes in order to break down the events of my recent months or year. I look at what my motivations were and what my true goals in each and every action or project that I undertook were. When I am following up a positive swing in my life, I look at what I did differently in this situation to find victory. Was I more focused? Did I try a new method of training? Did I receive guidance or advice from someone that turned the tide for me? Similarly, when I have hit a rough patch and want to ensure that I learn from my mistakes and improve for the future, I ask myself different questions. Did I lose focus during my recent months? Was I not taking care of my body? Did all the members of my team understand the goal and were they fully invested?

By looking at all the possible causes and analyzing every detail of the action plan for a specific period of time, or a specific goal, it is far easier to identify where the problem or the success originated from, and either eliminate or duplicate it.

In business, a similar practice can be instituted. Companies often take group retreats, but personal reflection and contemplation is also valuable. Businessmen, and I include myself in that category at this point in my life, can take some time away from the hustle and bustle of work and find a spot that will provide them with a peaceful or relaxing atmosphere. From there, honestly face your issues, concerns, and behaviors in order to better understand the path you're walking at any given time. Things change over the course of our lives; with every new development, it is vital to check in with ourselves, so to speak, and make sure that we are still following our true values, and aiming for our ultimate goals. For business owners and leaders, the values that dictated the initial venture into the business world should remain strong and continue to be the motivating force behind one's actions. However, if contemplation of self-reflection reveals that something has changed in a negative direction, than it is your responsibility to figure out how to make a change before the damage goes on for too long.

Cause and effect analysis may seem like an overly simplistic way to solve potentially complex problems, but it is often the simplest solutions that work. Honest contemplation, patient consideration of past behaviors, and then



proactive behavior to either change or maintain the trajectory is the most basic way to ensure ongoing success, year in and year out.

**17: Find your blind spots, and if you can't see them,  
ask someone who can.**

No matter how well prepared or self-aware we think we are, there are certain things that we are unable to see about ourselves. Some of this “blindness” may come from pure stubbornness, but most of it arises because our naturally learned behaviors become unconscious, and over time, they become a part of our personality. It is difficult to access our unconscious behavior, let alone change it, so everyone, no matter how self-reliant they usually are, must at some point rely on the wisdom and vision of someone else to help them along the way.

One of the most frustrating and damaging things that a person can develop is a blind spot, some part of their personality or behavioral pattern that is destructive or detrimental that they are simply unable or unwilling to see and correct. If there is some recurring issue or point of failure that seems unfixable in our lives, then we must turn to someone else for guidance. For athletes, this often comes in the form of a coach, but a trusted friend, a partner, or a family member can also do this for us. By taking an outside look at our behavior and actions, they can pinpoint the weakness and help us to work through that unconscious behavior that is bringing us down. A coach's main responsibility is to increase an athlete's conscious control of his emotions and actions. For example, if our conscious behavior is only 5% while our unconscious or learned behavior is somewhere near 95%, then a coach should work to increase that 5% to 8 or 10%, giving us a more concentrated ability to choose our reactions and shape our fate. Blind spots are part of our unconscious behavior, and can be eliminated through diligent practice and a self-awareness that they exist in the first place.

Again, this analysis is best done in some sort of remote location, away from the normal places that trigger unconscious behavior. By leaving our comfort zone, we become vulnerable, uncomfortable, and malleable. We face new challenges and put ourselves in situations where we are highly alert and focused. It is at this point of heightened concentration that we can work to master our emotions, actions, and behavioral patterns. A coach can be there to help us understand why we do the things we do, and also to help us eliminate harmful habits and tendencies. If a person's natural reaction following a difficult situation is to retreat back and protect themselves in order to recover, rather than forging ahead, that natural defense mechanism will keep them from learning from the challenge. That unconscious choice to become reticent or cautious could be a major issue in their life, whether in the realms of sports or business. True champions must be willing to face a challenge and then move forward, whether they overcome it or

not. A coach or some other person can help encourage a change in that behavior, by making them aware of their natural response to difficulty and try to make a person change it.

When a person has found some modicum of success, it becomes even more difficult to change their fundamental instincts, because in theory, they have all worked in the past. However, it is important not to become stuck in a certain pattern of habits, because no one is perfect, and there is always room for improvement. To continue moving forward toward your goals, you must allow yourself to be flexible and listen to the wisdom of others who may be able to see things about your actions that you are simply oblivious to. I can't stress this enough, there is nothing wrong with asking for help; it doesn't make you less successful, in fact, it makes you a smarter competitor in any area of life, because you are not too proud to admit that you have room to grow and develop as a person, and a champion.

### **18: Use the 4-step process of change to guarantee your success.**

The natural question following the previous piece of advice is how to enact change? It is one thing to recognize the need for a shift in behavior, but quite another to efficiently begin the process, and maintain it over the long term. Unconscious or instinctual behavior can be buried quite deep in our persona, and it takes a concerted and determined effort to effectively alter our fundamental makeup. There is a simple, 4-step process for change that will make you successful over the long term, not just a quick fix to a problem that you will just as quickly revert back to its original form.

First, you must make change an active part of your "to-do list". Promoting an active change in your life is not an event; it is a routine and a process that must be continuous and consistent. It is not enough to simply wake up and decide to drastically alter a part of your unconscious behavior. You need to incorporate a proactive regimen to change your behavior on a daily basis. Once you are made aware of what changes need to occur for you to succeed, then you need to consciously focus on those issues on a regular basis.

Secondly, you need to regularly assess if you are making progress in your effort to change your behavior. You need to be self-aware enough to determine if you are being resistant to the change, or if you are noticing an improvement. Again, you may need an outside source of guidance for that, perhaps the person who recommended the change in the first place could be a good marker of your progress. Stay in regular contact with your coach or trusted friend so they can give you honest feedback about whether you are noticeably changing.

The third step is to be diligent and urgent in your process of change. There is no excuse for laziness if you are legitimately trying to become a champion. The quicker you can manifest a definite change in your attitude, approach, behavior, or actions, the faster you will begin to see the positive results from making that change. A lackadaisical approach to altering your behavior should be taken as a sign that you aren't ready for further challenges, and you should take a serious look at your ultimate goals, and consider some serious contemplation of your path.

Finally, you need to create a network of people who can enable change in your life. Having a coach is a great starting point, but allowing other people in your life to bolster that network of analytical and selflessly helpful people will keep you on the right track, and make sure that your blind spots don't come back. It is easy to slip into old habits once you are out on your own again, so be sure to surround yourself with teammates, friends, and trainers who understand you, and know the sort of support and motivation you occasionally need to continue being as successful as possible.

Recognizing the need for change is only the first step, even though it is extremely important. Actively pursuing that change in multiple ways that will endure through the changing landscape of your career in sports or in business is the other half of the equation, without which you will always know your weaknesses, but will be unable to permanently eliminate them. Without understanding exactly how to change your ways, and keep them changed, you are creating that quick fix without a real solution, and in the end, your chances at success will still suffer, and your status as a true champion will always be in jeopardy.

### **19: Good communication is key, and it consists of respect, openness, and trust.**

Champions too often think that their progress is limited to their individual efforts, but in fact, most success is due to the cumulative efforts of multiple people. In order to successfully build a functional team that has a concerted drive towards a common goal, there are a few important elements that must be considered. Respect, openness, and trust are integral to creating a strong support structure that will help you along on the path to your goal, whether it is professional or athletic. There were many times in my career when I shouldered all the responsibility, and didn't trust anyone else to play a part in my success or failure, but as I grew and moved forward, I realized the error in my ways.

I worked as a solo sailor as well as a team sailor in various points throughout my life, and having to switch back and forth was difficult. When you are alone on the water, it is a very isolating experience, and everything must be accounted for.

Every action, or lack thereof, will have a definite result that you are in complete control of, but when you switch to collaborative efforts, it is vital that you relinquish some of those controlling instincts and allow other trusted members of your staff or team to take some responsibilities. Before you can genuinely delegate any tasks or projects to others, you must first respect them, and they must respect you. You need to clearly communicate your vision for a certain project or undertaking, and then listen and discuss possible issues or concerns with the involved parties. Their experience will have to come into play, as well as their opinions on how it should get done. Whether or not you agree with them, or eventually compromise, it is necessary to listen respectfully and allow them to share their thoughts. Being a dictator isn't a good way to run a company or a crew, and if members of your team don't believe that you respect them, they will become disinterested in your larger goals, and begin following their own ambitions and plans. Being a team means following a united path towards a singular goal, and there must be mutual respect between all the people involved for it to run smoothly.

The second element is openness, which was another struggling point for me in my younger years. After bad experiences with various crews who had underlying motives for joining my team, and even some people who wanted to displace me as captain of the craft, like during my second campaign for the Tour de France of sailing, I had become somewhat suspicious. I saw the lack of openness in others, and it began to impact my way of handling my crewmembers, and taking advice from them. It is impossible to succeed all on your own, particularly when you have a dozen crewmembers responsible for sailing the craft next to you. An open and honest culture of information and goal-setting needs to be established early, and reinforced with meetings, brainstorming sessions, and collaboration, rather than a strict hierarchy where some people get left in the dark. This applies to business as much as it does to sports. When people don't know why they are doing something, or what the end goal is, they are less likely to fully invest their time and energy into a project. Open lines of communication and mutual respect are key to running a successful business and making sure that everyone understands the process they are participating in.

Finally, there must be trust. This is related to the previous points about respect and openness, but it might be the hardest thing to master. When you spend your entire life dreaming about a specific achievement, it is hard to relinquish any part of it to someone else who might make a mistake or screw it up. You need to make sure that you surround yourself with good people who you can trust with any part of your project or campaign. Weeding out people through a difficult testing regiment or an intense training program is a great way to narrow the field to only the most dedicated and trustworthy people. There will be many people who say they want to help, or are eager to join you on your journey, but you must first be sure that they are telling you the truth. However, once you have

established that they are honest, hardworking, goal-oriented individuals, you must trust them, or else you will constantly be checking over their shoulders and babying them. People want to be trusted, and they want to create good work as a supporting member of a greater cause. They don't want to feel like you don't trust them to be productive or sincere, and if they do, it will undermine the openness and respect that you have worked to establish.

Communication is the key to all collaborative efforts, and if people feel included, trusted, and informed, they will work very hard for you, and their output will be of the highest possible quality. Just be sure that you enlist the right people to work with, whether they are managers, employees, or partners. When you get the "right" people, then open up and let them share fully in your dreams; they will help you achieve everything you desire.

## **20: Resistance is good; it means you are on the way to new possibilities. Without resistance, there can be no change.**

As funny as it sounds, "smooth sailing" has very little to do with becoming a good sailor. Obviously, that is a pleasant part of any career, when things seem to be going very well and minor obstacles are overcome without a second thought, but that is the beginning of complacency and the rise of ego. As I have mentioned before, the times when everything seemed to be going my way were the points in my career where I learned the slowest, and pushed myself the least.

Encountering resistance in your plans should not be seen as a sign that you are doing something wrong; rather, it means that you are challenging yourself and pushing into new territory.

There are plenty of competitors, both in business and in athletics, who are content with being average, or moderately successful. They coast along somewhere near the middle, never becoming a superstar, but never failing either. Basically, once they reached a comfortable level where they no longer had to push themselves into new challenges, they stopped. They no longer have the motivating force of failure to push them to new heights, and they will always remain average. Stasis is not in the vocabulary of a true champion, and the evolution as a competitor must involve resistance, failure, and subsequent growth as a response.

I often speak about my involvement with Olympic campaigns, and there is a curious phenomenon that some people don't understand about competing at that elite level. Each campaign is structured completely different, like an ongoing experiment to find new styles or approaches. Even if a campaign is very successful, the next one will be designed in a slightly different way and the entire process is tweaked or even completely overhauled. Sometimes the changes are

good, and sometimes they are less successful, but the important thing is the change itself. There are an infinite number of techniques for finding success; I have established mine over the course of many years at sea as a competitor, but I still change my tactics when I think it is warranted. No matter how consistently successful you become, there is always room for growth. I became complacent at certain times in my career, applying similar action plans to vastly different campaigns and teams, and that laziness caught up with me. Every project needs a customized approach, and every person needs a different method of handling. The resistance or struggle that is felt when a new challenge is being undertaken is a good sign, and being flexible in your approach to management means that you will be able to adapt and overcome any type of difficulty. Being stagnant or stubborn will eventually lead to failure, even if it seems easier or more comfortable.

I train people to become true champions, and one of the fundamental lessons is to never stop improving and challenging yourself. It won't be an easy life, but it will certainly be more rewarding than simply floating somewhere near the middle, never being challenged, never knowing hardship, and never growing into something truly great. A business leader that wants to become a titan of industry, or a dominant force in their market, must follow a similar path. They must constantly innovate, dream big, and motivate their employees to seek out resistance, in order to overcome it and become even stronger and more prepared for the greater challenges that lie ahead.

**21: Losing yourself is encouraged, so allow it to happen.  
You will find a new path with new possibilities.**

No matter how perfectly structured your action plan may be, how dedicated you are to your training, or how well coached you are, there is a chance that you will fall on very hard times. Nothing is promised in life, and as they say, *"the best laid plans of mice and men oft go astray"*. At these darkest points in life, it is normal to feel helpless, as though everything you've worked for has been a waste, and that life itself is working against your happiness. Remember that all great champions face tremendous hardships, but they must rise above their difficulties, and find a fresh path. When you lose yourself, it is the first step to finding something new.

When I was at the very lowest point in my career, I was broke, single, mentally exhausted, and emotionally discouraged. I felt as though everything my life had been building to had suddenly been yanked out of my sight, and I was left with nothing. In short, I was lost. At the time, I even debated whether to take my own life. In that deepest pit of depression, I had no direction and no goals to seek out. I was left alone with myself. As scary as that was, it gave me the opportunity to

build a new path for myself, free of the expectations and crushing responsibilities that I had been placing on my shoulders. I decided to educate myself, and to enjoy the little things in life away from the stress of my sailing career. Through my studies, I found a new passion, teaching others about life, sailing, and the path to being a champion. I had my moment in the sun, so to speak, and after losing everything, I found a previously unknown part of myself. It is hard to suggest intentionally losing all that you hold dear, but if that should happen, the potential for the rest of your life do open up in a way you never thought possible.

There are many different roads to walk in life, and it is only by chance that we choose one at the beginning. Some of that choice has to do with our talents, family, education, and early passion, but it does not mean that there is only one correct direction for our lives. If you happen to fall on hard times, or you experience a massive failure in your career that threatens your livelihood or your life itself, don't give up hope. The clarity of losing everything is something indescribable. For only the second time in my life, I had a completely clear vision of the future, and I saw that it was limitless.

There are true champions in every industry and way of life, and the underlying personality of someone that is willing to sacrifice, work, and overcome obstacles is applicable to countless different journeys. Think of all the businesses that have gone bankrupt, only to have that same innovative leader push forward into a new direction and find even more overwhelming success. There will always be a transitional time, when your uncertainty and self-doubt will take control; that is a natural reaction to catastrophic circumstances. Be patient, and let yourself enjoy life for a while. Allow all that you have learned and lost guide you towards a new goal, just as it did for me. There is no right or wrong path for truly passionate people, the important thing is to continue moving forward, trying new things, growing, and finding success any way that they can.

**22: Communication can be confusing, so read  
between the lines  
of what is said and not said.**

Being an honest and open person is a great quality to have as a leader and a businessman, but there are many people in the world who don't share those qualities. Although trust and openness is imperative towards your teammates, friends, and partners, it is wise to have some amount of wariness and suspicion when strangers come into your life, particularly after you have found some success. New business partners, like the board of directors at the Olympic Federation in Holland where I worked as the Technical Director, may say one thing and mean another. Certain people will want to use your talents and

resources for their own gains, and in the confusing mess of negotiation and hierarchy, it is possible to be taken advantage of.

You need to work on your skill at reading people, and understanding more of what their true intentions are. It is not good to go through life perpetually suspicious, because trust is necessary to form strong relationships, but protecting yourself from those who don't have your best interests in mind is important. I recently began studying the fascinating science of energetic psychology, which has greatly improved my ability to read and understand people through their behaviors and energy. I am currently finishing my 4-year course of study in this area of knowledge, and it is something I am sharing with those people I work with and train. It can help you read between the lines of what people say and what they really intend, which is so important as you build networks of people that you need to rely on.

When you are very successful, everyone will want to be your friend. They will ask you to attend publicity events, come with them to parties, appear on media outlets, and a host of other things. Some of those new friends will genuinely want to be a part of your life, and others will only use your time in the limelight to leech your time, energy, money, and talent in various ways, even if they are not doing it consciously. That may sound cynical, but in my experience, I had far more "friends" coming out of the woodwork when I was successful than when I was struggling to achieve my smaller, personal goals. There is a power to fame, and you must be able to quickly decide who is on your side, and who just wants a piece of the pie.

People often make promises and say things in order to get what they want, with little concern for you, so you need to be aware of these deceptions before they can damage your career or your reputation. This is also a valuable application to your personal life. When ultra-focused people are faced with personal issues, they often make them secondary to their professional concerns, and they cease to communicate effectively with their family members or spouses. It is possible to achieve a healthy balance in your life between your passion and your personal life, but open lines of clear communication are necessary.

In business, this ability to understand subtext and underlying intentions is almost more important than it is in athletics. Starting a business, or maintaining a successful one, takes energy, money, and manpower. There will be plenty of people who seek to take advantage of your position, prestige, wealth, or talent, under the guise of helping you towards your goals. Be discerning in whom you take on as partners or employees, and build a culture of trust around a unified and clearly understood goal through consistently clear communication.



### **23: Be a Samurai and a servant to others; sharing is the ultimate goal.**

The desire to be a champion can be all consuming, but don't forget about all the people who helped you achieve your goals along the way. It can be easy to view your personal journey towards success as an individual effort, but there were surely surprising and charitable acts from others that were indispensable to your eventual victories. When you are in the throes of a personal mission, it is difficult to avoid being selfish, but balancing selfishness with selflessness is the sign of a true champion.

In my experiences, there were many beneficial people and acts that I may not have appreciated at the time. The knowledge I gained from my father in the art of sailing, the camaraderie and teamwork that I mastered with my brothers and friends on the sea, and the advice that I acquired from friends and colleagues were all vital parts of my developments into the man I am today. In the moment, without the proper distance and perspective, I didn't realize how important those contributions were. As I got older, and reflected on my life and achievements, I saw the irreplaceable value that those lessons had, and I chose to pass that along to others. The "pay it forward" system is a profoundly important and rewarding way to love your life, and I firmly believe that what you give away to others will always come back to you in some way.

I often say that you must be a samurai, who, in ancient Japanese history, were servants of the people, selfless protectors who shared their wisdom and strength to benefit the greater good. I have tried to shift my focus away from my personal achievements and now dedicate most of my time towards helping others accomplish their own goals. Being a servant to others is a way to live on in the actions of people outside yourself, and in that way, you can be an active member in a culture of charity and selfless giving. Looking out for yourself might be a useful way to promote your own success, but it isn't right to dismiss the impact that others had. When I considered the other forces that led me to my long dreamed of success, I knew that I had to give back in some way.

By creating a program and a training regimen that guides others to their dreams is my way of living vicariously through them. I didn't have a strong support system like a coach or a consistent set of advisors during my numerous campaigns in sailing, and I want to provide that for others who may think as I did, that the journey must be taken alone. My hardheaded determination to tackle my issues and problems alone is one of my biggest regrets, and something I want to discourage in other promising young individuals. Although the glory of victory can be something that ultimately is shared alone, the humility it takes to ask for help is a necessary component of a champion's personality. Over the course of my career, I gave a lot of advice and wisdom to my various crews and teammates,

but I was foolish for not seeking out professional guidance throughout my career. I saw it as a weakness, something that “wasn’t for me”, but if I had willingly participated in the idea of sharing and collaboration, I could have reached a level of success that was more impressive, and I probably could have reached it even sooner.

Being a servant to others is valuable in all aspects of life, business included. Helping your staff and employees when they are struggling will eventually come back as a benefit for you when they become more productive and your company grows. Knowledge is not something finite that is lost once it is shared; knowledge is a cumulative network that can grow and expand so everyone can benefit from the fruits of your experience. Making someone else successful should not be seen as a threat to yourself, and the feeling you get when you positively benefit someone else’s life is one of the most satisfying feelings you can have. That generosity, humility, and benevolence is yet another sign of a true champion, albeit one that is often overlooked.

## **24: Never blame someone else for your mistakes; be mature enough to accept responsibility for your actions.**

As I have said time and time again, mistakes are bound to happen on your journey to success; this does not make you a failure, and should not encourage you to give up. However, mistakes are also not an opportunity to blame someone else. Finger pointing and blame passing are immature approaches to difficulty, and should be avoided at all costs. There is nothing more detrimental to team morale or friendship than refusing to accept responsibility for one’s actions. If you want to be a leader and a champion, it comes with a certain amount of responsibility and accountability that cannot be turned on and off. Many people want to accept all the glory for a victor, but none of the fault when things do not turn out as they’d hoped. A strong leader understands that mistakes occur, and in order to keep their team united and functional, they must shoulder that burden as the ultimate source of the error.

There were a number of times throughout my many campaigns that errors in judgment were made by my people on my crew, and although there were lessons that had to be taught to those specific people, it wouldn’t have been right for me to single them out as the cause of failure. As a captain, either of a ship or of a company, you must look inward when failure occurs, because you are the person responsible for training those that work for you. You are the person driving the team towards a specific goal, and if they weren’t motivated properly or trained well enough, then the responsibility for that lack of preparedness is yours.

Also, when you point a finger at someone, you will soon find two more pointing back at you. No one wants to be singled out as the cause of failure, particularly if it is not completely true, and they will respond in an equally unfair way. That sort of dissension or division in the team or group that you worked so hard to put together is not worth the temporary blow to your pride that admitting to a mistake will cause. Trust and respect are so important when working with other people, and throwing blame and dodging responsibility is a surefire way to destroy the strong bonds of teamwork that great leaders attempt to forge.

In another sense, throwing blame onto someone else means that they are the ones who need to learn a lesson, and as I've explained countless times, hardships can be an amazing source of strength. Admitting both to others and to yourself that you were at fault is the first step in correcting that fault and improving as a leader and competitor. Why would you want to put that beneficial burden onto someone else, robbing yourself of the opportunity to grow? Those challenges will only come back to find you later in life, perhaps at an even less opportune moment if you don't try to fix that mistake the first time. Being a great leader means being a mature human being, and realizing that we are not perfect. Your teammates will respect you for being fallible; they don't expect you to be a god. The respect that you will gain from openly admitting to being at fault will be far greater than the respect you will lose by initially making the mistake, but it won't be as great as the respect you'll lose if you begin pointing fingers and displacing blame.

Throughout history, business leaders who relate to normal people through similar faults and problems are the ones who are most attractive to the common man. They represent a greater version of themselves, not perfect, but doing their best to find the maximum level of success and happiness possible. Occasionally making a mistake makes you admirable, and being modest and honest enough to admit it makes you inspiring. Don't worry about seeking perfection in every single situation; dropping the ball may be frustrating and embarrassing, but admitting that it was your fault and picking the ball back up will lead to stronger team morale, increased confidence in your ability as a resilient leader, and a heightened sense of self-confidence and trust in your other teammates for understanding your humanity.

## **25: Fear is good. Facing yours fear is even better.**

Part of being an adult, a leader, and a champion, is the ability to face your fears and come out stronger for the effort on the other side. It is a common misconception, particularly when we are young, that being afraid is a sign of weakness. In fact, being afraid is a sign of intelligence, caution, and common

sense. I am not referring to being afraid of the dark, or of heights, although those are legitimate fears for some people. I am talking about the fear of losing your life, losing sight of who you are, or fear of hurting the people you care about. The road to ultimate success is not an easy one, and there are many obstacles that must be overcome. Some of them will definitely be frightening, and some will be dangerous, but that does not make it less important to move through those fears and emerge more mature, prepared, and determined.

Those who claim to be fearless are dangerously delusional, because every person in the world could find himself or herself in a situation that genuinely strikes fear in them. Facing a 20-foot wall of water crashing down on your 20-foot yacht in the middle of the Pacific Ocean after months of sailing, mere hours of sleep in the past week, and no one else on board to save you would chill anyone to the bone. When people think of my career, they correctly assume that some of the scariest moments were on the water. The ocean is merciless, and as a sailor, you must respect the awesome power and complete ambivalence that the ocean has to your life. Sailing can be a glorious experience, but it can also be deadly. I have lost good friends at sea, even in the same race that I had been participating in. When I see a huge storm building on the horizon, there is always a note of caution mixed in with my excited anticipation of some truly challenging sailing. I was raised on sailing the roughest waters my father could find, so bad weather isn't something I run from, but I am still careful. If you pretend to not be afraid, or actively seek out dangerous situations as a way to prove your bravery, you will likely be killed. Just as there is nothing wrong with admitting you've made a mistake, there is nothing wrong with being afraid either. You just can't let that fear control your actions.

You must respect the fear; allow it to add caution and wisdom to your actions, without crippling you. When I was crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a two-man World Record attempt, my sailing partner Gerard almost died in the middle of the campaign. We had had numerous mishaps onboard, our bodies were falling apart, and Gerard was in serious need of medical attention. At one point, he asked me to let him die so I could finish the crossing without worrying about him. In that situation, I was very afraid, but I refused to let that fear overwhelm me and claim my friend's life and my chances of breaking the world record all at once. I assessed the situation, put my fear, anxiety, and worry into a corner of my mind and refused to let it out. I acted on instinct, doing what I had to do both to save his life, and then to break the world record, which we did.

Fear can be an ally, motivating you and keeping your nerves sharp, your attention piqued, and your energy flowing. If you see it as an enemy, you will spend more time battling it back than in overcoming the obstacles that made you afraid in the first place. In business, there will be plenty of intimidating decisions and moments in your quest for success, but is there any point in succumbing to

fear and letting it crush you? Absolutely not. You need to trust in your experience, your knowledge, and your determination to achieve your goal. The fear will make you careful, and heighten your senses, but it shouldn't overwhelm you. Once you face those fears directly, and wrestle them away into the corner of your mind and achieve the goal which you had previously thought was too frightening, you will be stronger, both in mind and spirit, and that fear will diminish and be forgotten. Fear isn't real, but our response to it is. True champions understand the role that fear can play both in helping and harming us on our journeys.

## **26: There are no limits to what you can achieve, only those you set for yourself.**

When you embark on a journey to achieve a certain goal, you should never think of it as a final destination. One thing leads into another, and each subsequent goal should be higher and more difficult. The most challenging goals you set for yourself may seem impossible when you first begin, like my dream of sailing in the Admirals' Cup that I had the first time I sailed into Kavos as a boy. A handful of years later, I had worked my way up in the world of sailing and there I was, competing in a regatta that I had only dreamed of. Goals are accomplished by small steps that accumulate into the realization of that dream. That was the first time that I understood that there were no such things as limits; only self-imposed barriers that we construct due to our limited view of our own reality.

Each time I set a new long-term goal, I had the confidence that if I followed my action plan and worked hard, I would eventually achieve it. There were very few goals in my life that I did not eventually achieve, and those that I failed to reach were missed because of outside forces that I could have never predicted, not because they were "impossible". By giving into fear, popular opinion, or the advice and warnings of those around you, it is easy to talk yourself out of grand dreams. If I had listened to all the people in my life that told me sailing was a foolish endeavor that I could never succeed at, I would have probably spent my life safely as a DJ or a career military man, and perhaps I would have married one of my girlfriends, and my life would be completely different than how it ended up being. There are an infinite number of paths that our lives can take, and, within reason, none of them are impossible to walk down.

One of the best times to overcome the fear of the impossible is when we are at our lowest. When you fail and falter, it gives you the opportunity to reassess the direction of your life, eliminating all the pressures and responsibilities that you previously held onto. When you search inside yourself for the fundamental values that define you as an individual, you can redirect your passion towards any improbable goal. If someone else in the world has achieved it, why shouldn't you be able to? Many sailors consider the Vendee Globe "round the world race" as an

impossible race to participate in, perhaps because they don't have the money, dedication, or talent for it. When I was a young man, it probably was impossible, but by setting it as a long-term goal, and then achieving the small baby steps that were necessary to reach that competitive level, I was suddenly able to race. I had funding, for a time, a boat with which to sail, the talent to achieve the massively difficult task, and the mental fortitude to sail for months at a time without any help from the outside world. If it hadn't been for the actions of others, I would have sailed in the race, and I might have even won. Thousands of professional sailors had dreamed of participating but dismissed it as impossible, and they will never be true champions.

When I fell from grace, so to speak, and was in that dark part of my life without money, possessions, or direction in life, I looked inward, reminded myself of all the abilities that I still had, and moved forward from that platform of confidence towards a new goal. When you find that clarity of vision, you can see new horizons that had previously been invisible, and by setting realistic goals that gradually increase in difficulty over time, you can build yourself into whatever form you want. We are our greatest enemy when it comes to limitations for our lives. If we work hard enough, make the proper sacrifices, and remain focused on achieving what others deem "impossible", we can transcend the limitations that the rest of the world has made for us and accomplish truly great things.

The only times when things should be deemed impossible is when we are not mentally prepared to make the necessary changes in our life, or are too stubborn to eliminate bad habits or destructive tendencies of our own actions. These limitations come from within, and with the help of a good coach, a person can overcome those issues and rise above the normal stopping points or limitations on the road of life. With the right mindset, dedication, and training, there is nothing that can't be achieved.

### **27: Your mind will lie to you, but your body will always tell the truth.**

Our minds are extremely powerful machines, but they can be tricked just as easily as they can trick us. Determined and passionate people can have such mental strength that they shut out the warning signs from the mind, or justify them away as something else. Our ability to convince ourselves of something false is a form of self-deception, which happens in all aspects of life. Self-image problems are a form of self-deception. Depression, psychosis, psychosomatic diseases, and a laundry list of other conditions and states of being are the result of people tricking their mind or their mind tricking them, but at the end of the day, our minds are not to be trusted.

Our bodies are a completely different story. The physical manifestations of stress and wear are unavoidable, because they register as pain and discomfort that, at a certain point, cannot be ignored. Challenging yourself over and over to reach greater heights shapes your mind to be hardened and determined, so much so that you can fool your mind into thinking that you are prepared, healthy, or excited to begin a new journey. If your body agrees with that diagnosis and you feel functional, strong, healthy, and injury-free, then move forward confidently in your new mission. But if your body and mind are sending you different signals, it is your body you should trust.

For example, when I was preparing for the Vendee Globe race, I was dedicating the vast majority of my time and energy into training and readying myself and my ship for the extreme challenge that lay ahead of me. Despite the peripheral issues of financial funding, politics, and investor pressure, I was gearing my mind for the exciting opportunity that I had dreamed of. Even the Queen of Holland came onboard my yacht to chat with me about the difficult task that I was undertaking. Suffice to say, there was a huge amount of pressure on me to perform and make my country proud. I was literally trying to cap off my career with an achievement so rare and tremendous that I would put myself into the history books. That sort of mental pressure can be overwhelming, but I had become so good at controlling my mind and eliminating fear and anxiety that I moved forward, fully prepared to race.

My body wasn't as easily fooled as my mind, however, and eventually, it became obvious that I wasn't physically capable of completing the task. My back and knees, which had irritated me over those recent years, began reacting to the huge exertion I was putting on them during my training. My belly was acting up, and basically, my body as a whole was breaking down. I had been going too hard for too long, and all the strain was finally catching up to me. After a huge amount of debate, which I did while in one of my traditional soul-searching retreats in the mountains of Switzerland, I came to the realization that I couldn't go through with my plan to sail in the Vendee Globe.

To be perfectly honest, I could have died. If I had ignored the signs from my body and pushed onward with my quest to participate in the Vendee Globe, I probably would have continued pushing myself too hard and ended up seriously harming myself, making a single mistake in the middle of the ocean that would have cost me my life. I was mentally distraught following that decision, because my mind was still trying to convince me to continue, but my body was right. I had stretched myself too thin and not taken care of my health well enough to participate. As I said, the mind will lie, but the body will tell the truth.

In the high stress world of business, the responsibilities and challenges of being successful can take a very high toll on your body, but your mind will continue to

push you forward, encouraging you to work a little longer, strain a bit further, and challenge yourself for that new client, that new accomplishment, or that promotion you've been seeking. If your mind and your body agree that the extra effort is safe, and that you can do it without hurting yourself, then continue! But you must pay attention to both your mind *and* body. Together, they are the tools that allow us to live and function, and nothing is worth sacrificing your life or your health, not even becoming a champion. True champions understand that, and they listen to the truth coming out of their body, and live to fight another day.

## **28: The bigger the why, the easier the how.**

At first glance, that statement may seem confusing, and even backwards. Common sense says that a bigger "why" would mean a more challenging or rewarding endeavor, which would subsequently require more effort and struggle to achieve, not an easier "how". That rationale makes sense, unless you are considering the personality of a true champion. Someone that continually pushes themselves towards greater accomplishments is stimulated by new challenges; daring themselves to do something impossible is like an addiction. If something seems impossible, bring it on! Someone that is genuinely interested in becoming the best in their respective field or sport will be eager to engage in new challenges, and put far more energy and attention into it than in some banal, repetitive level of competition that they have already mastered.

Since true champions are not afraid to fail, undertaking grand ambitions is not something that they see as a chore, but rather as a pleasure. The new pressures they will face, and difficulties they will overcome are like gifts, because they see growth and personal advancement as an inevitable result. They will consciously and unconsciously pour more attention and energy into the project, adding techniques and mental strengths they didn't even know they possessed into accomplishing the new task. With that much potential for success working towards a seemingly huge "why", the "how" manifests naturally, and the chances of success increase exponentially.

Those that are secretly afraid of failure will see a looming challenge and cower in fear, doubting their abilities and fearing the embarrassment or shame that will accompany defeat. They would much rather stay at a safe level where they know they can win, keeping their reputation and confidence secure by never pushing their limits. The world is full of individuals like this, and they aren't bad people; they are simply not destined for greatness. The man who tries to climb Mount Everest and fails will be respected far more than the man who successfully climbs the same smaller mountain every year. By never pushing things into the next level, there is no potential for growth and no personal examination of your abilities. Not to repeat a phrase more than once, but as Einstein said, "*Insanity*:



*Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". If you always remain at the same level, and never learn what new tools your body and mind are capable of discovering, than why would you ever advance or expect a different result?*

Being a true champion means embracing the possibility of failure, but not allowing that possibility to discourage you from trying new things. So, in short, dream big, fail big, and never stop moving forward.

## **29: If you don't decide your path, someone else will.**

One of the things that many people overlook when journeying through their life in pursuit of their goals is the need to continually check their path and make sure they are still headed in their original or desired direction. It is easy to stray off course, and life can be very distracting, particularly when family, personal life, fame, injury, or temptation begins to divert attention from your dreams. The path you set for yourself at the beginning of your career is perhaps the most important, because from that original intention, all your other impulses and actions will stem.

When I was beginning my long road to where I am today, there were plenty of other people who wanted to push me in one direction or another, but it is important to honestly look in your own heart, and decide what is important to you, not to those around you. This can be difficult, because people naturally want to please their parents and have their friends be proud of them, but although their intentions might be honorable, they are not in ultimate control of your life, and they won't have to live with the consequences of the actions which they are urging you towards. If you don't decide your own path with firm and decisive steps, than someone else will do it for you. You may not even realize that the gentle nudges toward a certain university, hobby, or extracurricular activities are a subtle means of controlling what you do, but they are. We are cumulative beings, and it is never too early to begin building the small inroads to various larger paths.

Once you begin your journey as a young person, you must be constantly aware of yourself and of how you may be diverging from your original ideas. Influences are everywhere, and they only increase as you get older, and become more attractive and tempting. Giving in to various activities might hold you back, mentally and temporally, from achieving your dreams. If you manage to stay on track into your adulthood, the problem becomes exacerbated by the wide range of adult decisions you are now able to make without permission or oversight. When I became successful in my 20's, there were dozens of people who wanted to shape my path for me, and they tried to convince me with promises of fame and fun that sounded very good to my 20-something ears, but if I had lost my

way, I might have never found my way back to the correct path. Continuing on in my career, the pressures became even greater, because the temptations were within my own industry, working for this campaign, or that prestigious race. I could have easily allowed myself to be swayed into the decisions that other people were making for me, because the results would have been fun, and I would have increased my abilities in some small way, as well as my prestige in the sailing world. No matter how attractive the path that someone else urges you onto, you need to clear it with your own conscience, and make sure that it fits in with your true values and your ultimate vision for your life.

Stepping away to solitude, as I often do and always suggest, is the best way to redefine your direction, and make sure that you are not being tugged and pushed into things that are not actually beneficial to you. There is nothing wrong with contemplation, and putting major decisions on hold. This is your life, and you only get one shot to do it right. If anyone ever says that they need an answer “right now”, they probably don’t want you to take the time to think over all the pros and cons. Avoid people and choices like that, because they are aiming to steal your individuality and rob you of control of your most precious asset, your self-determination.

Being mature enough to say no, and confidently step forward on your own road to success is something that all true champions must do at some point. For all the work you put into building a business, or running a sailing campaign, is it really worth it to put it into someone else’s hands and trust them to have your best intentions at heart? A true champion is too smart to be fooled into that sort of deceptive trap, and will always recognize their path stretching into the distance. It will be far more satisfying to walk your own road, rather than the one that someone else wants you to walk for their eventual gain. So choose your directions carefully, and as your life moves forward, take the time to check yourself, and be sure that you’re still confidently walking the path of your own design.

### **30: Is it worth fulfilling 100 goals if you hold back on 1 great dream?**

When you become consistently successful, it can feel like you are on top of the world, as though you could achieve anything. You get into a groove, when everything begins falling into place and the victories come so naturally that they almost seem effortless. This is when many people begin piling more and more responsibilities on themselves because nothing seems impossible and time management seems simple. Loading on more challenges, projects, and work doesn’t strike a person as a bad idea, because they are confident that they’ll knock it out of the park. Once they continue on this streak of confident winning,

maybe one or two things will fall through the cracks, but the sheer volume of successful “gold stars” makes them forget about the things they might be missing out on. Unfortunately, seeking quantity over quality is a common symptom during times like these, and that is something that can lead to apathy and complacency. Ultimately, it can become a rut of comfort and laziness that distracts a person from their ultimate goals.

Quantity and quality are two elements that are oddly juxtaposed for a champion. On one hand, a long list of accomplishments is flattering, and shows versatility and endurance. On the other hand, a more select group of prestigious achievements represents focus and a selective mind that only wants to compete against the best in the world. It is not the easiest balance to strike, and at various times in my career, I have fluctuated between the two types of success. When I was younger, my singular focus simply wanted to become a professional sailor, and once I did, I tended to focus on a single campaign at a time. Once I became successful, I expanded my gaze and began taking on four or five campaigns in a single year. At this point in my career, however, I began to see the negative side of quantity. Not only did it wear my body down to leap from one project to another, sometimes with only days in between, but I was much more willing to take on smaller, easier projects to boost my numbers. To some degree, I was avoiding the campaigns and challenges that would have taken a large amount of my time, or had a higher chance that I would fail. Some of the things I passed up on were elite opportunities to race in famous regattas against the highest echelon of competitors. I often ask myself if I would have rather had 5 victories in average level competitions, or one victory against other champions. In hindsight, I always regret choosing quantity over quality, at least for that period of years.

As I continued to mature, I moved back to having a singular focus, and making sure that everything I did was at the highest level, and I tried not to spread myself too thin and take on too much. That way, I didn't have to worry about not being able to properly compete in the more important or prestigious campaigns that I was interested in. This goes back to the idea of not challenging oneself enough, and never taking risks for fear of failing. Racking up wins against competitors you've already beaten is not impressive; the victories are empty. The unwillingness to move forward into a more selective and exclusive stratum of challenges shows the fear and self-doubt of an immature or amateurish competitor. A true champion doesn't care about having a hundred trophies on the wall or having only one, so long as they each represent some important step in his progress to the top. A dream is far more sacred than a goal, and to sacrifice a dream in order to get a few more headlines or rounds of applause is not what being a champion is all about.

Questions of quality and quantity are intimately linked to discussions of business, and the debate rages on in various industries. However, as I have found it in my

life, the most successful leaders and businessmen have narrowed their focus and sought to achieve greater things, rather than a greater *number* of things. Companies that become dominant forces in the market are those that create a product of the highest quality, not the highest volume. As long as you continue to push forward into new challenges and new levels of difficulty and skill, than you will find yourself advancing and progressing towards a truly elite level of success, where the number of achievements is not nearly as important as the quality.

### **The Final Word**

Every individual must walk their own long road to success, and no amount of wisdom or advice can help unless they are willing to accept it and listen. Some people will choose to walk alone, confident in their abilities to conquer the world all by themselves. Others will lean heavily on others, perhaps too much so, and never develop the inner strength and confidence to push forward into the unknown. Then there is the rare breed, somewhere in the middle, who finds the ideal balance between individuality and collaboration, support and stubborn strength. Those are the people who never stop learning and always find the good mixed in with the bad. They are the competitors who push themselves to the very edge of the impossible and come back wiser. You find them across all aspects of life, these true champions, including sports, business, the arts, education, science, philosophy, industry, and any other imaginable area of professional passion. These people are meant for great things, and have the potential inside of them to rise to unimaginable heights of success and fame.

These 30 anecdotes from my own life are meant to shed light on the most important qualities that I have seen over the course of my career in those that I admired, and they are the parts of myself that I am most proud of. Not everyone is destined to be a true champion, but this book may be an early guide to set you on a path to success. Every person is different, and every life will have different pressures and stressors that will have to be responded to on an individual basis, but the fundamentals are often the same. The basic lessons of work ethic, humility, coaching, teamwork, self-awareness, risk-assessment, and common sense are applicable to most people who want to be successful.

I don't want to be a hypocrite and try to push you onto a path that I believe is best; that decision can only come from within you. However, whatever you are trying to accomplish, whether it is to become a successful businessman, an

athletic champion, or just a more driven and complete individual, these lessons are good places to start when shaping your values and redirecting your dreams. As I've said before, true champions aren't afraid to ask for help. So, take the time to think over what you've read, contemplate its place in your own life, and then set out on your journey with a renewed vision.

I can only tell you my story; the rest is up to you.