

The Courage to Succeed - Secrets from a Three-time Olympian

By Ruben Gonzalez

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No matter what your dream is, whether it's to be the best Dad or the best Mom, the best husband or the best wife, the best employee or the best boss, the best salesperson or the best student you can be, to make it a reality, you will have to have the courage to act in spite of your fears.

High achievement requires courage, self-confidence, boldness, and the willingness to go for your goals with no guarantee of success. With courage you can do anything in life. Without it, none of the other qualities will help you.

The first time I saw the Olympics on TV I was in the third grade. As soon as I saw the Olympians I knew I wanted to be just like them. What impressed me the most about the Olympians was not their athletic ability. What I admired about the Olympians was their values. You see, these were people that had a dream, and had the courage to commit fully to it for years with no guarantee of success. That's what impressed me about them! Sure they had outstanding athletic ability. But more importantly, they had the faith, the guts, the boldness, and the willingness to go for it with no guarantees of success. They had that rare attitude of not worrying about the possibility of failure. They were going to go for it and commit 100% to winning no matter what. It's like they said to themselves, "It's my dream and I'm going for it. That's it period!"

When you move boldly towards your goals, when you make the decision to do whatever it takes (and all it is is an attitude change, a choice), magic happens. All of a sudden, unseen forces will come to your aid. The bolder and more committed you are, the more your subconscious will work for you. You will unconsciously start to attract the people and resources you need to achieve your goal. All of a sudden, you will draw energy to making your dream a reality.

People will start saying you are lucky. Winners know there is no such thing as luck. All that is really happening is that now, you have become driven. You are known for your goal. Everybody can see it. Your every action is broadcasting to the world where you are headed, and all of a sudden, anyone who might be interested in helping you, can see you are serious. Also, when you are focused on one goal, your mind starts acting like a guided missile. It becomes tuned to anything that might help you achieve your goal. This is not any different than when you buy a new car and all of a sudden you notice how many other people are driving the same model car.

When you put all of your energy into one goal, you tap into huge resources. That single decision changes everything. All the stress and worry disappears. Your mental attitude changes completely. You are now the hunter. The dream has become the prey that will eventually succumb to you.

When you make the decision to commit 100%, the winner inside you comes out. The champion inside you comes out. The real you comes out. You just have to have the courage to face your fears.

Your fears are a smokescreen. They are like ghosts that keep you from being the real you. Your best you. It's OK to be afraid. Everyone is afraid! If everyone is afraid, what's the difference between a brave person and a coward? The brave person acts in spite of his fears. The coward allows his fears to overwhelm him and control his thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Can courage be developed? Absolutely. Aristotle said, "Through repetition, any quality can be developed." Do you realize the implications of that statement? It means we are not doomed to being the way we currently are. You can change! You can grow! You can be a different person three months from now! In case you haven't figured it out, that EXCITES me! You see, if that is true, and it is, now you know that it is within you to grow into the kind of person that can make your dreams come true.

Back to courage. The way to develop courage is by practicing courage in every situation where courage is required. How do you do that? Through a decision. You come to the realization that whenever you are afraid to do something, you are simply being tested. You make a decision that from now on you will win over your fear. Remember; if you do what you fear, the fear will disappear. If you don't do what you fear, the fear will control your life.

Make a game out of conquering your fears. You can get started with small things. For example, if you usually wait to see what everyone else is having when you're ordering in a restaurant, next time, be the first to order. When you do that, you will have experienced a small personal victory. You just won over that fear. Next time you are talking to somebody and you want to ask a question but you are afraid of looking stupid, ask anyways. Guess what? You've just won another personal victory. Score: Fears - 0, Courage -2.

You need to win many many personal victories before you will win a public victory. Michael Johnson, the 200 meter and 400 meter Olympic Gold medallist, says in his biography, "I did not miss a scheduled workout in 10 years." His public victory did not happen overnight.

By becoming conscious of your fears and making a game out of conquering them, before long you will begin to understand in your heart that fears are just smokescreens. And by playing that game all the time, you are becoming more courageous every day.

There are two parts of courage that lead to success. The first part is the willingness to begin, to act in faith, to step out boldly in the direction of your goals with no guarantee of success. The second part of courage is the willingness to endure, to persist, to refuse to give up, and to keep on working harder than anyone else.

Most people talk themselves out of even going for their dream. And most of the ones who make the attempt quit as soon as the going get tough. It's so sad. Because everyone has the ability to make their dreams come true. It's sad that so few people have the willingness to do what it takes.

That's why as a boy I admired the Olympians. That's why we root for the underdog. That's why we love movies like Rocky and Rudy. Because all of us have felt like the underdog at one time or another. Because seeing the underdog win gives us hope that we can win too.

That's why we admire people like speed skater Dan Jansen.

Once you get started on the road to making your dreams a reality, you must make the decision to

never quit. The decision to never give up gives you a huge advantage. The person who is most determined usually wins. A study on goals and perseverance found that 95% of the goals that people set are ultimately achieved, as long as the person didn't give up.

Ninety five percent! That's almost a guarantee. A guarantee that if you refuse to quit you will eventually win. The main reason people fail is not because of lack of ability or opportunities. They fail because they lack the inner strength to persist in the face of obstacles and difficulties. That's why trying something almost always leads to failure. By definition, trying something means you will quit if you are not successful.

Don't worry about failing. Failing is how you learn. You can fail over and over again, but all it takes is one big success to wipe out all your previous failures. Just like Dan Jansen in the Lillehammer Olympics. The only time you can't afford to fail is the last time you try.

You need to be bold. Once you have made the decision to never quit, it's easy to be bold. Remember, if you don't quit you're almost guaranteed to succeed. So just assume that success is inevitable. It's only a matter of time. Act as if your ultimate success is guaranteed. No matter how bad it is or how bad it gets, learn from your failures and keep moving on.

Your goal should be to reach the point where you believe in yourself so much that nothing can stop you or hold you back for very long. You want to become unbeatable. This is where persistence is so important. The more you persist, the more you will believe in yourself. And the more you believe in yourself, the more you persist. Your persistence is a measure of how much you believe in yourself and how much you believe in your ability to succeed. If you act as if you are guaranteed to succeed, your belief will grow. Because emotion follows motion. What you do determines how we will feel. Act in spite of your fears and commit to not quit, and I'll promise you that the winner inside you will burst forth to propel you to victory.

When you develop your courage and perseverance, you will experience life in ways you never thought were possible. The more you practice courage and perseverance, the more confident you will become. Don't quit. Refuse to quit and you will succeed. Dan Jansen refused to quit and look at what happened...

Dan Jansen was supposed to win gold in the Sarajevo 84 Olympics. He didn't. Disappointed, he knew he should bring home a medal in the 88 Calgary games. But only moments before the start of the race he was told his sister, Jane had died of leukemia. With this weighing on his mind, he raced poorly and walked home empty handed. Dan had another chance in Nagano 92, but his hopes were crushed again when he slipped on the ice. The 94 Lillehammer would be his last chance. With the world holding its breath as he raced in the 500 meters, he fell again to the horror of the crowd, and finished eighth. With only one race left in his career, the 1000, Dan Jansen was racing for his life. Incredibly he slipped on the last turn...but didn't fall. As he raced past the finish line, he read the official time. A new world record. At long last Dan Jansen's perseverance paid off. Finally he had won the Olympic Gold Medal. On his victory lap, he carried his baby daughter on his shoulders. Her name is Jane... after his sister.

Dan's story is so inspirational. It makes us feel like we can't fail. It teaches us lessons in courage and perseverance. It has been said, "The Honor should not go to those who have not fallen; rather, all Honor should go to those who fall and rise again." That's why we love Rocky, and Rudy, and the Olympics.

The Olympics are not really about sport. The Olympics are about the power of the human spirit. They are a place that showcases to the world a group of people that were willing to go after their dreams no matter what.

The Olympic flame represents the fire in the heart of someone who is in pursuit of their dream. At the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics Opening Ceremonies, Mitt Romney, the CEO of the Olympic Organizing Committee faced all of the athletes and said to us, "Athletes, you are proof to the world that when you have a dream, and you pursue it, and you refuse to quit, dreams do come true. After the Olympics it is your responsibility to teach that philosophy to others. Teach them how to make their dreams come true. And let's make this world a better place."

So have the courage to go after your dream. Give it all you've got. Have the courage to get started and have the courage to never quit. I guarantee you, when you do, your life will become great!

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