

Chapter 1. Act Like a Champion

In this first chapter, I'd like to highlight several individuals who exemplify what it means to "act like a champion." You don't have to win every race to be a champion, but always acting like a champion will help you *outrun ordinary and achieve extraordinary*. Much of this book will focus attention on you and your individual goals. Right here at the outset, though, I want to emphasize that part of acting like a champion is caring about others. You have to *want* them to win their individual races. In the heat of competition, true champions find a way to help others, even when it might risk diminishing the final score.

In this chapter, you'll hear the story of a decorated high school runner who learned a key lesson (the hard way) about the responsibility he had to his teammates. Then you'll meet a young lady who helped a fellow competitor in a high-stakes race in a way that will truly astound you. Finally, you'll meet my father, and I'll share the ways that he, throughout his career, ran a business of distinction while helping many others along the way.

Let's start with Scott Friedlander, the star of his high school cross country team, who with a little help from his

See You at the Finish Line

coach, learned that the decisions you make for yourself affect more than just you.

Rewind to Scott's senior year, which could be described as "one for the ages!" He was coming off a cross country campaign where he won all sorts of races, broke records, and wound up earning all-state honors. He had become a cult celebrity in the Illinois cross country community and at his high school. From freshmen to seniors to faculty members, everyone knew him as "the runner." By October, Scott had gotten into the one and only college he applied to - Brown University. As Scott explained, "It was hard to imagine being any happier than I was at the time. I was on top of the world."

Scott had always prided himself on being a positive influence on others. He never abused the position of power he had earned as the captain and top runner on the team. He maintained his reserved personality and never tried to show dominance or tout his own ego. He had great respect for how the program had changed his life, and he tried to pay it forward the best that he could. Despite all his success and accolades, he was determined to be the same guy he had been his first three years in high school - the guy whose teammates were so important to him.

Nevertheless, he had changed a bit. “I had gotten cocky with my schoolwork,” Scott shared. He slacked academically because he thought he had it all figured out. He didn’t need to worry about high school because he had already gotten into the college of his choice. He figured all he had to do was maintain decent grades so that Brown University didn’t rescind his acceptance. There was no reason to try any harder than that. As a result, he didn’t study much for exams and earned a 60% on his first calculus test. Although he had never scored that low on an exam, it didn’t bother him much because he figured he’d bring the grade up to an “acceptable” level before the end of the semester.

What he didn’t count on was his coach being notified!

“I’ll never forget that day. I was sitting in the lunchroom, as I did for over two hours every day. As part of my lack of academic interest, I had arranged my schedule such that my two free periods backed up to lunch. So instead of using my free time to do homework as I had in the past, I sat at the ‘runners’ lunch table for multiple hours as my teammates rolled in and out during their lunch periods. On that particular day, one of my senior teammates strolled into the lunchroom and said, ‘Scott, the coach wants to see you in his office.’”

See You at the Finish Line

“Coach took me to a small back room that was used primarily for tutoring, and there he unleashed on me. For a good five minutes (which seemed like an hour), he yelled at me. It was probably the first time anyone had raised a voice to me since I started high school. I was shocked and scared.

“The message he left me with was: You’re being selfish. The team has given you a leadership position, but the effort you are giving is an example nobody should follow. You represent our program. Is this really how you want our program to be represented? Is this how you want your teammates to remember you?”

The coach’s message that *your actions, while they may seem only to affect you, actually affect others* had never occurred to Scott. He’s carried this lesson with him ever since.

Scott shared with me, “If you care about people and they care about you, then you represent them in the decisions you make. Whether that’s your team, your family, or any group where there is a mutual desire to see each other succeed, your actions impact how the group is perceived.” Scott took a lot of pride in the fact that the team consisted of a group of good kids who were extremely positive influences on each other. They did well in school and didn’t get in trouble.

“We always heard about teachers and parents recommending the cross country team to 8th grade boys looking for an identity because of the positive, supportive culture we fostered. My academic decisions as a second-semester senior ran counter to that culture. I was not representing the team, a group I cared so much about, appropriately. When people thought of the runners, they thought of me, and I didn’t want negative perceptions of me to be translated into negative perceptions of the squad. So, because of what Coach said to me, I changed my attitude.”

Scott’s grades improved, and even though it wasn’t his best semester, his report card wasn’t something that caused him shame. But more important than the grades was the fact that he acted like a champion.

Sure, he had to be reminded (by his coach), but he wasn’t even 18 years old at the time. In the end, *it wasn’t that he needed the message that mattered; it was what he did with the message.* He buckled down with his schoolwork (and leadership behavior) and set a better example.

Now more than five years later, Scott still comes to visit the team when he’s in town. I know that the responsibility he feels to represent the team hasn’t faded, despite the fact that he’s out in the real world now.

See You at the Finish Line

“The bottom line,” he told me, “is that I learned that when you make decisions, you need think about the people you influence and how your decisions will affect them. Your decisions reach much farther than you’d expect. I’m prouder of my last six weeks of high school than I am of all the prior experiences combined because of the legacy I left the younger runners.”

Scott “acted like a champion” and he’s continued to *outrun ordinary and achieve extraordinary* in his life as a successful consultant. Meghan Vogel, also a runner, became a champion not for the race she won, but for the race in which she finished last.

Meghan had just won the mile run to become the 2012 Ohio State Champion for that event. A short time later that same day, while running the 2-mile race, she fell behind. What transpired after that is astonishing. As she struggled to narrow the distance by which she lagged the leaders, Meghan saw a fellow competitor struggle and fall to the track. Instead of focusing on her own performance, Meghan ran to the fallen runner, picked her up and guided her towards the finish line, which resulted in a last place finish for Meghan. Although Ohio High School Athletic Association rules would normally disqualify a runner for receiving assistance, in this

instance, neither runner was disqualified. Take a moment to search the Internet for this video - it will bring a tear to your eye.

Many high school track and field championships take place in late May, when the weather can be either nastily cold or extraordinarily hot. The heat was oppressive that day and, according to the announcers, the other runner was overcome by heat. Nonchalantly, during the post-race interview, Meghan said, "I saw the girl needed help and I just figured I'd help her out. So that's what I did! I wanted to help the other runner cross the finish line. She worked hard to get here. She deserved to finish ahead of me!" Yes, as if the initial act of helping the girl up wasn't sportsmanship enough, Meghan made the conscious decision to push the other runner ahead of her.

When people talk about that day, they don't talk about the race in which Meghan finished first, they talk about the race in which she finished last. It's spellbinding how the humility oozes from this athlete. "She doesn't think what she did was terribly impressive," according to her father, but everyone else who watches the video would probably beg to differ. By demonstrating caring about someone else to this degree, Meghan truly acted like a champion and outran ordinary!

See You at the Finish Line

Scott and Meghan acted like champions at key defining moments in their lives. My father has acted like a champion day by day for his entire career. Talk about *outrunning ordinary and achieving extraordinary*...my father, Fred Rosen, built a successful business through hard work, people skills and caring for others. Drawing upon his experiences as a multi-sport high school and college athlete, he brought a champion's mentality to our family's retail business.

If you ask anybody who interacted with him, they'd tell you that he treated everyone with the utmost respect. He never belittled (either privately or publicly) any one of the many sales professional from vendors who would call on us. He knew that sales professionals had to put children through college, just like he did. If you needed a favor, you called my dad and considered it done. His word was as good as gold. As our business changed, he gracefully stepped aside and allowed others to do things he had always done so that they could develop needed skills. He was charitable and generous.

Often, a local sales pro would pay a visit with his or her national sales manager in tow. To be sure, it was an extremely important day for that sales pro. Dad was certain to make him or her look like a hero...always sure

to point out at least one great thing the sales pro was doing to sell more products in our stores. He was a natural at making you feel like the most important person in the world to him at that moment.

He had a soft heart – I’d call it generous to a fault. As a company, when we cut back on employee loans, he still helped people out of his own pocket. He even loaned money to members of the community immediately surrounding our main store, which was in an economically depressed neighborhood. He never considered himself better than anybody else. The down-on-their-luck members of the neighborhood called him “Freddy,” and he treated them with kindness. He may have accomplished more than they had, but he didn’t consider himself any better than them. To this day, that’s a lesson that has served me enormously well.

My father and I, our mutual goals were success and achievement for others, as well as ourselves. He taught me that success never happens without the help of others. To him, acting like a champion meant that you treat everybody with whom you come in contact with great dignity. That you never make people feel small or keep people waiting, a tactic some use as a display of power. He said the true mark of a champion is that you

See You at the Finish Line

never consider yourself better than anybody else. That you always can have a kind word for people and let them feel proud of their lot in life.

One quick story before I conclude this chapter. Recently I attended a train-the-trainer program hosted by Jack Canfield. During the training, each day Jack would ask, “Who wants a standing ovation?” He’d offer this distinction to the first five people who came up on stage, but each day there were many more than five who volunteered. I watched this unfold with bewilderment. Why did people need this attention? What was I missing? I felt no need to take part, so I remained in the audience and clapped and cheered alongside my fellow attendees. The best I could figure was that these individuals needed some acknowledgment or encouragement. They needed approval of some sort, for whatever reason, and standing up there and soaking it all in helped them feel good in some way.

Guess what? These people live, work, play and travel among us. They’re all over the place. Maybe it’s the guy sitting next to me as I write this, waiting for a delayed flight! Or the young lady at Starbucks who served me my grande mocha frappuccino light this morning – and this afternoon. Or the young man unpacking boxes in the

Chapter 1. Act Like a Champion

cereal aisle at your local supermarket. You get the drift...people who need your help, kindness, guidance and leadership are out there, but you won't see them with your eyes closed.

Scott Friedlander cared about his teammates, so he changed his ways. Meghan Vogel cared about a fellow competitor, so she gave a helping hand. My father spent 60 years helping others. You can do the same. Open your eyes wide and your heart wider. Care about others and you'll be labeled a champion, no matter what place you finish!

That's just the way it works!