



## How Your Team Can Perform Like the U.S. Olympic Team

At these Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada, I was honored—and challenged—by the United States Olympic Committee to help motivate the Olympians to outperform their competitors. So how has Team USA managed to avoid many of the difficulties that are tripping up other teams? By remembering to execute as an individual, but compete as a strong, connected team and feed off of each other's successes.

One of the activities we gave the athletes to inspire them to overcome obstacles and challenges at the Olympics is quite similar to an activity that I do with corporate groups I speak to and share in my new, inspirational book. We told the athletes to write down a goal or motivating word that would help put them in a positive frame of mind. When a hurdle or distraction jumps out at them, they can pull out their card and remind themselves to think positively and make them responsible to reaching their goals. We asked those that were brave enough to share their ultimate goals to truly make them accountable to their aspirations.

When I made the World Cup team, one of our first responsibilities was to write down our goals. I wrote that my goal was to win a World Cup competition that year. A teammate of mine sneered at me and said that no one wins a World Cup in their first year on the tour. She told me I should pick a more "reasonable" goal, like hers—of reaching one top-ten result, one result better than tenth place.

I left my goal as it was. I took it as a personal challenge, and to keep myself on track, I pinned the goal up next to my bed at every hotel we traveled to.

Toward the end of that first year, we competed at a contest in Inawashiro, Japan, and my teammate finally reached her goal of a top-ten result. But what I think surprised her most was the outcome of my own commitment. I also reached *my* goal that day, and won my first World Cup competition.

Today, give yourself a challenge, and challenge your colleagues and employees to decide on a certain goal with you. Write the challenge down on an index card and tape it to the wall to remind yourself of your goal. This commitment will make you accountable to your goals and responsible for your actions. Read your index card and/or check in with your friend weekly to keep yourself on track. If you aren't willing to put a goal in writing, you probably aren't really committed to achieving it.

We also reminded the athletes that you can't get to the top by yourself. Many people think that because I took part in an individual—versus team—sport, there wasn't a teamwork element. I absolutely guarantee that I wouldn't have my Olympic medal if I didn't know how to find, rely on and get help from many people around me. Take my coach, for instance. If you want to understand trust, try spinning at a hundred revolutions per minute five stories in the air, and counting on someone to tell you when to land right side up.

Aerialists flip and twist through space so quickly that we have a hard time deciphering how high we are off the ground. So my coach would call out instructions—to stretch my body and slow down my rotation, to tell me if I was flipping too quickly, or to pull my knees in to increase my revolutions if I was somersaulting too slowly. If I didn't rely on his directions, and follow them implicitly, I likely would have found myself in a hospital bed rather than on an Olympic podium. Trust me, *no one* gets to the top alone.

Several years ago, I served as a board member of a program with the United States Olympic Committee, where eight Olympic medalists would help mentor future potential medalists. We would play different games and activities that would teach the current athletes important lessons in finding their own success. My fellow Olympians would go through training sessions ourselves to make sure we understood the important lessons to be learned.

One game we played, called Landmine, taught us about relying on a partner for teamwork and support. One team member was blindfolded and the other would act as a guide to direct him or her through a minefield of obstacles—chairs, balloons, buckets, puddles, etc. The goal was to make it to the other side of the room without touching any of the obstacles. The “guide” would call out when to step forward or sideways, take a big or small step, turn at an angle, duck down, and so on.

The game turned out to be much more challenging than I’d anticipated. I was amazed at how difficult it was to relinquish control and rely on my teammate’s advice. When we switched positions and I became the “guide,” I realized how crucial my input was for my partner’s success.

A million analogies immediately flooded my mind, not the least of which was that sometimes someone else might have a better perspective on the route we should take. Do others trust my input? Am I finding the right people to guide me? Am I using other people’s support when it’s offered?

It doesn’t take a genius to find the support you need. The real genius lies in recognizing that you need it! Take the time to see if you and your “team” are letting others in to help you.

Are you or your colleagues the type of people who insist on controlling a situation? How uncomfortable are each of you in releasing some of that control? Ask yourselves why you need to maintain this power. Try to see if you can each let go of part of that stubborn side by asking others for help or delegating responsibility today for some small task you would normally do yourselves.

Notice that someone else’s support and perspective can actually enhance the finished product. It may even allow you time to turn your attention toward more important issues.

I know that without the support of my team, I never would have been able to overcome the endless challenges thrown at me—including a near career-ending spinal injury—in order to win America’s first Olympic gold medal in the sport of aerial skiing.

And without our mutual support, Johnny Mosely, Eric Bergoust and I wouldn’t have been able to bring home three of the four gold medals awarded in freestyle skiing that year.

Now it’s your time to inspire and feed off of your colleagues and bring home whatever your “gold medal” may be.

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