

Pursuit of Excellence

In a bobsled competition, the race often continues long after the winners have been declared and in some cases, the medals have been presented. Interestingly, despite this fact, I have never seen any of the remaining teams approach their runs with a nonchalant attitude. You can easily make the case that completing the race is a mere formality since the winners have already been declared. However, what I have observed instead are individuals pushing and racing with the ferocity and intensity of a team within striking distance of winning gold and setting a record. That, in my mind, is the essence of excellence and as George Will said, "Sports serve society by providing vivid examples of excellence."

Growing up, I was taught that anything worth doing is worth doing well. I have always understood that to mean that anything we do must be done in a superior manner. In our society the word excellent is synonymous with superior performance. Over the years, experience has taught me that that is only part of the meaning. I believe it also means that we must give our absolute best effort every time. We have to be willing to push a little harder and to reach just a little beyond where we are right now. While the last team pushing off the top of the hill knows they don't stand a snowball's chance in hell to win the race, they still put in a gigantic effort because they are striving to improve on their last performance and to create new personal benchmarks. This is what peak performers do. This is the hallmark of excellence

Excellence does not happen by chance - neither is it a single event. It takes a total commitment and consistent effort to be the best we can be. Aristotle said it best when he declared, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit." When we get in the habit of being excellent at what we do, we raise our own expectation level and are therefore able to reach beyond ourselves. In pursuing excellence we find ourselves on a continuous journey. Not pursuing perfection, but rather seeking constant improvement; learning and developing new skills and satisfying an innate desire deep down inside to explore our full potential. As John Gardener points out, "When we raise our sights, strive for excellence....we are enrolling in an ancient and meaningful cause - the age long struggle of humans to realize the best that is in them."

Someone who practices excellence is:

Focused

They are clear about their goals and work with a singleness of purpose to achieve them. Through effort and sweat equity they willingly pay in advance the price exacted in order to receive the prize at the end. "Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat; long is the road thereto and rough and steep at first; but when the heights are reached, then there is ease, though grievously hard in the winning" states the early Greek Poet Hesiod. In short, there is no excellence without focused labor.

Motivated

They are motivated to achieve. They are motivated to be at their best, using all the unlimited, untapped resources they have on the inside to create something incredible with the limited

resources they have on the outside. Their passion for their goals ensures that they shun mediocrity and thus perform in an excellent way.

Ambitious

They see themselves as individuals with the capacity to be really good at what they do and because they are so motivated they consistently go over and above what is required. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.

Like the last sledders racing off the top of the hill even after the medals have been awarded, I encourage you to practice excellence:

- \$ Consistently strive to do your best no matter what.
- \$ Face new challenges head on.
- \$ Embrace any and all opportunities to learn and improve.

Keep On Pushing!

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