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Win at all costs?

By Steven L. Anderson, PhD., MBA

I just had a great discussion with one of my clients, CJ Werley, about what it takes to succeed. CJ is quite an inspiration to me. He is a personal trainer in Madison, Wisconsin, and he is presently working to qualify for the Hawaiian Ironman race. For those of you who aren't familiar with this event, in the Ironman race the athlete swims 2.4 miles, then bikes 112 miles and then runs a marathon. It may be the greatest test of human endurance ever created.

CJ is an incredibly hard worker and he is driven to always do his best. He said that he gets frustrated because he works so hard to excel then finds himself feeling either extremely high emotionally, or really burned out. He asked me if I thought it was necessary to have a "win at all costs" mentality in order to succeed in life.

I told him that I really don't think so. In fact, in my experience, those who have balance in their lives may start more slowly than those "win at all cost" individuals, but in the long run, they outpace them because they have more inner strength and balance.

He remained uncertain. He commented, "What about Lance Armstrong? I've read that he is a maniac who only cares about bicycling. Maybe that is what it takes to win the Tour de France."

"That may be true," I replied, "but it also may have something to do with the trouble he has had in his personal relationships. If a person totally dedicates themselves to any one thing, there is no room in their lives for any thing else. In the end, I don't really see that as being successful. To me a successful life consists of seeking balance, in addition to achieving goals. There is also the whole element of getting so wrapped up in the result that we don't enjoy the journey. What good does it do a person if he achieves his goal, but is miserable along the way and makes others miserable along with him?" I asked.

After some discussion, CJ grasped my message and concluded; "I guess if our sense of self is so wrapped up in winning, we really can't call ourselves a success. On the other hand, if we give all of ourselves to the things we care about, then we are successful no matter what the scoreboard says." I couldn't have said it better myself.

Action items:

So if you would like to create more balance in your life here are some steps to consider:

- 1) Take time every week to assess how balanced your life is. It's best to do this for one hour somewhere that you cannot be interrupted. Have a blank sheet of paper with you on which to write.
- 2) Make two lists:
 - a. What I want more of
 - b. What I want less of
- 3) Make a plan for how to increase what you want and decrease what you don't want in your life
- 4) Put this plan in your calendar. The only way you will follow through on this plan is if you schedule it.
- 5) Now comes the tough part. In order to implement this plan it will mean disappointing some people. There simply is no way to create balance for yourself and make everyone happy.
- 6) Understand that this is an ongoing process. A balanced life today may not be balanced in six months if it is not regularly re-examined.