

25 Dynamic D's

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Take your running to the next level by following these steps:

To the person who has had no exposure to serious competitive distance running, the sport may appear very simple—nothing more than putting one foot in front of the other for an extended period of time. To the committed competitor, however, running is a complex activity involving a myriad of dynamic and interrelated mental, physical, emotional and spiritual challenges. After more than 40 years of facing such challenges, I have categorized the responses they evoke into what I call the 25 Dynamic Ds. These create a path to success that I believe every runner must follow, in some manner, in order to reach his or her potential in the sport.

1. Desire

It should go without saying that you must want to be a distance runner if you are going to succeed. A child who is pushed into it by his parents, no matter how physically gifted, will probably not go far if there is no desire to do well. The fitness jogger will not achieve competitive success if she has no interest in pushing beyond basic conditioning. Baseball great Rod Carew once commented that natural ability was not necessary to succeed in his sport. Rather, he said, it was work, driven by desire. "It doesn't mean doing what you have to do, it's doing what you want to do. You have to want to do that work." That is even more true of distance running.

2. Definition

If the desire is there, the next step is to define your goals. You have to spell out exactly what you hope to achieve. It should be specific, not just a general goal such as "wanting to be a good runner" or "getting faster." You need a target so that you will know if you have succeeded. "... people fail because they shoot at nothing," former mile-great Jim Ryun has said. "Even if your goal is only to get up at 6 in the morning, it gives you direction and a sense of self-esteem if you accomplish it. Lots of people get muddled and are aimless, and don't know what they want to achieve."

3. Destiny

Now that you've defined your goal, ask yourself if you really have what it takes to achieve it. Maybe you're too big, too young, too old, too busy or too challenged with other things to carry it out. There's something to be said for believing that you can do anything once you set your mind to it, but there's more to be said for being realistic. If you are big-boned and have the musculature of a Mr. America, you'll probably never break 30 minutes at 10K or 2:20 in the marathon. That's fine, so long as you accept your probable limitations. Not everyone is physically capable of becoming a champion distance runner. Nearly everyone, however, has what it takes to be a much better distance runner.

4. Determination

Determination is burning desire. Wanting success is one thing; being prepared to make all the necessary sacrifices to achieve it is something else. You've got to be hungry, ravenously hungry, for greatness. Desire alone will get you out on the track and through the first eight of your planned 16-quarter interval workout, but it's determination that will push you through the last eight. As English philosopher Thomas Carlyle put it: "A man with a half-volition goes backwards and forwards, and makes no way on the smoothest road; a man with a whole volition advances on the roughest, and will reach his purpose, if there even be a little wisdom to it."

5. Dedication

You may be determined, but are you ready to dedicate yourself to the pursuit of your goal? This means making adjustments to your lifestyle and eliminating as many conflicts as possible. In the words of 1960 and '64 Olympic gold medalist Peter Snell, "There is more to training than merely allocating two hours a day to be spent at it. The whole life revolves around it. The conscientious athlete has to moderate his approach to everything." Perhaps your job or family situation will not permit you the freedom or luxury of such dedication. If so, you might have to rethink your goals.

6. Daring

As in nearly every pursuit, you must assume risks. There are physical risks involving injuries, of course. You also may have to risk telling your boss that you don't want to put in late hours on the job, or your family that you want to spend three hours doing a long run on Sunday morning. You'll definitely have to take some chances and be prepared to come out on the

losing end now and then. The rewards, of course, make the sacrifices worthwhile. "I think that people who are unwilling to live on the fringe of their soul and their heart and their compassion and their passions really miss a lot of life," said the great masters runner Alex Ratelle. Still, don't downplay the chances you may be forced to take.

7. Direction

This means making a decision to either go for it now or to retreat and think about it. Said miler Mary Liquori: "A commitment to serious training means that no matter what else you are in this world—doctor, lawyer, Indian chief—first of all you are a runner. If you are unable to live up to that standard, your running is not truly serious, and you can expect your race results to show it." The legendary football coach Vince Lombardi offered this: "I will demand a commitment to excellence and to victory, and that is what life is all about."

8. Design

Having a plan is one thing; developing a program to carry out that plan is something else. You have to design a day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month program. "I was honest with myself in estimating my potential. I made a written plan for reaching my goals and then I fit that plan between a 40-hour week and my family duties," said Derek Clayton, the first man to break both 2:10 and 2:09 in the marathon.

9. Division

OK, you've set your overall goals. Now you must establish intermediate goals so that you won't lose interest or momentum as you pursue the ultimate goals. If you know where you are now and where you want to be a year from now, then you should be able to approximate where you should be at points in between. If not, find a coach or adviser who can help you. Make each intermediate goal a milestone.

10. Discipline

It's time now to begin exercising self control in ways that correct, mold or strengthen your habits. This may mean giving up harmful activities or acquiring beneficial ones. "If an athlete can't handle discipline, or take advice, he won't do well with us and I doubt very much he can be successful in athletics anywhere," said Jumbo Elliott, the great Villanova track coach.

11. Defiance

You must be prepared to stand up to or challenge those who obstruct your way. Some people will tell you that your pursuit is not a worthy one, that running is for kids, that you are passing up material gain, that you are chasing a dream. You can defy them silently or attempt to enlighten them, but the most important thing is that you see the value in what you are doing and remain firm in your commitment to your goals.

12. Diligence

While assuming risks and standing up to the objections of those who get in your way are often necessary, wanton disregard for your own safety, health, well-being and important relationships is not. You must be able to walk the line between recklessness and superfluous caution. Don't make divorce one of the Ds if you can help it. Retired tennis champion Chris Evert Lloyd offered this: "As a tennis player, you have to be selfish, but you can't be selfish in a marriage. It's taken me a long time to figure out how to separate the two."

13. Development

All of the ephemeral elements of great running mean nothing if you don't do the work. This means long, arduous training-miles of running and hours of supplemental exercises. Depending on your goals, you're probably going to have to figure on nothing less than an hour a day and possibly up to four or even five hours a day for the champion runner. "There are no shortcuts. It's just day after day, month after month," said former Olympian and current masters standout Ruth Wysocki.

14. Drive

You can't effectively develop in a plodding manner. You must pursue your goal with vigor, spirit and intensity. This is a manifestation of determination, which as we've said will get you through those last eight quarters in that interval workout. It's your drive, however, that will keep you doing them just as fast as the first eight. Drive means not backing off and not surrendering to the fatigue that you're beginning to feel.

15. Depth

This involves going beyond the drive gear to a place where you learn to continue on even when you are hurting. It involves digging deeper into your physical reserves and your soul, and pushing yourself beyond whatever barriers you perceive. Depth is what allows you to kick it in, to lift those knees high in spite of the extreme oxygen debt and muscular fatigue. In training, you might call upon this only on the last 100 meters of the final quarter. In racing, you'll probably need to sustain it for longer periods.

16. Distance

This is the quantity aspect of your training, which fosters the development of your endurance. It comes as the result of many hours and miles. Most champion distance runners have found that they need to run somewhere between 90 and 120 miles per week to develop the cardiovascular reserve necessary to maximize their potential. "The initial key to successful training is the amount of time you spend running each week and the distance you cover, rather than the speed at which you run," says renowned running research scientist Tim Noakes, M.D.

17. Dash

Quality is the other side of the training coin. Interval training on the track, fartlek on the roads or trails, hill repeats and various types of crosstraining all can be an integral part of a champion runner's speed-building regimen.

18. Distribution

You must learn to distribute your energy and effort in an economical and efficient manner by developing pacing, patience and balance. Pace yourself in training just as you do in a race, being sure not to do too much too soon or, conversely, not to save it all for the end of the workout. Use patience to work through the gradual build-up phase and a tapering and rest phase that are part of just about every successful runner's training cycle. Balance has to do with the trade-off between quantity and quality training. Too much of one and not enough of the other does not make for optimum results.

19. Dream

At some point, you have to visualize yourself running perfectly: your form flawless, your pacing precisely timed, your winning move planned and executed seamlessly. Olympic heptathlon champion Jackie Joyner Kersee put it this way: "I concentrate on visualizing specific movements. I visualize myself being successful, what I should be doing at the start of the race, going over the hurdles, coming off the hurdles, between the hurdles, and how I should run through the finish line." In training, the distance runner should visualize efficient running form and make the actual movements fit the imagery.

20. Diet

You don't run a high-powered engine on low-grade gasoline. A runner can get only so far on nutritionless food. Intelligent training calls for attention to the amounts and proportions of carbohydrates, protein and fat in the diet, as well as essential vitamins and minerals. Educate yourself and make a consistent effort to fuel yourself well. Don't forget about proper hydration, something overlooked by too many runners.

21. Dwelling

This means having concentration and focus, not allowing yourself to stray from the path that leads to your goal. We all face temptations along the way. When asked why he had been so dominant in his event, Olympic 400-meter hurdle gold medalist Edwin Moses replied, "I know what I'm doing. I concentrate on this as much as I would on engineering or physics." Golfer Sam Snead put it this way: "Concentration means different things to different people, but to me it means keeping yourself on an even keel no matter what happens. Don't get too high when things are going good; don't get too low when things go wrong.

22. Documentation

Most successful runners keep a log or journal in which they record their workouts, noting distances, times and how they feel before, during and after a workout or race. Some go into more detail, plotting their progress on graphs or even posting charts on the wall. The important thing is to find a format that works for you and use it as a tool to adjust your training and lifestyle factors as needed.

23. Discernment

From time to time, you must stop and ask yourself what's working and what isn't. This is the only way to effectively monitor your progress and be prepared to make changes in your program. Sometimes this means modifying your training, perhaps experimenting with something new or revising goals or target dates. It might even mean retreating for a time before tackling the next intermediate goal with renewed vigor.

24. Delight

Sure, achieving success is going to mean a lot of hard work with a certain amount of discomfort and inconvenience, but you should be able to take pleasure in the pursuit. Drudgery is not one of the Ds! You must be able to savor those moments of complete release that follow a hard workout. Don't forget to reward yourself with little treats now and then.

25. Divine

Running is not a religion, but it can be a spiritual undertaking. The well-conditioned runner should experience a oneness with the universe and with other humans. Certainly, the sport teaches perseverance and humility. But the underlying metaphysics of the sport—the lessons often confined to the subconscious—entails learning how to die, an experience that comes with pushing our limits. The well-conditioned runner who reflects on those moments of extreme exhaustion will no doubt recall the release and ecstasy that follow and perhaps see an analogy with the death that we all will face.

Two final Ds, as a bonus: Don't procrastinate. Do it now.