

## Checks and Balances

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During my last two seasons of college basketball, our conditioning test before the start of practice each year was to run a sub six-minute mile. Since graduation, I have decided that I should continue this practice every year, and so every Saturday for two and a half months leading up to November 1 I run a timed mile. There is an indoor track where I work and it's 10 laps for a mile. I would usually check my watch after every lap to see how I was fairing compared to the 5:59 pace. A few weeks ago the idea was proposed to me to run the mile that week without checking my watch at all during the run. I was to run at what I thought was an appropriate pace for myself in order to reach my goal. I ran the mile that way, and I ended up running it six seconds slower than I had ran it the previous week. While I was disappointed with that performance, I realized something that day. In sport, as in life, the more opportunities you have to pace yourself the more checks and balances you need to have to make sure that pace is right for you until you develop a true understanding of what your body and mind are capable of.

A friend of mine, Todd Durkin, writes in his book *The IMPACT Body Plan* that life is not a marathon, but rather a series of short sprints. Much like the idea I wrote about in my article "The Hills", Todd says that in life you should not go at one pace the entire time. Instead, you should go as hard as you can for a short period of time and then rest, repeating this cycle over and over. This attitude towards work and life will allow you to have times of great productivity while still forcing yourself to relax for periods of time. The beautiful thing about this approach towards life is that it still has checks and balances. Every time you rest, you get to reflect on and learn from what you just completed, allowing you to make adjustments to your future plans and actions. Much like the timed mile, if you don't have checkpoints along the way to tell you where you are relative to your goal, how do you know if you are pushing hard enough, too hard, or even going in the right direction?

Once you figure out how hard you need to push in order to get to where you're going, you won't have to check your pace as often. On a similar note, once you figure out what you are truly capable of, you will be better able to determine how much you have to give. A prime example of this can be taken from my grandfather's past. When he was high-school age, he attended New Hampton Prep in New Hampshire. While there, he decided he wanted to attend Dartmouth College after graduation. The funny thing was, he never once checked his grades while at New Hampton, and so he had no idea if his scores would be good enough to get accepted. What he did know, though, was that he was studying as hard as he could while at the school, and he figured if he was working as hard as he could in his classes, he wouldn't need to worry about his grades because he couldn't do any better than he was. He had already been through difficult times in his life, so he understood himself and what his body and mind were capable of, which was vital. Shortly after the war broke out, my grandfather talked to his counselor about his grades. He wanted to fight in the war, but was worried that he wouldn't be able to

get into a school after. The counselor checked out his scores and informed him that not only would he be able to get into Dartmouth, but he was the top student in his class as well! Crazy, huh?

I hear a story like that and it amazes me, partly by the accomplishment of being the top student, but mostly by how deeply my grandfather must have understood his abilities as a human being. You have to be put in difficult situations over and over again to figure out how to best survive them and until you figure out what you are truly capable of, you are just guessing as to whether your pace in life is correct unless you have a means to check. My grandfather didn't need an external means of checking in order to attain the scores he did, but the vast, vast majority of us do. Even when we sprint in life, during the times when we tell ourselves to push our absolute hardest, we do not know if we have more to give until we go back and reassess our work. I see this all the time with my clients—I tell them to do a sprint, as hard as they possibly can, for a distance of 30 meters and they end up jogging it. They've gone at one pace during their entire training career and have yet to recognize the fact that they have a few more gears above that. If they didn't have someone there pointing that out, they may continue to go through their training under the belief that what they gave was as much as they could and they couldn't do any better than that.

In life, do not pace yourself, sprint, but take the time to check yourself after and make sure that pace was right for you.

Here's to faith, strength, and passion.

Get big or die tryin'.

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