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COACHING

TIPS FOR A TIPTOP LIFE: Limiting Beliefs

50 years ago, Roger Bannister broke a huge limiting belief that was held by most athletes of the time. In honour of his achievement, let me tell you his story and how we can apply it to our own life.

May 6th 1954 was a typically English Spring day with wishy-washy skies, grey clouds, a few spits of rain and a brisk wind. At Iffley Stadium in Oxford, Roger Bannister stood with 2 friends, Chris Chataway and Chris Brasher, waiting to see if the wind would drop. They weren't alone. A crowd of 1,100 people – mostly students – had gathered, all hoping to see something special. At 3 p.m. the wind was gusting at 20 miles an hour and so Roger and the two Chris's waited. At 5 p.m. the anticipation was almost too much to bear, but then at 6 p.m., the wind suddenly dropped. A few minutes after 6 p.m., Roger, Chris and Chris stood on the starting line with 3 other runners.

After the gun fired, as agreed, Chris Brasher took the lead with Roger tucked in behind with Chris Chataway in third. At the half mile point Chris Chataway spurred forward and took the lead whilst Chris Brasher, dropped back. Chris Chataway lead Roger to the the three-quarter mile mark – reaching that point in the time of 3:0:05 – then Roger surged forward. He heard the maker time being announced and he knew he would have to the run the last lap faster than the first. With steely determination and sheer will power he went for it 100%. This was his chance. This was his dream. He was going to do this. He was going to break the 4 minute mile.

And, as you all know, he did. With a time of 3:59:4 Roger Bannister was the first man to break the 4 minute mile. But what was really special about this event? Yes, it was a world record – but there is far more to it than that. The old mile record of 4:01:4 had been set by Sweden's Gunder Haegg in 1945. And, for 9 years no-one had been able to get below this time. Physiologists of the time, said that running fast enough to break the 4 minute mile, would be very dangerous to the health of any athlete who attempted to reach it.

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But Roger Bannister didn't believe that. In fact he believed that he could break this record. His friends believed he could do it too. This belief in himself together with the support of his friends is really what made the difference. Breaking this record wasn't just a physical one: it was also psychological. A month later, Australian John Landy ran a time of 3:57:9 and later that summer Roger and John went head-to-head – with Roger winning – but both of them again breaking the 4 minute barrier. By the end of 1957, 16 runners had recorded sub 4 minute miles.

Why did the record get broken again so quickly by so many after a 9 year drought? More than anything it was down to a change in beliefs. Prior to Roger's run, everyone was saying it couldn't be done, and so most people simply believed this to be true. When Roger broke the record, he smashed the limiting beliefs of many athletes, and suddenly their self-talk thoughts changed from "can't do" to "can do", and this is undoubtedly why the record was broken so many times so quickly. It wasn't new training techniques or new nutrition, it was simply taking on a new belief that it could be done.

We all have some limiting beliefs and often talk ourselves out of doing things. Do any of these 'self-talk' phrases ring bells with you? "No, I can't do that", "It's too hard", "I'm not good enough", "You have to have (money, contacts, education, beauty etc.) to do that", "I won't make it" "It's impossible" **And what we believe about ourselves is what we bring about.** If we think talking to someone will be hard: then it will be. If we think we can't sell our product or service because the economy is in decline, then it will be a struggle. If we believe that we aren't beautiful enough to attract the person we fancy, then we won't attract them.

Why does this happen? Lets use the last example and see how it works. With a negative mindset, what happens when you meet someone you fancy? Does your body stand straight? Or do your shoulders dip slightly? Do you become tongue-tied and don't know what to say? Is your smile somewhat nervous? In desperation to impress, do you say all the wrong things?

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Now, lets imagine you believe you are a lovely, attractive person. With this mindset, what happens when you meet this person you fancy? Your body language mimics your thoughts and so you feel and look totally at ease. You smile openly and genuinely. Talking is easy and fun. In a nutshell your confidence shines through.

Now switch images again in your head and pretend you are the person who is being fancied. In front of you are identical twins. One appears shy and unsure. One is outgoing and fun to be around. Which twin are you naturally drawn to?

Now imagine that it's not someone you fancy, but a potential customer, a potential employer, or someone who holds a fantastic opportunity. Can you now see how that if you believe in yourself that far more is possible? That these people who can bring good things into your life are going to make decisions **based on what they perceive** (your body language, the way you talk, the tone of you voice) as much as the words you use.

So what are your limiting beliefs? What's holding you back? What could you achieve if you didn't have anything holding you back? Think about one of your limiting beliefs. Now write down a positive spin of it. So if in your mind your limiting belief is: "I'm not good enough to be promoted to xyz job" write down: "I can do xyz job well and with ease. My employers will be pleased to promote me to this position because I can do a good job for them". Write this down on several pieces of paper and put them in places you will find them regularly (purse, wallet, beside your bed, on the fridge etc.). Keep reading your new belief and see what happens!

Good luck – let me know how it changes things for you.

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