



## How Winning Works: 8 Essential Leadership Lessons from the Toughest Teams on Earth – Part 1

My teammates and I have been competing in (and winning) the world's craziest ultra-endurance multi-sport Adventure Races for the past 20 years. In these 6-10 day long nonstop events, teams must run, hike, kayak, mountain bike, climb, raft, swim and generally do whatever it takes to get across some of the most remote and inhospitable locations on earth using only a map, compass, and our teammates' wits, skill and synergy. Interestingly enough, surviving 600-1000 miles of extreme terrain isn't the toughest part of the race. The founders of the sport, in particular Gerard Fusil and Mark Burnett (yes, THE Mark Burnett), decided to throw in a little plot twist that all teams had to be mixed gender, and that if even one of your 4 or 5 team members quits along the way, your entire team is disqualified. So, based upon the rules of this ludicrous sport, and the fact that every member of our team had to actually succeed or none of us would be allowed to finish, the most important thing that we learned out there had nothing to do with sports. What we learned out there is that Vince Lombardi was absolutely right when he said that "the secret is to play less as an individual and more as a team. As a coach, you play not your 11 best, but your best 11". In other words, the magic in successfully reaching any difficult goal lies in great individual team \*members\* being inspired to be great teamMATES.

In 1999, the Extreme Teamwork required for success in Adventure Racing caught the attention of the editors of Fast Company Magazine. They understood that the style of racing required to not only cross the finish line, but to WIN these multisport team endurance races was something that could absolutely be applied to the success of any organization that had "teams of men and women, trying to make it through an endless series of checkpoints, in pursuit of a nearly impossible goal, working against extreme time pressures, in constantly changing conditions, and with the goal of doing it among the best of the best in the world." In other words, any business person who has huge audacious goals that they could never accomplish alone is an adventure racer. So why not study how World Champion Adventure Racers consistently succeed against the toughest of odds? And so they did. And they not only studied our adventure racing team, they also interviewed consistently high performing teams from NASA, Industrial Light and Magic and some Navy Seals. Not surprisingly, what Fast Company discovered is that, regardless of the mission at hand, all of these Extreme Teams had an attitude, a belief system, a mindset, and a way of seeing one another and the world that was nearly identical. Inspired by the article, I began to study the good, the bad and the not so pretty in teamwork and leadership skills both in Adventure Racing and in my life as a full time Firefighter, and this series of short articles is the cliff notes version of what I discovered about How Winning Works! Here are the 8 Essential Leadership Lessons from the Toughest Teams on Earth (which is also the title of my New York Times Bestselling Book -- that's the beginning and end of the shameless plugs, btw. :)

### **Total Commitment**

"People who have lost heart have never yet won a trophy" --Greek Proverb

"Commitment starts when the fun stops"! --RB

"I'm a great believer in luck. I find that the harder I work, the more I have of it."  
--Benjamin Franklin

## Inspiring and Demonstrating "The 4 Ps of Total Commitment":

**Planning**-- You MUST have a clear and easily understandable plan (direction, methods, checkpoints, destination) that is consistently communicated to the rest of the team, and ensure that all team members understand their role within that plan and the ways in which they can help one another get to the finish line. In our experience, "Semper Gumby" (forever flexible!) is also one of the hallmarks of a great navigator/leader, as change is the only thing that will ever stay the same when we're trying to achieve world class results in a constantly changing environment!

**Purpose**--Inspire yourself and your team by focusing on and reaching for something greater than yourselves. Money is powerful as a goal, but great people not only want to do "well" for themselves, they want to do "good" for others and their communities. Give people a way to create a "greater good" through your organization, and watch them rise to the occasion, personally and professionally.

**Perseverance**--Great winners always find a way, every day, to move forward toward their goals, mentally, spiritually, and physically. And make sure you reward people for their consistent, small, day to day steps, and not only the big leaps. Success is often based on consistency, and ultimately, the small steps have more long term impact than the big ones when it comes to reaching huge, hairy, audacious finish lines. In the fire academy, we learned that water is extremely hot at 211 degrees, but it boils at 212 degrees. You never know when that 1 degree of extra effort is going to change outcomes. Perseverance, and going the extra step every day (versus occasionally going the extra mile), is the key!

**Preparation**--Luck=Opportunity+Preparation. All consistently high performing teams have one thing in common: their world class preparation. How do you think they get so "lucky"!? And not only are they out-preparing their competitors, they are always scanning the horizon for opportunities and **creating** opportunities by understanding, mining and capitalizing on their unique strengths and core competencies. What do you do better than anyone else in the industry? And are you preparing every day to capitalize on those strengths?

Remember: COMMITMENT STARTS WHEN THE FUN STOPS! You don't find out if your team is truly committed until they're faced with times of great challenge and change. For World Class Teams, these times are a catalyst to make them even better...together!



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"adventures in teambuilding"