

SPEAKER CHAMPION AUTHOR
PETER VIDMAR

“How to Keep Your Eye on the Gold”

by Peter Vidmar

R
I
S
K



O
R
I
G
I
N
A
L
I
T
Y



V
I
R
T
U
O
S
I
T
Y

Recently, I gave a presentation that was a departure from the kind of program I usually deliver. I was asked to speak to a community business organization that promotes moral and ethical leadership. My topic (borrowing a phrase from my friend Michael Josephson) was, “Pursuing Victory with Honor: Ethics at the Olympic Games.”

I reminded the audience that of all major sporting events we follow (Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Finals, Stanley Cup, etc.), only one begins with the athletes taking an oath to play fairly and with sportsmanship. At the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, one athlete, representing all athletes, holds a corner of the Olympic flag and recites the following:

"In the name of all competitors, I promise we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the spirit of true sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our teams."

Sadly, that oath has been broken many times. Even the ancient Olympics in Greece had its scandals. The earliest recorded cheater was Eupolus of Thessaly, who bribed boxers in the 98th Olympiad. Callippus of Athens bought off his competitors in the pentathlon during the 112th festival. And The Emperor Nero didn't even finish the Chariot race, but was declared winner! We have to look no farther than the recent headlines regarding Marion Jones to know that the modern Olympics are not free from unethical behavior.

But there are many inspiring examples of individuals who, while striving to be the very best athlete, didn't lose sight of being a very good person as well. Let me share with you just one story.

At the 1964 Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria, the clear favorites in the four-man Bobsled event were the Austrians and Italians. The Canada 1 team was not expected to win. But on the very first run, Canada broke the Olympic record and was leading after the first heat. But on the very last turn of their record breaking run, the Canada 1 sled hit the ice wall, damaging the axle. If the axle couldn't be fixed, their quest for the gold medal would end.

So imagine the worry, then the surprise as the Canadian driver, Victor Emory, reached the top of the mountain only 15 minutes before his next run to find his sled upside down. It was said that Eugenio Monti, the legendary Italian team driver, didn't want to win unless they raced against the best, and the best were competing on equal terms. So his team pitched in to fix the Canadian sled. As a result, Canada 1 was able to race and hold on to its lead...and the gold medal was theirs. Italy's Eugenio Monti and his team took home the bronze medal.

The story gets better.

A few days later, in the two-man Bobsled event, Tony Nash of Great Britain, recorded the fastest run in the first heat, but a bolt attaching the runners to the shell sheared off. Just before Eugenio Monti took his sled down the track, he said, "Get an Englishman and a spanner to the finish and they can have my bolt." After his run, he removed the bolt from his own sled and had it brought up the mountain to be attached to the British bobsled. Tony Nash and his partner Robin Dixon took home the gold for Great Britain and Eugenio Monti took home the bronze for Italy. For his sportsmanship, Monti was awarded the "Pierre de Coubertin" award for fair play. Although Eugenio Monti was viciously criticized in the Italian press; he was firm in his conviction that he did the right thing. "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt," he said. "He won because he had the fastest run."

Lately, I've been spending some time researching fascinating stories like this, of individuals who understand what it means to pursue excellence at the very highest level, and not forget to help others achieve their dreams as well. These people are my heroes.

Competing in sports is much like competing in the workplace, where you may find yourself competing *with* your teammates, while simultaneously competing *against* them for individual honors. I don't see many corporations with two presidents. A wise coach once taught me, that if I ever want help in life, I have to be willing to give help as well. When teams and individuals work together, everyone improves. Now that's what I call *win-win!*

For more information on Peter Vidmar, please visit
http://www.speakersoffice.com/peter_vidmar.asp or www.petervidmar.com

Extra Effort

It only takes a fraction more.



by Peter Vidmar

HOW OFTEN DO YOU HEAR a parent, coach, or teacher, say, “You better study twice as hard if you’re going to get success?”

The sentiment makes sense, but the math doesn’t. Most of the time, no matter how much we might want to, we simply can’t double any significant effort. It’s not possible in the case of a world-class athlete. In my sport, any gymnast hoping to make the Olympics must work out at least five hours a day. So if I’m going to double my training, I have to train 10 hours a day. Technically, that may be possible, but from a physical standpoint, it makes no sense. It would be exhausting to the point of being counterproductive.

Just a Fraction Longer

So, the key to improving isn’t to work twice as hard, but just a fraction harder, or smarter, or longer. In the end, it’s the fraction that matters. Increase the quality of your effort bit by bit. Being the best is never really a matter of being twice as good as someone else. It’s usually measured by fractions.

In the Olympic arena, you will find example after example. Connie Carpenter-Phinney won the women’s road racing gold medal in cycling in the 1984 Olympics after 50 miles of racing—by one inch. Gary Hall Jr. won the 50-meter freestyle at the 2004 Athens Games by 1/100th of a second. In Track & Field, Justin Gatlin won the 100 meters in Athens to become the *Fastest Man in the World*. The fourth place finisher was just 4/100ths of a second behind!

No one wins by running twice as fast or jumping twice as far. They win by fractions—by portions of seconds undetected to the naked eye.

In *Sports Illustrated*, George Plimpton told a story about a phenomenal new rookie playing baseball for the New York Mets named Hayden “Sidd” Finch. Sidd was a pitcher who could throw a baseball 168 miles an hour—a third faster than anybody in

the major leagues; a third faster, in fact, than anyone had ever thrown a baseball in history.

Plimpton reported that Finch was proving to be unhittable in spring training. The Mets’ best hitters were going up to the plate and not swinging until the ball was already in the catcher’s mit.

“It’s possible that an absolute super-pitcher is coming into baseball,” Plimpton wrote. “So remarkable that the delicate balance between pitcher and hitter could be turned into disarray. He may well change the course of baseball history.”

Sidd Finch and his 168 mph fastball may, indeed, have changed the course of baseball history—except for one detail. He did not exist. Plimpton’s arti-



cle appeared in the April 1 edition of *Sports Illustrated*. He made the whole thing up. It was all an elaborate April Fool’s joke, which the magazine revealed in its following issue. There was no phenom/mystic named Sidd Finch. The Mets weren’t shoo-ins for the pennant and the World Series. The joke was on the readers.

The possibility was intriguing, however. What if a person really could perform a third above the rest? What would be the impact? Such a performer really could change the course of sport’s history.

But in the normal scheme of things, it just doesn’t work that way. Not only can’t we throw twice—or even a third—as fast as everyone else, or jump twice as high as others, we

can’t work twice as hard, either. But we can always work just a little bit harder, or a little bit smarter.

Just 15 Minutes More

When I made the Olympic team along with Mitch Gaylord and Tim Daggett I knew I couldn’t outwork them by very much, if at all. We’d been teammates at UCLA for four years, and I knew how hard they trained. In college I had a more modest goal, and it was this: I’d be the last person out of the gym every day. That was hard to do when the rest of the team had that same goal! Workouts would get really long! But, every once in a while, I accomplished my goal. At the end of the day, I’d find myself in an empty gym by myself. I’d work an extra 15 or 20 minutes and feel like I was gaining ground.

I once calculated just how much of a difference 15 extra minutes a day could make. If you did that every day for a year, it would add up to 91 more hours of training. Think of the benefits if that training were applied to those skills that needed a little extra attention. For an athlete training three hours a day, 15 extra minutes a day over a year adds up to an extra month of training. Little extra efforts do make a big difference, when measured over time.

But where do you find the time to give that little extra effort, especially when your life is already so busy? Here’s a startling exercise I want you to do. Analyze one typical day by keeping a minute-by-minute log of your activities. List all of the little “time wasters” you do in each day (e.g., idle chatter, watching television, daydreaming, internet surfing). Calculate how much time you can gain by eliminating those obstacles to real effectiveness. Commit yourself *now* to meaningful lasting changes to these behaviors. Chances are, you will be amazed at the increase in your productivity and the time you have left over for the important stuff in life, like time with loved ones.

The extra attention you give to your client. The daily extra call you make to a customer. The hand written *thank you* note you send to someone. The unscheduled moments you take to play with your son or daughter. Little extra efforts *do* make a big difference. Because sometimes the small stuff really is the big stuff. PE

Peter Vidmar, Olympic gymnastics champion, is an expert and speaker on personal achievement, co-chair of the US Olympic Committee Summer Sports Summit, and the author of Risk, Originality, and Virtuosity, the Keys to a Perfect 10. peter@petervidmar.com

ACTION: Improve little by little.

Risk and Reward

Take only the sensible, calculated risk.



by Peter Vidmar

AT THE 1983 WORLD Gymnastics Championship, held in the Budapest (Hungary) Sports Arena, I fell nine feet, but that wasn't the worst of it. Just moments before, I was going through a routine on the high bar that I thought would make me the world horizontal bar champion. I was in second place going into the high bar finals, close enough to be thinking about winning the title. And when the Japanese gymnast who was leading the competition fell during his routine, the cameras focused in on me.

I was ready. All I had to do was nail my routine. But there was one slight problem. I was suddenly having difficulty with a risk skill in my high bar routine—a tricky maneuver that I'd managed to pull off without a hitch in the preliminaries, but now was giving me problems. This was a skill that had made me a contender. Indeed, this was the one skill I needed to win.

As I warmed up, I kept having problems and became very frustrated. Worry soon gave way to panic. I looked at my coach and said, "You've gotta help me. Suddenly I can't do this right! It's my only risky skill! I have to do this! What's wrong?"

He watched me and said, "Just pike more on your swing. Arch more at the bottom. Let go of the bar a little later." He followed these tips with the ultimate coaching, teaching and leadership wisdom: "Just do it right!"

But I wasn't doing it right, and for a moment I thought about not doing it, leaving it out. Why not? I wouldn't get the two-tenths of a point awarded for risk, but I could still score as high as a 9.8—and that score would likely win the bronze medal, maybe even the silver. But I knew that I wouldn't win the gold medal without taking some chances.

I also knew that it wasn't every day you get a chance to be a world champion—in anything. Now I had that chance—and was I going to play it safe? Was I going to throw out the risk now that I was this close? No! I decided to leave that risky skill in. With it, I would ride to the top. All I had to do now was perform my routine successfully, and I would become the *World Horizontal Bar Champion*.

My risk skill came right at the beginning of the routine. So, I swung around the bar, let go, came straight up over the bar, did a half turn, straddled my legs, came back down, caught the bar, immediately let go again, did a back flip with the half turn in the pike position, and came back down to catch the bar—but the bar was not there.

That's when gravity prevailed.



After dropping nine feet, I hit the mat. Now, in my sport, you're only allowed one dismount in a performance. So, I did the only thing I could do. I jumped up off the floor, grabbed the bar again, and finished my routine.

I'd blown it. I'd choked. I'd failed and placed eighth (there were only eight people in the competition).

What bothered me the most was that I didn't come through. I honestly thought I would. That's what I kept thinking. *I thought I would come through!* Doubts suddenly came creeping in from all corners. Deep down I wondered: Will I ever rise to the occasion under pressure? Do I have what it takes? When the heat is on, will I always crack?

As I walked away, my coach cornered me and said, "Pete, this is not the end. *Everything* is a learning experience. You can benefit from this."

He was right. This was a valuable learning experience. That fall taught me this: Never take any risk for granted.

I promised myself that from that day forward, if I was going to take risks, I

was going to be ready for them. The Olympics were eight months away. I resolved that I'd either go back to the high bar at the end of my workouts or stay on the bar longer, and I'd work overtime on that risky double release move. I had learned my lesson. The next time the heat was on, I would not fall.

By the Olympics, I was a lot more comfortable with that risky release. I jumped up and grabbed the bar in the all-around finals at the Los Angeles Olympic Games. About a minute later, I had scored a perfect 10.

Looking back, I can say that I'm glad I fell in Budapest. Sometimes it is necessary to fail. Often, that's how we learn. It wasn't fun at the time, but it taught me to focus. Respecting a risk is every bit as important as taking one.

I suggest you make a list of some of your mistakes and ask, "Have I learned from each mistake? If so, what?" *Write it down.* If you haven't learned from that mistake, look at it again.

After completing this exercise, think of the next big bold task you would like to accomplish—the one that's a bit of a stretch for you. Ask yourself, "Is it meaningful? Is it worth the effort? What's the potential?" *Write it down.* What are the habits or behaviors that will prevent you from achieving that goal? What will you do to avoid those habits or behaviors? *Write this down.* What are the habits or behaviors that will contribute to your reaching that goal? How will you acquire those habits? *Write this down.*

Explore ways in which sensible, calculated risk-taking can help you get where you want to go, instead of where the risks want to take you. The pursuit of meaningful personal excellence will require some risk taking. Is your risk calculated? A calculated risk is clearly in focus, well considered and understood, and is seen as worth taking. An uncalculated risk is neither researched nor understood. Usually, it's just stupid. Consider whether the potential consequences are worth the gamble. These basic, simple exercises can make for a safer journey.

Remember: If not for risks, rewards would lose much of their value. My fall in Budapest taught me not to avoid risks, but rather that a life without risk—a life of safe mediocrity—hurts much more than a "face plant." PE

Peter Vidmar, Olympic gymnastics champion, is a speaker on personal achievement. He is co-chair of the US Olympic Committee Summer Sports Summit and author of Risk, Originality, and Virtuosity, the Keys to a Perfect 10. peter@petervidmar.com

ACTION: Go for the meaningful reward.

SPEAKER CHAMPION AUTHOR
PETER VIDMAR

My Father, John Vidmar

by *Peter Vidmar*

It was the early 1950's. The country was still recovering from the second World War, and John Vidmar felt he was a fortunate man. He had a good job and was rising through the ranks as a sales rep with a large pump company in Los Angeles. He had two college degrees, a wonderful wife and a young, growing family.

But then one day, my dad stopped for lunch between appointments. He noticed he was having trouble swallowing his food. After lunch, he stopped by the doctor's office on the way to a business appointment scheduled for later that afternoon.

The doctor, who spotted the polio symptoms immediately, told my dad he had to get to the hospital, to which he replied that he couldn't possibly do that, he had an appointment he couldn't afford to miss. He had a *job*.

"John," the doctor said, "you don't understand."

Forty-eight hours later he lay in the hospital—paralyzed in a hospital ward with forty other people, all but two of them young children—polio's usual victims. A man who only days earlier had been a picture of healthy perpetual motion was now confined to dining every night through a straw. Polio—a disease so cruel that it doesn't let you move but still lets you feel—demands patience of you. All you can do is wait. Day after day, week after week, my dad lay there, his life in the balance, hoping the virus *poliomyelitis* would run its course and somehow spare him the kind of destruction you can't repair.

As he lay there his main thought was about what this was doing to his young family. It was that concern, he said later, more than any other, that heightened his determination to see this thing through. He needed to get back out on the road and make sales and *provide for his family*.

And that's exactly what he did. The doctors came close to putting him in an iron lung when his breathing got so labored that it appeared he would no longer be able to get enough oxygen on his own. At one point a doctor actually sent out a call for the dreaded machine that would make the body so dependent that it could never be removed. But then bad fortune turned to good. His breathing got better, and the virus disappeared, its exit every bit as abrupt as its entrance.

It left him with a permanently atrophied left leg that never would get much bigger than a No. 2 pencil. It also left him without the use of a number of other muscles throughout his body. But it left him, that was the main thing, and when he got out of the hospital he hit the sidewalk—figuratively, at least—running. There were months of rehabilitation at home to come. Hundreds of baths using a crane and pulley system. Thousands of hours re-training all the muscles that could still be re-trained. But as soon as it was humanly possible, John Vidmar was back making his rounds, back climbing the corporate ladder. He eventually progressed from sales rep to senior vice president in charge of all international operations for what became the largest pump company in the world.

One day, when I was 10 years old, my father came home from work with a bloodied face and broken glasses. My mother gasped, thinking he had been mugged. Dad explained that he had tripped while walking across the street. Apparently, his good leg had landed in a pothole and his "bum" leg couldn't support his weight in the following step.

R
I
S
K



O
R
I
G
I
N
A
L
I
T
Y



V
I
R
T
U
O
S
I
T
Y

R
I
S
K



O
R
I
G
I
N
A
L
I
T
Y



V
I
R
T
U
O
S
I
T
Y

He went down, hard, hitting the pavement face first. He talked of the embarrassment of getting picked up off the street by a gathering of strangers. I will never forget what followed. With a big smile on his face, my father chuckled and said, "I've got to be more careful next time." That was it. I never heard him complain about what everyone else called a handicap.

My father's example helped me become an Olympic champion. Whatever my coach seemed to inflict on me, I accepted, without complaint. How could I complain when every night I came home to a father who never quit?

People face tough times. You don't need to tell Olympians that some things don't always go according to plan. We all face setbacks and changing conditions. But organizations and individuals can still thrive in difficult environments. They may need to take more calculated risks; they may need to innovate, and look for ways to take their products or services to new levels. Or, like John Vidmar, they may need to dig deeply within, to find strength they never knew they had, until circumstances gave them no other choice.

*For more information on Peter Vidmar, please visit
http://www.speakersoffice.com/peter_vidmar.asp or www.petervidmar.com*

SPEAKER CHAMPION AUTHOR
PETER VIDMAR

R
I
S
K



O
R
I
G
I
N
A
L
I
T
Y



V
I
R
T
U
O
S
I
T
Y

Mind over Mattress:

10 Tips to Stay Committed to Your New Year's Fitness Resolution

by *Peter Vidmar*

Since I continue to perform on the pommel horse every time I speak (and because people who are good at math realize my Olympic experience was quite a few years ago), I'm constantly asked what my fitness regimen consists of. Before I go into that, let me comment first on health and wellness in general.

As the Vice Chair of the California Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and a former member of the President's Council, I'm a deeply committed advocate of fitness for people of all ages. I firmly believe, and mountains of evidence support, that when we exercise regularly and eat properly, improve our quality of life, as well as increase our propensity to living a longer life. Who doesn't want to reduce the risk of premature death, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, colon cancer, breast cancer, depression and anxiety, while improving your psychological well being and enhancing our work lives, too?

However, too often we let our busy schedules hinder any commitment we may have to work towards our fitness goals. While I'm far from perfect, I have been consistent with my wellness program by practicing the art of "mind over mattress". Please don't think I'm advocating less sleep here. Practicing "mind over mattress" refers to the time we may choose to exercise. We all know it's often hard and inconvenient to interrupt our workday with a run, swim, or trip to the gym. Some people do use the middle of the day to exercise, but for most of us it's difficult. So what's left? Mornings and evenings – we can either commit to exercise as soon as we rise each morning or before we go to bed. Because I'm a morning person and my days may keep me busy until late at night, I have found it most convenient to exercise in the morning as soon as I leave my mattress.

I vary my workouts among the things I love most, such as cycling with friends, running with my yellow lab Jasper, or surfing with my son. Every morning, I try to do something (though I do rest on Sundays). My fitness regimen also consists of resistance training: push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, and weights a few days a week. Of course, I also do some gymnastics exercises (that I don't recommend!). Lest I overwhelm you, I do all of this because my work demands that I be very fit. Or as my 95 year old friend and fitness legend, Jack LaLanne, once told me, "I can't die...it will ruin my image!" To enjoy many of the benefits listed above, experts say we really only need regular exercise of 30 to 60 minutes, three times a week. **(If exercise is currently not a part of your life, you should see your physician before embarking on an exercise program.)**

The key, however, to practicing "mind over mattress" is **commitment** - something I learned many years ago through preparing and competing in the Olympics. Soon after I graduated from high school, I found myself on a run with my coach in Colorado Springs.

As we finished, my coach looked at me and said, "Pete, do you know what a vow is?"

Whenever he asked questions, I'd get nervous. I knew he always had a motive behind them, and that motive usually involved more work for me.

"A what?" I said. (I guess I was buying time.)

"A vow," he said.

"Yeah," I answered. "I know what a vow is."

"Let's make a vow," he said. "Let's vow that you will do morning training before breakfast every day like this until you graduate from college. And I will too."

So what was I going to say? No?

"Uh, OK," I said.

"Let's shake on it."

So we shook on it, and when we did, when I shook his hand, even though there was no drum roll, no trumpets blaring, and no lawyers were writing it down, I knew it was binding. I thought, "*I have to do this.*"

Keeping that vow was a piece of cake for the first couple of months, when I was healthy, when I didn't have any early classes, but it definitely became more challenging as I dealt with fatigue, final exams, and other distractions. I never missed a day though. I'd made a commitment and I was going to stick with it, **NO MATTER WHAT.**



Sometimes life requires this kind of “NO MATTER WHAT” attitude. The benefits I’ve received from practicing “mind over mattress” are real and lasting. They go beyond fitness and enhance productivity in every aspect of my life. As you think about your new year’s resolutions for 2009, be sure not only to ask yourself *what* you want to accomplish, but – even more importantly – *how* you will stay committed to your goals. The only thing between wishing for it and achieving it - is the *how*.

Peter’s 10 Tips to Stay Committed to Your New Year’s Fitness Resolution:

- Decide on a specific time to exercise that will be most convenient for you. Start off with 30-60 minutes, three days a week. Schedule this time in your calendar as if it were any other important appointment.
- Find activities you actually enjoy. Do you like to work out alone? Participate in exercise classes at the gym? Or do you enjoy social group sports, such as tennis or basketball? Focus on what is most fun and you’ll be much more likely to stick with it consistently.
- Mix it up. If you do the same thing every day, you will grow tired of it eventually.
- Find a friend, or two. Committing to a friend is easier than committing to a treadmill. If you need someone to really push you along, seek out an expert at a local health club or find a certified personal trainer you’re comfortable with.
- Take it public. Tell family and friends you are committing to a fitness plan. This will help hold you accountable and when other commitments pop up during your regularly scheduled fitness time, they will understand when you have to decline.
- Set measurable objectives. How many inches, pounds do you want to lose? How fast do you want to be able to run a mile? How many points do you want to lower your cholesterol by? Measure your results. Visualize your results.
- Keep a scale by the shower. Most people hate the thought of this, but it can be very motivating when you begin to see results. Weigh yourself every morning. Remember, where performance is measured, performance improves.
- If you travel often for business, don’t watch TV unless you are in the hotel fitness center.
- Don’t think of your fitness program as a “project,” but more as a permanent lifestyle change. (If you need help with this, read tip #2 again.)
- Remember - Have fun! Be positive! And don’t quit!

*For more information on Peter or his speaking topics, please visit:
www.petervidmar.com or http://www.speakersoffice.com/peter_vidmar.asp*