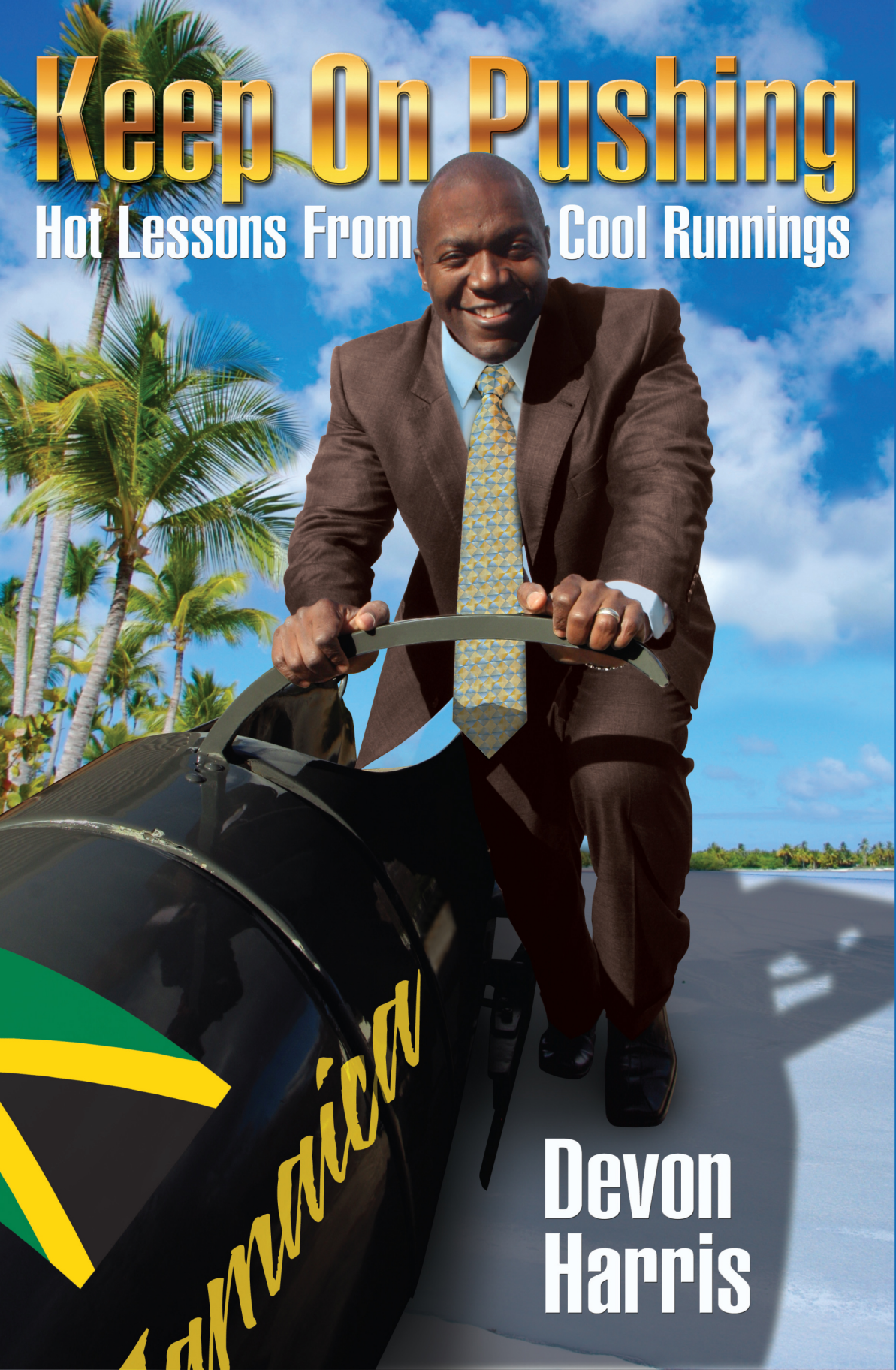
Keep On Pushing

Hot Lessons From Cool Runnings



Devon Harris

Keep On Pushing

Hot Lessons From Cool Runnings

Copyright © 2010 Devon Harris
Designed by Dan Berger
Cover Design by Dawn Lewandowski
Edited by Sean Janson

ISBN: 978-0-9764082-7-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009939365

Keep On Pushing: Hot Lessons From Cool Runnings/Devon Harris

1. Devon Harris, 1964-
2. Olympic Games—Jamaica—Biography
3. Bobsledding—Jamaica—Biography
4. Inspirational

All rights reserved worldwide.
No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written express permission of the publisher.
For information regarding permission, Write to:
Waterhouse Publishing, 40 Sheridan Ave, Congers, NY 10920

Printed in Hong Kong
www.devonharris.com

THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO:

My wife, Nicole.
Thanks for your love and unwavering support

The memory of my grandmother, Loretta Robinson.
You fired up my imagination and turned me into a dreamer.

Acknowledgments

Oh Lord, when I think of where I am coming from and where I am today, I have to say thank you!

Writing a book is an enormous undertaking that requires the help of others to get it done.

The books I have read and the tapes and speeches I have listened to over the years have provided me with invaluable insights as I crafted this book. The many conversations that I have had with friends have also been precious. Thanks guys for jogging my memory with your stimulating discourse.

Special thanks to Stephen Samuels for reading the manuscript multiple times and giving his honest opinion during those long, spirited conversations we had.

Steve Hochman, my brother from another mother, your candor was very helpful as well.

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Lesson 1: Keep On Pushing 13
Chapter 1: Enlarge Your Vision of What's Possible 16
Chapter 2: Push Past Your Limitations 20
Chapter 3: Six Ways You Can Keep On Pushing 31

Lesson 2: Persistence Pays 43
Chapter 4: Strive for Excellence, Not Perfection 45
Chapter 5: Overcoming Inertia 51
Chapter 6: Enduring in the Face of All Difficulties 58
Chapter 7: Bounce Back from a Setback 63

Lesson 3: Pushing Unleashes the Power 81
Chapter 8: What Is Pushing? 84
Chapter 9: What Creates the Impetus for the Push? 87
Chapter 10: What Stops Us from Pushing? 97

Lesson 4: See the Track Before You Take the Track 111
Chapter 11: What is Visualization? 115
Chapter 12: The Weight Room of Your Mind 120
Chapter 13: How Do You Visualize? 124

Lesson 5: Courage Defeats Fear 135
Chapter 14: What Is Fear? 143
Chapter 15: What's the Absolute Worst that Could Happen to You? 150
Chapter 16: What Is Courage? 154

Table of Contents (cont.)

Lesson 6:
The World Eventually Sees What You See in the Mirror 163
Chapter 17: What Is Self Image? 168
Chapter 18: Developing a Positive Self Image 176

Lesson 7:
Twists and Turns Are Natural Parts of the Course 185
Chapter 19: It's an Obstacle Course to the Finish Line 188
Chapter 20: Learn to Navigate the Turns 191
Chapter 21: Feel the Rhythm 199

Lesson 8: Teamwork Makes the Dream Work 205
Chapter 22: Getting on the Sled 208
Chapter 23: Have an Unwavering Vision 215
Chapter 24: Together Everyone Achieves More 218

Lesson 9: Winning is Not Always About the Final Score 227
Chapter 25: Learn and Grow from Your Experiences 230
Chapter 26: Pursue Your Own Definition of Success 237
Chapter 27: Inspire Others to be Their Best 240

Lesson 10: Out of Many, We All Are One 243
Chapter 28: People are People 245
Chapter 29: Nationalism Gives Way to Athleticism 252
Chapter 30: Equal Opportunity Requires
Personal Responsibility 257

The Keep On Pushing Foundation 265
Bibliography 267
Index 269

Introduction

It is 1993, and I am walking briskly up Gun Hill Road in the Bronx, the frigid pre-dawn wind sweeping across my face. I remember this winter date – January 18th – very clearly. It was Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and I was on my way to my first day of work at the Jamaican restaurant just up the road.

I arrived in the United States just three weeks prior, on December 23rd. Two days later, on Christmas Day, I celebrated my 28th birthday in my new home, my new country. When I boarded the flight in Kingston, I was still officially a captain in the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF). Back then, the only time I went into a kitchen was to inspect it. Now I was on my way to start working in one as a line cook. Less than a year before I was in Albertville, France competing in my second Olympic Games. And now, as tens of millions before me had done, I had come to America to chase my American dream.

So here I am on a day that honors the quintessential American dreamer, inhaling the wintry air and wondering what life in America had in store for me. Decades before, Dr. King had clearly defined *his* dream, and although I still wasn't clear about what *mine* looked like, I had high hopes. I slackened my pace momentarily, closed my eyes and inhaled deeply. As the cold air filled my lungs, I could feel the possibilities permeating every fiber of my being. But my most pressing need that day was to begin that new job, and I was grateful for the work as I had a wife and a two-year-old son to support.

Flash forward sixteen years. I still find myself spending a lot of time in the kitchen, only this time I am preparing meals for my family in my home just north of New York City. If – or more accurately – when, my wife, Nicole, a respiratory therapist, gets

her way, I will be living on the water in a warmer part of the United States. Unlike her, I like my water frozen, and I would choose cold weather over the tropical heat any day. She scratches her head every time I say that. "Where were you born?" she would ask mockingly. But I love it here. The changing seasons remind me of the rhythms of my life. My favorite is autumn; I am enthralled by the beauty of brown, yellow and orange leaves breaking up the city skyline through the branches and then finally falling and carpeting the ground.

I am writing this introduction on my laptop, sitting in my backyard, and trying to convince my fourth of five children, Summer, to play on her slide. For now, she is much more interested in playing one of her games on my computer. I know that three-year-olds can be very persistent, but she seems to be even more so than most. I wonder where she could have gotten *that* from?

As the scent of freshly mowed grass permeates the air, I know the sputter I hear in the distance is my neighbor's lawn mower, and not the gunshots that used to be my lullaby as I would fall off to sleep in our Kingston home.

The oldest of fifteen brothers and sisters, I grew up with half of my siblings. Like everyone else around us, we managed to find peace and security in the middle of the chaos and danger that enveloped us. I look back now and realize how terrified we really were.

Every single day I am reminded of how far I have traveled. From the slums of Olympic Gardens, living in a two-room wooden shack, to the prestige of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the officer corps of the Jamaica Defence Force, where I smoothed out my rough ghetto edges and learned to be a gentleman. From dreaming about running track in the Olympics, to competing in three Olympics as a member of Jamaica's historic bobsled team. From being shot at on the streets of Kings-

ton, to being on a feature film set watching a Hollywood movie being shot about an important part of my life.

Today, I travel around the world as a motivational speaker, giving keynote addresses and workshops to audiences full of senior executives from Fortune 100 corporations, sharing a lifetime of lessons learned about perseverance and teamwork. My foundation creates and runs programs aimed at improving the lives of less fortunate children across the globe. As often as I can, I visit schools and speak to the children. I encourage *them* to always have a dream, and to work hard towards making that dream come true.

I still marvel at the fact that, as small as Jamaica is, as a kid I didn't even know where the airport was. Now, I make my way through airports around the globe with the ease and familiarity of a seasoned traveler. To think that the greatest businesses around the world find value in what a barefoot boy from a Kingston ghetto has to say, or that I may be able to inspire a poor child who has some big dreams of her own, is humbling, exhilarating, gratifying. It is a huge responsibility and I take it seriously.

In some ways this sounds like the stuff that Hollywood movies are made of. And, of course, after *Cool Runnings'* great success, it is literally true.

I am so grateful to God. All this used to be a dream. Now I am living it. I live it every day. Yeah mon, I love it!

Even as I encourage *them* to ***Keep On Pushing***, I keep pushing *myself* as well. Pointing to the *great* things I have done in the past is wonderful, but the real power of my message lies in what I am doing with my life today. We all must find a way to ***Keep On Pushing.***

During the eighteen months I worked in that restaurant on Gun Hill Road, there were many times I was tempted to settle for what I had in hand. I rationalized that if I lived frugally, if I

scrimped and saved, I could carve out a fairly decent life in the Bronx. I was tempted to give up on dreaming big dreams, to become complacent and blend in with the crowd, to settle for far less than what I knew was possible. I came close a few times to doing just that, but there was a voice inside of me that pushed me to do the opposite. It is the same voice that is inside of you. If you listen carefully, you will hear it telling you, "You are more than this." "There is greatness inside of you." "There is much more that you can do." I chose to listen to that voice. I kept on pushing, and now I have the opportunity to travel the world and inspire audiences with my story. I believe it is our responsibility to ***Keep On Pushing***, to grow as individuals and to strive towards our full potential.

In 1979, the year I started running track, ABC's *Wide World of Sports* ran a series called "Road to Moscow." The series took a peek into the lives of Olympic hopefuls from around the world who were working to compete in the 1980 Summer Games in Moscow. It not only highlighted their athletic lives, but also their personal lives. What I took away from the series was that Olympic athletes were average and ordinary people with extraordinary dreams and an equally strong desire and drive to achieve them. It occurred to me, then, that virtually anyone can attain high levels of achievement if they are willing to push themselves long and hard enough.

If you have ever wondered about what it takes to qualify for the Olympics, or asked yourself what it must be like to live in the Olympic Village, or how it felt to be front and center in the competition arena; if you are one of the people who believe that bobsleds run on rails, bobsledders are nuts, or that the movie *Cool Runnings* is a purely fictionalized story, then ***Keep On Pushing: Hot Lessons from Cool Runnings*** is for you.

This book is your front row seat to the life of an Olympic athlete, and your ticket to the world of Olympic bobsledding.

These pages will tell you of the hardships and difficulties Olympic athletes face in qualifying for the Games, and the sense of achievement they feel when they finally march in the Opening Ceremonies.

The ensuing chapters will transport you to the real world of bobsledding – its rigors, dangers, excitement and exhilaration. You will learn about the passion that drives them to compete so fiercely, and how that same passion can drive you to achieve your goals.

I wrote ***Keep On Pushing*** to engage you in a conversation about how you can always push yourself past the obstacles in your life to higher levels of achievement. I wrote it to inspire you and to give you tools that worked for me as well as my corporate clients, tools that you can immediately apply to your life.

In keeping with my desire to both encourage and challenge, and my wish to see you apply the lessons that I am passing on to you in this book, you will find a section at the end of each chapter entitled "Key Points to Remember." These are the most salient points in the chapter. Review them frequently. They will serve as your own motivational booster to get you through the day. In time, you will find that they have significantly influenced your thinking as you embrace this philosophy of ***Keep On Pushing.***

You will also find an assignment at the end of each chapter. Put time aside to do them. My suggestion is that you read through the book once and then, as you go through it again perhaps more slowly, spend some time digesting the Key Points to Remember before completing each assignment and moving to the next chapter.

You will notice that I have included quotes from several well-known persons, as well as some whom you may not easily recognize. That's because I believe that everyone who has succeeded, whether they are famous or less well-known, can con-

tribute to our growth and development. As a result, I have taken inspiration from all of them. I hope you will too.

You will read about how I made up my own training programs in high school after reading books on middle distance running. I encourage you to do the same here. No one knows you and your heart's desire the way you do. It is your life. Shape it in the way you want. This book is a tool to help you dream, plan, and execute... so use it!

And, as always: Keep On Pushing!

Devon Harris

Lesson One

Keep On Pushing

"Man was created as a being who should constantly keep improving, a being who on reaching one goal sets a higher one."

Ralph Ransom - American Writer

In bobsledding, the uninformed observer only sees, at the start, the massive pushing of the sled from the starting blocks. However, anyone who has learned how to push a bobsled knows that there are different phases of the push, each designed to apply constant pressure on the sled while exerting maximum effort and ultimately attaining the best result. First, there is the explosive force of the push on the sled as the team pushers overcome inertia to get the 650-lb. mass of fiberglass and metal moving. Should they stop there, the sled would eventually come to a stop or slowly trickle along the slippery ice until gravity starts pulling it down the track. From there, they transition into their running form, plowing through the first fifteen meters of the ice, constantly applying pressure to the sled and accelerating down the hill.

The common mistake that most beginner brakemen make is to take their hands off the push bar as they transition from their

initial burst of force on the sled to a normal running form. The secret is to rotate your hands as you change grips. If you take your hands off the push bar you run the risk of falling. As the sled comes out of the blocks, the brakeman's body is at about a thirty degree angle. This position leaves him slightly off balance. With the piston-like movement of his feet keeping him ahead of the sled, his hands on the push bar keep him balanced until he is able to get into a normal running form. The other important reason to always keep your hands on the push bar is that if you remove them, even for a split second, you are not pushing, and are therefore wasting valuable time.

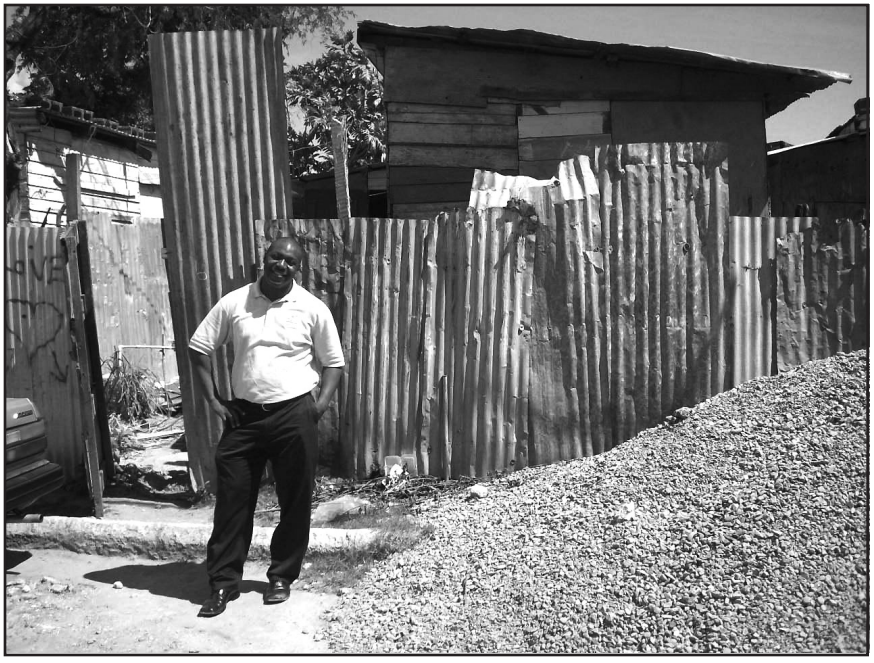
When the sled is going as fast as the pusher is running he is in effect no longer pushing. At that point he jumps in, using his momentum and the weight of his body to give the sled one final jolt forward. Because the start is such a critical part of the race, it is important that the athlete keeps pushing the sled until it has developed enough momentum to travel under its own power. Once the sled is traveling under its own power, applying the brakes will slow it down; but its momentum and the pull of gravity means that it is virtually impossible to stop it.

The same holds true for us in life. Every desire, every worthwhile goal, every dream that you have in life is sitting on its equivalent of a 650-lb. bobsled. In order to make them a reality, you must launch with maximum effort and then continue to push forward with zest. As with the bobsled athlete, when you begin to make steady progress towards your goals you must maintain the intensity. This builds up momentum and gives you the best chance of reaching your full potential.

I believe that life is a process of constant pushing. ***Keep On Pushing*** speaks to the idea of persevering, being persistent, never giving up. It is impossible to achieve high-level success without meeting opposition, without having to face a 650-lb. sled at the start of your journey. Success dictates that you keep pushing

these challenges out of the way, or push yourself over the barriers.

Keep On Pushing also embodies the concept of redefining your limits, constantly going beyond what you originally thought was possible, growing, striving to reach your full potential and embracing change. It is this aspect of ***Keep On Pushing*** that I would like to focus on next.



Revisiting the house I grew up in on Sunrise Drive in Olympic Gardens. Seven of us lived here.

CHAPTER 1

Enlarge Your Vision of What's Possible

"We all have possibilities we don't know about.
We can do things we don't even dream we can do."
Dale Carnegie - American Writer and Lecturer

Human beings are designed and created for great success. Deep in our core lies an innate and powerful desire for full expression of our abilities. There is a seed of greatness in everyone, and each person is at least remotely aware of the incredible things they could do with their lives. This is why we live so vicariously through our heroes – star athletes, pop icons, Hollywood celebrities and so on. Observe children at play, or daydreaming. They all imagine themselves as someone great. A superhero, a famous actor, a stellar athlete. I have never seen a child at play pretending to be an ordinary Joe. I suspect that children have always been this way, but technology, economics and social factors prevented most from pursuing their visions of greatness. Unfortunately, after they outgrew the Superman cape, many of these kids allowed themselves to be saddled by a very limited view of what is possible in their lives, and never adjusted their self-imposed limitations, even into

adulthood. Today, the opportunities exist for everyone to use their particular mix of talents and attributes to achieve something great in life. Despite the evaporation of trillions of dollars from the stock market, there are still more self-made millionaires than there were five or ten years ago. In every area of human endeavor – science, business, art, politics, sports – people are soaring to heights never before imagined. Yet success still eludes many.

Unfortunately, they have succumbed to the challenges of life, and have settled for just getting by. You have the ability to join the ranks of those who have found success and happiness. You have the ability to achieve far more than you have achieved up to this point. All you have to do is ***Keep On Pushing*** beyond the status quo. It is almost criminal how far below our full potential many of us live our lives. We have allowed the circumstances of our birth, society, and the economy to determine the level of our success. I believe that those excuses are almost laughable today. No matter your circumstances, there are many with similar conditions who found a way to rise above them. The great "secret" to their success, and yours as well, is this: It doesn't matter where you are coming from. All that matters is where you are going. Neither your past nor your current situation has to be equal to your future. Renowned American psychologist Abraham Maslow said, "People have a tendency to settle for far less from life than they are truly capable of." Many are stuck in dead end relationships, grappling with floundering businesses or twirling their thumbs in dead end careers when they should be moving rapidly onward and upward.

The goal, the singular focus at the top of a bobsled track is to have the fastest start. A fast start gives the team a reasonable chance of winning the race. Granted, the team still has to negotiate the rigorous turns up ahead, all of which present their own

unique set of challenges. But that is simply accepted as the price you pay to reap success. The push is key, and at the start of every race you can hear coaches and supporters shouting, "Big push! Big push!" egging their team on and getting them juiced up for this important part of the race. And even though the push is only used to describe what happens at the start, the driver must ***Keep On Pushing*** during the run. Hanging back, as I used to do in my middle distance races, and going for the big kick at the end is not a luxury he can afford. He is constantly pushing himself to the edge of his abilities to get the sled down the track as fast as possible. In the bobsled race of life, the individuals, companies and organizations who continue to push hard after overcoming the initial inertia at the start are those who often enjoy meteoric rise and success. Although we have the ability to deliver that big push, not everyone does, nor maintains the intensity.

NON-STARTERS

In life there are many who simply refuse to turn up at the start. Their only focus is on how difficult the track is. They limit themselves by fearing the crash: the chances of the business failing, getting passed over for the promotion, being hurt in a relationship. They worry about being ridiculed or criticized by others, or a myriad of other things that could go wrong. These folks abandon the hope and the promise that life offers. They sit back and watch those who have the courage to go for the ride surge ahead. Unmotivated, uninspired, they do just enough to get by.

JOGGERS

Joggers take to the start, but instead of pushing with all their might, they choose instead to jog – to take their time. They surmise that if they leave the top of the hill with less speed, they minimize their risk of crashing. They want to play it safe. Unwittingly, they don't realize that the track doesn't care how fast

you are going. Each turn is still perilous. Foolishly, their effort is half-hearted at best. Their input on the job is lackadaisical; their indifference in their relationships glaringly obvious. They refuse to do anything to improve their current level of skill and make very little effort to expand their point of view. They, and others like them, live by the mantra "at least we tried." They find a comfortable place where they can "skate by" and essentially choose mediocrity. Like non-starters, they live compromised lives, hanging on to the illusion of what is, instead of striving for what could be. They have no vision.

PUSHERS

These are the people who approach life with a "balls to the wall" attitude. They are not content living life vicariously through their heroes. While they may look up to these people, they acknowledge that they are made of the same stuff and have the same potential for greatness. Unlike non-starters and joggers, who constantly take an inventory of their shortcomings, pushers refuse to allow what others may consider a disadvantage – race, gender, age, family background or any other obstacle – to stand in their way. These obstacles do not intimidate them. On the contrary; they attack them with a sense of urgency, and use them as fuel to propel their success. Pushers are possibility thinkers. They dedicate themselves to a lifetime of growth and achievement.

CHAPTER 2

Push Past Your Limitations

"Push yourself again and again.
Don't give an inch until the final buzzer sounds."
Larry Bird - American Basketball Player

I believe that we are born with that desire to charge down the bobsled track of life looking for ways to go faster and improve our time. We hate quitting or settling for a place that is unworthy. Every one of us has the capacity to dream grand dreams, which in turn inspire us to constantly push towards higher levels of achievement. Although these things are inside all of us, they do not just bubble up to the surface on their own. They have to be nurtured and developed.

I spent my early years, from seven months old until I was about four years old, with my grandmother in the rural district of Haughton, in the southwestern parish of St. Elizabeth – about seventy-five miles outside of Kingston. Some of my most vivid memories are of the stories she used to tell me about soldiers. Soldiers could perform these amazing physical feats and were always pushing the envelope of their physical abilities. Her stories fired up my young imagination, and although, in my child's

mind, I had strong reservations about being able to jump from multi-story buildings without breaking my legs, I knew I wanted to be a soldier. In high school, I discovered that you could enlist in the Army as an officer. It seemed like a daunting task, but I decided that that was what I wanted to do. To do that meant staying in school and getting good passes in the General Certificate Examinations (GCE) and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) in the 11th grade. GCEs are exams handed down from the University of Cambridge and Oxford that students throughout the English-speaking Caribbean take at the end of high school. Students throughout the United Kingdom take these same exams as well. CXC was the Caribbean version of the English exams. By the time I took them, they were only in their second year of phasing out the GCEs. Students, on the strength of these passes, can enter the job market or go to college.

Succeeding in my GCE and CXC exams, although a huge accomplishment, was only the first step in an Army career. I had to go through a "selection board," a rigorous three-day selection process similar to the Army Officer Selection Board used by the British Army to select its cadets for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. In November, 1984, six months after graduating from high school and unsuccessful in finding a job until I got into the Army, I reported to Up Park Camp – the Army base in Kingston.

Thirty-three of us turned up that morning, and by mid-day, after a series of interviews and medical assessments, we were whittled down to only nine. By early evening we were on a truck heading up to Newcastle. Newcastle is the Training Depot of the Jamaica Defence Force. The base was founded in 1841 by Field Marshal Sir William Gomm, who, incidentally, is the longest serving soldier in Britain. Field Marshall Gomm was an ensign at the age of ten and Constable of the Tower of London over eighty years later at the time of his death in 1875.

In the 1840s, Up Park Camp and the other Army barracks lo-

cated on the Liguanea Plain in and around Kingston were being ravaged by yellow fever. On average, one soldier died every two and a half days. Field Marshall Gomm believed that a mountain station could effectively combat the effects of the disease, and so he relentlessly badgered the War Office in London until they acquiesced. The British government purchased a coffee plantation protruding from the southern face of the grand ridge of the Blue Mountains, and Newcastle became what is believed to be the first permanent mountain station in the British West Indies. Shortly after the camp was established, deaths from yellow fever fell precipitously.

Despite its long and storied history, the thing that strikes you first about Newcastle is its beauty. Nestled in the Blue Mountains – home of Jamaica's world famous Blue Mountain coffee – the camp offers a clear view of the city of Kingston and a spectacular view of the seventh largest natural harbor in the world.

As part of the Selection Board's requirements, we had to give both an impromptu and a prepared speech, and complete a leadership task as well as a physical test in the form of an obstacle course and a long run. Our first morning in Newcastle saw the nine of us standing in an extended line on the obstacle course being given our instructions.

At the time, that was the most important test of my life, and I knew my dream was in sight if I could ***Keep On Pushing***. The atmosphere was really intense. They knocked us off balance with the almost ruthless way in which they conducted the first part of the selection, and have managed to keep the pressure on us ever since. The green Army coveralls we were issued offered little protection from the cold winds blowing off the Caribbean Sea. I don't know if I was shivering because of the cold winds or because my nerves were so frayed.

As I stood there shaking like a leaf on a windy day, I noticed a captain walking down the steps leading to the obstacle course.

He looked so powerful and self-assured. I imagined that not so long ago he was standing where I was, feeling as frightened and vulnerable as I was, and now he was strutting around like a demigod. I decided that if he could do it, then I could; and from that moment on, I knew I would be fine.

In the end, I was the top pick of only three who were selected. Six months later (including eighteen brutal weeks of basic training), I was an officer cadet at Sandhurst, where I received a Queen's commission on December 13th, 1985.

My military career did not get off to the brilliant start I anticipated. I really struggled during the first twelve to fourteen months. A severe shortage of officers resulted in a heavy workload, and the fact that I wasn't as organized as I should have been resulted in me not being as effective as I could have been. My company commander and I had a mutual dislike of each other. He didn't like me because I was from the ghetto, and I disliked him because he stifled me. As I struggled to get my career on track, I constantly felt as if I was locked in a maze and couldn't find my way out. I kept running into dead ends and had to retrace my steps only to find myself hopelessly lost again. The walls of the maze kept moving. Every time I thought I was going to make a breakthrough with my work, the rules of the game changed. There was no consistency. What was acceptable to one of my superiors was absolutely unsatisfactory for another. What one superior would rake me over the coals for, another officer would get a pass on.

I was in a real quandary. My Army career felt like it was on life support, and at that point I had no idea what I would do if my career came to a premature end. Even as I worked to improve my performance, I knew I needed another goal to pursue. I needed something to get my juices flowing and to take my mind off the difficulties I was experiencing in the Army.

I remember the moment as if it were yesterday. I was walking down to the Officer's Mess and I began asking myself, *what now*? I was twenty-one years old and had achieved my life's ambition. Was this it? Was this all there was for me? I would have given anything to become an Army officer, and given my background, the challenges I faced and the obstacles I had to scale to get there, I had achieved greatly. But there had to be more. I loved Army life, but something deep inside told me that there was more to my life. It was during this moment of introspection that I experienced one of those *ah-ha* moments and I revived my secret ambition to become an Olympic athlete.

In high school, I had aspirations of competing in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. As far as I knew, a high school athlete had never represented Jamaica at the Olympic Games, and I wanted to be the first. It never happened. The Olympics came and went, and I was not any closer to achieving that goal. I graduated from high school and enlisted in the Army that year. It was now 1987. The Summer Olympics were coming up in Seoul, South Korea, and I figured that if I got fit enough I would have a shot at representing Jamaica. I started my training in earnest, running five miles every morning before reporting for duty.

That summer, in 1987, exhausted from a long stretch of duty, I ran a cross country race and finished fourteenth from a field of forty. I was way off Olympic pace, but unbeknownst to me I had caught the eye of a few people, including my commanding officer, Colonel Alan Douglas.

A few weeks later, I was on duty at the Battalion Headquarters when the duty clerk walked in with a big stack of mail. I reached in and pulled out one piece. It was the *Force Orders*, which is essentially a weekly newsletter that detailed the happenings in the JDF. Scanning through it, I didn't notice anything unusual until I got to the section on sports. In part that section read:

A.
Applications are hereby invited for personnel who wish to be trained for possible selection to represent Jamaica at the Winter Olympics to be held in Calgary, Canada in February 1988.

B.
Applicants must be in very good physical condition and be wiling to undergo hard and dangerous training.

It actually took me a few readings to figure out that Jamaica was about to start a bobsled team. My first reaction was not unlike that of many people around the world – one of incredulity. Do they know how dangerous that sport is? How would the team train? I doubt that I gave much thought to the fact that the Olympics were less than a year away. After I got over the initial shock I knew I wanted to be part of the team, but I had no idea how I was going to pull it off. I didn't think I was fit enough.

My morning runs were interrupted by duties, so I pushed to get them started again. At the time I did not understand the concept of explosive speed – getting to top speed quickly – so I trained the only way I knew how – I ran. I ran hard and pushed myself harder and harder trying to get in shape. Even though I was training so hard, I wasn't sure that I would even get a chance to attend the team tryouts. There was a distinct possibility that I could have been scheduled for duty that day, and duties take precedence over everything else.

My big break came one day while I was at work. My commanding officer was passing by my office when he called out to me. This made me nervous. The last time he called me over in such a fashion was the week before the cross country race, and I ended up on the duty roster for seven consecutive days, with each tour of duty lasting twenty-four hours. That is what you would call cruel and unusual punishment. This time his instruc-

tions were decidedly different and would impact my life in ways I couldn't have imagined at the time.

"I want you to go out for the bobsled team trials," he said. It seemed like an afterthought – an idea that popped into his head as he was passing my office.

The colonel was not an athlete, although it was fun to watch him put his old soccer moves on display during the occasional match-ups between officers and sergeants. He was a sports fan who hailed from the coastal town of Falmouth, about sixty-five miles from Kingston. Falmouth is the capital of the parish of Trelawny, which was best known for its sugar estates and sugar factories. Now it is known for its yams, since its favorite son, Olympic champion and 100m and 200m world record holder Usain Bolt, jokingly attributed his athletic prowess to them. It is the birthplace of other Jamaican Olympians too, including Beijing 200m Champion Veronica Campbell-Brown. It is also the birthplace of Canadian sprint star Ben Johnson and Voletta Flowers, mother of the late rapper and hip hop icon the Notorious B.I.G.

I don't think I fully appreciated the magnitude of the achievement of competing in the Olympics at the time. Sure, I fulfilled a childhood dream of becoming an Olympian, and did it in a way that was historic, but in one sense it was like just another tour of duty in the Army. Despite all the accolades and attention, I did not see myself as a star. I was just doing my duty. After each bobsled trip overseas, I would literally exchange my bobsled uniform for my Army uniform and go right back to work.

To illustrate: Almost seven months after the Calgary Games, on September 12th, Jamaica was slammed by Hurricane Gilbert, a powerful Category 5 storm. The eastern end of the island was devastated. That night I found myself on patrol on the streets of Kingston with about twenty soldiers from my platoon. As we proceeded down a main road in an area called New Kingston, I heard chattering coming from one of the premises which

was surrounded by a ten-foot wall. I lined my men up against the wall and went up to the heavy metal gate to peer into the dark interior. Before I knew it, a shot ricocheted off the gate just above my head, and by the time I could take cover behind the wall several more shots rang out. In between the shouting and the shooting, I realized that we were being fired on by security guards from the American Embassy. I didn't even know that those premises belonged to the U.S. Embassy, and it was clear that these guards were scared out of their wits. After a few tense minutes, I was able to calm the situation down, lucky to walk away with my life.

During the last few days of the Games in Albertville, in 1992, unknown to me violence and tension had flared up in the garrison communities of Rema and Tivoli Gardens in Kingston. In early February, Mark "Jah T" Coke was killed as a result of a dispute between rival gangs. His father – Lester Lloyd Coke, also known as Jim Brown after the famed American football player – was also a tough gang leader with strong political ties. The older Coke was in jail awaiting extradition to the United States for his role in a number of murders, drug trafficking and other gang-related crimes. But before those proceedings could have been completed he was mysteriously burned to death in his jail cell. It occurred on the same day his son was buried.

When I returned to Jamaica, the troops were deployed around Kingston and, naturally, I traded my bobsled uniform for my Army uniform and joined them. On my second night back in Jamaica, I led an operation into the Maxfield Avenue area. I was on the second floor of a burned-out building overlooking Maxfield Avenue with one group of soldiers positioned to my north and another just south of my position. I had received information that gunmen used one of the gullies in the area as their attack and escape routes. At about three a.m. I noticed a group of about six men crossing Maxfield Avenue. They all had rifles and were

moving towards the rear of the group that was to my south. I immediately got on the radio to alert the sergeant leading that group. By the time I could complete my radio transmission gunfire broke out, and by the time the shooting died down I was unable to raise the sergeant on the radio. The large open lot between my position and the sergeant's was strewn with mounds of garbage and dirt. It was pitch black. As I crawled over to his position, shouting out the sergeant's name, I was quite aware that one of the gunmen could have been lurking behind one of the mounds of dirt. I paused briefly to marvel at the kind of life I led. Only a few days earlier I was at the Olympic Games on television in front of the entire world, and tonight I could be shot and killed in a nondescript, garbage-strewn lot in a Kingston ghetto. In the end, one of my soldiers was grazed by a bullet and one of the gunmen killed.

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL

A few months after the Calgary Olympics, the team began to make a series of public appearances across the United States on behalf of the Jamaica Tourist Board. It was during those trips that I began to notice that there was a big wide world beyond the Army and that somehow it was possible for me to participate in it. Through bobsledding, I began to see that the world was full of opportunities – but more importantly, that I was full of potential.

The biggest lesson I took away from the experience of competing in Calgary is not that I can learn to push a bobsled in a relatively short period of time and become proficient enough to compete in the Olympic Games. What I treasure most from the experience is the knowledge that human beings can achieve anything they set their minds to. The fact is that you and I have more innate potential than we could use if we lived several lifetimes. I have heard it said that if you could run at a hundred miles per hour in the direction of your potential, you would never be able

to come within miles of it. That means that whatever you have accomplished so far in your life pales in comparison to what you have the ability to do. When you strive to unlock your potential you will always raise the bar on your performance; or if the market-place raises the bar, you will be able to respond successfully.

As you know, the high jump is a field event in which competitors must jump over a horizontal bar placed at measured heights without the help of any devices. Although it probably occurred in the Olympics of ancient Greece, the first recorded high jump event took place in Scotland in the 19th century. That unknown jumper cleared a height of 5'6". Early jumpers used a method known as the "scissor kick." This technique required the jumper to approach the bar diagonally and kick one leg up and then the other in a scissoring fashion to get over the bar. The technique had its limitations, as there was only so high you could go. Irish-American M.F. Sweeney developed the "Eastern Cut-off." By starting as if he was going to do the scissors kick and then extending his back and flattening out over the bar, Sweeney achieved a more economic clearance and set the world record at 6'5 1/2" in 1895.

Next came the "Western Roll," developed by another American, M.F. Horine. Using this technique, the bar again is approached on a diagonal, but the inner leg is used for the take-off, while the outer leg is thrust up to lead the body sideways over the bar. Cornelius Johnson won the 1936 Munich Olympics using this technique, and set a new world record of 6'8". Innovative jumpers kept on pushing, or in this case, literally raising the bar. They modified the Western Roll by adding a bit of speed and developed what was known as the "Straddle Technique." As a result, by 1957 the world record was quickly raised to 7'. Once again, this technique proved limiting.

By 1967, the landing surfaces used in the high jump were higher and softer. American Dick Fosbury took advantage of this

by adding a new twist to the outdated Eastern Cut-Off. He directed himself over the bar head and shoulders first, sliding over on his back and landing in a fashion which would likely have broken his neck in the old sawdust landing pits. The "Fosbury Flop," as it was appropriately named, was a far more effective way of clearing the bar, and Dick Fosbury went on to win the gold medal at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games. Every high jumper now uses the Fosbury Flop, and it has been used to break the world record and push the limits of the sport several times. The current world record is held by Cuba's Javier Sotomayor. In 1993, he cleared an amazing 8'1/2."

The history of the high jump demonstrated an interesting and instructive trend. Every time the bar was raised, someone developed a new technique to get over it. This speaks directly to you and everything about your life, business, career, and family. The skills you developed yesterday will limit your potential and hence what is possible in your life the same way those earlier jumping techniques limit the heights to which those jumpers could reach. ***Keep On Pushing*** raises your expectations to become a better person, parent, spouse, manager, leader, and citizen.

CHAPTER 3

Six Ways You Can Keep On Pushing

"To be what we are, and to become
what we are capable of becoming, is the only end in life."
Robert Louis Stevenson -
Scottish Novelist, Poet, Essayist and Travel Writer

Here are six ways in which you can ***Keep On Pushing***:

KOP ONE:
PURSUE EXCELLENCE
In a bobsled competition, the race often continues long after the winners have been declared and, in some cases, the medals have been presented. Interestingly, despite this fact, I have never seen any of the remaining teams approach their runs with a nonchalant attitude. You can easily make the case that completing the race is a mere formality, since the winners have already been declared. However, what I have observed instead are individuals pushing and racing with the ferocity and intensity of a team within striking distance of winning gold and setting a record.

You must give your absolute best effort every time. You have to be willing to push a little harder and to reach just a little beyond where you are right now. Even as the last team approaches

the hill they know that the medal winners have already been decided. And though they don't stand a snowball's chance in hell winning the race, they still put in a gigantic effort because they are striving to improve on their last performance and to create new personal benchmarks. This is what peak performers do, and how they ***Keep On Pushing***. This is the hallmark of excellence. Aristotle said it best when he declared, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit." When you get in the habit of being excellent at what you do, you raise your own level of expectation and are therefore able to reach beyond. In pursuing excellence, you find yourself on a continuous journey. Not pursuing perfection, but rather seeking constant improvement, learning and developing new skills, and satisfying an innate desire to explore our full potential. As the American educator and novelist John Gardener points out, "When we raise our sights, strive for excellence…we are enrolling in an ancient and meaningful cause – the age long struggle of humans to realize the best that is in them."

Keep On Pushing is an ongoing journey and is never an end in itself. The pursuit of personal high performance is the source of tremendous pleasure and gratification. It is the feeling an athlete experiences in victory, a salesperson gets when they reached a quota or a student when they ace an exam. Performing at peak levels is not simply about winning or being number one. It is about pursuing your personal best.

KOP TWO:
CHOOSE CAREFULLY

In order to fully experience this incredible journey called life, you should carefully choose to set compelling goals. Goals act as a conduit for your energies and abilities. They engage your subconscious mind and create and attract the circumstances needed for their attainment. They push you out of your comfort zone

and cause you to stretch beyond your perceived limitations. Living without clear goals is like driving your super fast sports car in a thick fog. Despite its potential to perform at a high level, you are forced to drive slowly, tentatively making very little progress on even the best roads. Choosing clear goals burns away the fog, instantly allowing you to step on the gas pedal of your life and charge rapidly towards becoming who you can be.

While goals open up your eyes and mind to the opportunity for you to succeed, that opportunity itself does not guarantee achievement. It will not present your goals to you in a neatly wrapped package ready for you to enjoy. Opportunities always turn up in work clothes. They present a chance for you to run, lift weights, study, research, go through a training program, develop new habits – in short, grow, so that you can explore your potential.

One shortcut to ***Keep On Pushing*** and becoming excellent at what you do requires you to carefully select your pursuits. Reaching for the stars in your life's pursuit, whatever they might be, involves you having to be willing to pay any price, go any distance and invest any amount of time necessary. Making that kind of effort is easier if you are pursuing something that you thoroughly enjoy. If you try to work at something you don't enjoy or don't believe in you'll never be happy, and you'll never be successful. Having clear goals and working on the things that best suit your talents and interests motivate you to push harder. Unless you really care about your work, you will never be motivated to persist and achieve higher levels.

KOP THREE:
TAKE CONSISTENT ACTION

Action is the bridge between goals and their achievement. No matter how great your aspirations, your chances of realizing them without taking action are as good as trying to win the lot-

tery without buying a ticket. High achievers take massive action in order to unlock their potential. Since winning in any area of life requires you to play full out, you totally immerse yourself in what you need to do in order to win. This means that you become disciplined, and this forces you to do what should be done even when you don't feel like doing it.

We live in what I like to call the microwave society: Everyone wants to enjoy immediate success and be an overnight sensation. Truth be told, the vast majority of those who are enjoying "instant" success endure long periods of sustained effort in order to reach that level of accomplishment. It is consistent action blended with other characteristics (among them intelligence, skill and luck) that gives you the highest probability of unlocking your full potential.

KOP FOUR:
PRACTICE CANI –
CONTINUOUS AND NEVER-ENDING IMPROVEMENT

During one of the public relations trips we made on behalf of the Jamaica Tourist Board in 1988, we had an opportunity to attend a Lakers Game at the old Forum. While there, we met Mike Tyson. Mike had made history himself. He had defeated Jamaican Trevor Berbick to become the youngest heavyweight boxing champion in history. In the ensuing months and years, Mike became invincible. Every opponent who faced him met certain annihilation. Then came Buster Douglas. He was fully expected to meet the same fate as his predecessors, but instead he knocked out "Iron" Mike. The not-so-surprising reason for this is the fact that Mike Tyson had become complacent, and complacency breeds failure. He figured that he had reached the mountain top and he was now untouchable.

Mike was not like the East German bobsled team. In November, 1989, I was in Austria. It was my second week as a bobsled

driver and I was in the warm house calming my nerves before I took to the track. Above the hum of the activities I heard someone exclaim, "My God, they've changed the start again!" The person was referring to the new start technique the East Germans were using. Superior engineering had already given them some of the best sleds on the circuit. They were among the top athletes in the world, and certainly enjoyed a fine bobsled tradition. However, they were not content with their past success. They kept tinkering with and tweaking what they had in order to get better. The next time the East German team was called to the starting blocks, all eyes were trained on them.

The starting block is simply a piece of wood cemented in the concrete of the track. Similar to starting blocks in track and field, the brakeman places his feet on it in order to get a better start. The piece of wood is long enough so that the side pushers on the four-man sled can also use it. Customarily, the brakeman *controls* the push. The rest of the crew waits for him to set the sled. Most brakemen place one foot on the ice with their heel up against the starting block. The point on the ice where the back of the sled meets his toe becomes the set point for the sled. Once the brakeman sets the sled, the driver adopts his starting stance, digging his spikes into the ice and grabbing the push bar firmly. Timing is very important, so the brakeman and driver spend hours working on the start in order to get the timing down.

The technique the East Germans introduced saw the driver placing one of his feet on the starting block and the other dug into the ice. Once the sled is set and the team is ready to push, the brake-man explodes on the sled while the driver pushes off from the starting block and sprints forward to the push bar. With this technique, not only does the driver hit the sled with forward momentum, but it also eliminates the need for the perfect timing which the other technique requires. The East Germans were not satisfied with their past success. They kept on pushing, and

today most of the bobsled world uses the technique they first showcased in 1989.

Tiger Woods was the same way. You may remember when he won the 1997 Masters at Augusta National by a record twelve strokes. Shortly afterwards, he retooled his swing twice. Many thought that it was totally unnecessary, almost silly, for Tiger to change his golf swing. He was regarded as perhaps the greatest golfer of all time, and many experts thought his swing was as close to perfection as any one was going to get. But Tiger was obsessive about improving his game. In an interview with Ed Bradley on CBS's *60 Minutes*, Ed asked him why he changed his swing. His answer came back quickly: "I wanted to get better."

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow." The truly great ones know this. In the 1960s Muhammad Ali floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee. He danced around the ring and skillfully avoided his opponent's best shots. However, in the 1970s, he stood toe to toe with them and willingly traded punches in order to get the win. Michael Jordan added a fade away jumper to his repertoire late in his career after he was no longer able to take off from the foul line. After his eight gold medal performance in Beijing, Michael Phelps is now experimenting with a new freestyle stroke.

During their recovery from World War II, several Japanese companies implemented a philosophy known as *kaizen*. Kaizen, the Japanese word for improvement, focuses on continuous improvement throughout all aspects of life. When applied to the workplace, kaizen activities continually improve all functions of a business, from manufacturing to management and from the CEO to the assembly-line workers. For example, at Toyota, engineers would push a perfectly good assembly line until it broke down and then find and fix the flaws. Like kaizen, ***Keep On Pushing*** embraces the philosophy of continuous and nev-

er-ending improvement in all aspects of your life. It rejects the complacency that Mike Tyson and many others demonstrate in their lives. Whether it is bobsledding, golf, playing a musical instrument, studying, or being a parent or a spouse, the same process of continuous learning and improvement of performance applies.

KOP FIVE:
EMBRACE CHANGE

If there is one thing that you can be sure of, it is that change will happen. It is a natural, inevitable part of life, and remains one of the most important factors affecting our lives today. Perhaps more than at any other time in human history, the speedy infusion of new ideas, knowledge, products and services is creating unprecedented and amazing possibilities for everyone. Apart from being the natural order of things, why is change taking place at such an alarming rate? It is because some individuals decided to ***Keep On Pushing***. They are always looking for better, faster, more efficient ways to do things. They are relentless in pursuing their own potential, and that is reflected in the ideas that they conjure up and the things that they do. The high achiever knows that growth is a precursor to success – and that growth occurs only when you are willing to embrace change and move out of your comfort zone.

In 2000, digital music players were either big and clunky or small and useless, with equally terrible user interfaces. On October 23, 2001, Apple, Inc. launched the iPod, which went on to become the best-selling digital audio player series in history. At the time, most MP3 players used controls that were better suited to the Sony Walkman in 1979. Instead of using skip buttons, a user could spin a wheel on the front of the device to scroll through a list of songs to find the one they wanted to play. The same wheel was also used to control the menus of the system. As a result, it

was much easier to navigate through the iPod's playlist than the comparable Nomad or Compaq MP3 players. Since the release of the initial iPod with a capacity of 5 GB, Apple has created an entire family of iPods to include the iPod Mini, Nano and the iPod Touch, which are much smaller but equipped with capacities of up to 64 GB.

The need to embrace the inevitability of change is true for our personal lives as well as for our professional lives. It applies to individuals as well as multi-billion dollar corporations. Successful people, whether they be entrepreneurs or executives, students or teachers, trades-people or professionals, are always learning and developing new skills, and thereby having a much greater chance of remaining relevant in this increasingly competitive world. Successful companies are invariably those that research and develop new products and strategies and implement new systems. These companies, and the people who make them up, are motivated at every level to step out of their comfort zones, to be open to fresh ideas, to allow themselves to see the possibility of change. As the historian Eric Hoffer wrote, "In times of change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

KOP SIX:
TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

People have a tendency to readily accept responsibility for things that are going well in their lives and abandon responsibility for the things that are going unsatisfactorily. They blame their bosses, their parents, their spouses, the economy and anyone else they can find for things that are less than ideal in their lives. What they fail to realize is that this level of thinking is restrictive and prevents them from employing all their faculties to

overcome the challenges facing them. To paraphrase Albert Schweitzer, ***Keep On Pushing*** means that you stop attributing your problems to your environment and once again learn to exercise your will, your personal responsibility. It means that you stop making excuses for your perceived shortcomings and constantly work to strengthen your areas of weakness.

When you ***Keep On Pushing*** you are empowering yourself. You cannot control everything that happens to you, but there is no better feeling than knowing that you have the power to control your own destiny. As Elaine Maxwell said, "I am the force; I can clear any obstacle before me or I can be lost in the maze. My choice, my responsibility, win or lose, only I hold the key to my destiny." The successful ones understand that, through free will, they can choose to take actions which will create the kind of results they desire. Setbacks and challenges are viewed as opportunities for personal development, allowing them to become stronger, wiser, more knowledgeable and more skillful. Taking personal responsibility is the price you pay to achieve the greatness you are capable of.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER - LESSON 1

- You will always have a bag of plausible excuses for not achieving your goals. You either produce excuses or you produce results. You cannot do both. When you ***Keep On Pushing*** you eventually produce the results you desire.

- High achievers use the challenges they face on their way to their goals to feed their hunger. They develop a need to prove to themselves that they can achieve their goals. They know that success doesn't come cheap, and so they make sacrifices and endure all kinds of difficulty in order to achieve it.

- Persistence forces you to think outside the box and to come up with creative ways to achieve your goals.

- No one is immune from challenges, setbacks, weaknesses and liabilities. Do not use them as crutches. Work through them with the attitude that it is impossible for you to fail.

- Your first actions might not be successful. Oftentimes, you have to go through a learning curve as you work to achieve your goals. Goal achievement is like problem solving. Problems are often solved through persistent trial and error.

- Lack of persistence is one of the biggest reasons for failure. People simply give up, and once you've given up you've accepted defeat. Sometimes things simply will not go your way, but if you don't quit you must achieve your goals.

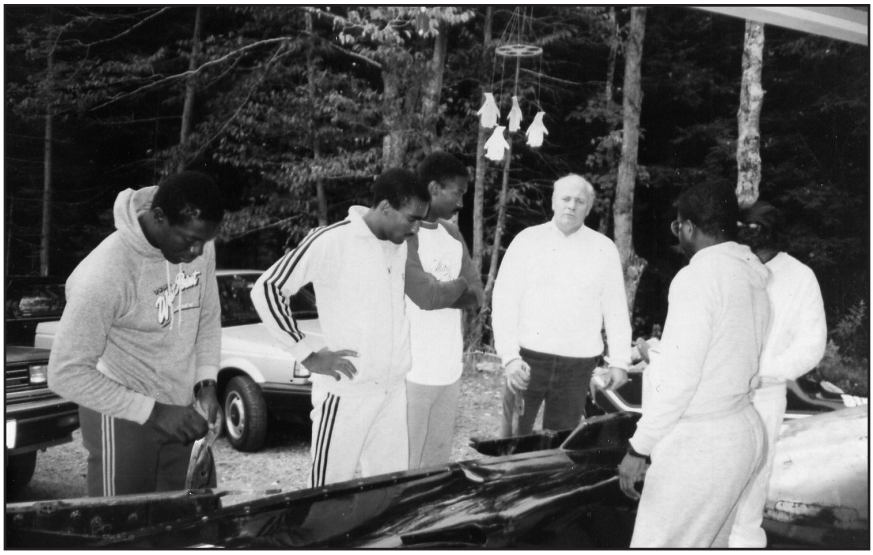
ASSIGNMENTS

1. Take an inventory of your life (skills, accomplishments, possessions, etc.) to establish a baseline.

2. As clearly as you can, from the vantage point of your baseline, define what you would like your life to be.

3. Commit yourself and begin to do everything in your power to transform the image you have described into your new baseline.

4. Repeat number two. Remember to go as far as you can see, because when you get there you will see further.



"Gentlemen, this is a bobsled." *Coach Howard Siler bringing us up to speed during our first trip to Lake Placid. Sept. 1987. (**Left to right:** Devon Harris, Michael White, Dudley Stokes, Howard Siler, Samuel Clayton*



Bobsledding Jamaican style: *Practicing our starts on the Army base in Kingston. Oct 1987.*

Keep On Pushing speaks to the idea of persevering, being persistent, never giving up. It is impossible to achieve high-level success without meeting opposition. Success dictates that you keep pushing these challenges out of the way, or push yourself over the barriers.

It also embodies the concept of redefining your limits, constantly going beyond what you originally thought was possible, growing, striving to reach your full potential.

You have the ability to achieve far more than you have achieved up to this point in your life and join the ranks of those who have found success and happiness.

All you have to do is
Keep On Pushing.



ISBN: 978-0-9764082-7-7
52499
9 780976 408277

US $24.99 | CAN $30.99 | UK £14.99

Cover photo by Roland Hyde

Enjoyed this excerpt?

Get the full book

http://www.devonharris.com/stores/books/keep-on-pushing-1-detail