

## Margins of Victory: There's No Silver in Sales

By Peter Vidmar

Sport has always served as a great allegory for human aspirations. There's something about scoreboards and stopwatches and yardsticks, and about concrete, identifiable objectives they measure, that make it possible to better quantify the human experience; to distinguish what works from what doesn't. Right now, we are witnessing the personification of these aspirations play out in Vancouver, Canada. While every Olympic athlete is giving their best effort in the moment of the competition, it is likely the athlete who gave his best efforts during the weeks, months, and years before the Olympics who will taste the sweet joy of victory. And the difference is often so slight.

In the Two Man Bobsled, German Andre Lange along with teammate Kevin Kuske, edged out fellow compatriots Thomas Florshuetz and Richard Adjei by the slim margin of .22 seconds. In Alpine Skiing, Didier Defago of Switzerland won the Men's Downhill. Mario Scheiber of Austria was only .21 of a second behind the Defago's winning time. He won no medal at all. Aksel Lund Svindal of Norway took the silver by .07 of a second. America's Bode Miller took the bronze just .02 behind Svindal. *After four runs* down the track, Luger Felix Loch of Germany narrowly defeated his teammate David Moeller by less than six tenths of a second. And these examples go on and on. At least Moeller goes home with a silver medal.

But in the business world, there is no silver medal for second place. Either the client purchases your product or services, or he purchases your competitor's. Second place might as well be twentieth place. So understanding the value of the little extra effort and what it could mean to your success is as critical now as it has ever been.

How often do you hear a parent, coach, or teacher, say, "You better work 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. An athlete hoping to make the Olympic team might work out six hours a day (I did). To double the effort would mean he would train 12 hours a day. Theoretically, that may be possible, but physiologically, it makes no sense. It would be exhausting to the point of being counterproductive. 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 or quantity of your effort just a bit, consistently over time. 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 an exercise worth trying. Take a notepad and track your time for an entire day by keeping a minute-by-minute log of your activities. List everything you do in the day (including idle chatter, internet surfing, phone conversations, emails, watching television, daydreaming). Calculate how much time you can gain by eliminating that which you know is not productive or truly relevant to your life. 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 your career and in your personal life. Little extra efforts do make a big difference, for the better or for the worse. Sometimes the small stuff really is the big stuff.

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