

# What we can learn from the Olympic athletes

Every four years, people all over the world hunch around their television sets, watching as the world's best athletes strive to attain perfection in their craft, in the Olympic Games.

Viewers choose personal favorites, cheer for their own countries (and for a few countries that are not their own), and literally hold their breath as athletes push themselves to attain new records -- all the time competing against not only other athletes, but also themselves.

What can we learn from watching these great athletes?

1. We can learn we should persist until we succeed. The skills they have attained were not developed overnight, but over many years' worth of struggle, exercise, and constant reflection. These skills are not ones that were developed overnight - - and the skills we seek will also not be developed without commitment and dedication.
2. We can learn that we should always push ourselves to get better -- no matter how good we are already. Too many people reach a level of competence in their profession or pursuits, and then grow no more -- they put their development on the back burner. They are like the graduate who, after receiving his diploma, walked away saying "That's the last time I have to learn anything." And so it was, I'm sure. Staying ahead in life means that we need to constantly get better; if we're not moving forward, we're really drifting backwards.
3. We can learn the importance of competition -- even if that competition is mainly with yourself. Competition gives us a reason to move on -- and it is a powerful impetus to make our lives better. Many of us limit our competition to competing in sports, or against the occasional co-worker -- but first and foremost, we should compete against ourselves -- the person we were. We need to constantly make ourselves better.
4. We can learn the importance of sportsmanship -- for even though we many compete in another venue, whether it is work, family, or life, we still should have a feeling of sportsmanship toward those around us. It's common for many people to get so caught up in an event that they treat others shabbily -- but the true sportsman would never think about doing that. In the Olympics, we see athletes supporting other athletes, even those who are competing against them.

Sure, they are still competitive, but that doesn't seem to stop many of them from reaching out beyond themselves and befriending people they otherwise would never support -- or even talk with.

5. We can learn the importance of finishing strong -- each athlete, no matter how strong his or her performance has been, must continue the remarkable performance until the end is reached. There are no medals for those who started strong, but gave up early.

The Olympics, as it has developed now, has a lot of marketing, merchandising, and advertising associated with it, and yet it still seems to rise above that still leave a lump in your throat. All over the world, people are pulling for athletes who they have never met -- and never will meet. For a couple of weeks, we become on a first name basis with these athletes. People talk about their performance at work, and share the excitement they felt when they watched that "perfect" performance -- or they share the feelings that invaded their heart when a would-be gold medal winner has a difficult time.

By learning from the performances of these athletes, we can make our own lives better.

Copyright, 2008, by Daryl R. Gibson. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted for the non-commercial redistribution of this document as long as it remains intact with this copyright and all other lines. This license does not extend to the use of this material in a compilation, whether for profit or non-profit use. Join us at <http://www.weeklywisdom.com>.