

## Quit or Fail

Have you ever wanted to quit something? Throw in the towel, slam down the cards, and walk away from whatever it is that's frustrating the heck out of you?

Oh sure, those of us that are mothers certainly uttered the words 'I quit' during childbirth as we tightened the grip on our mate's neck, but I mean really want to quit. Admit defeat. Stop. Turn around and walk away, never to make the same mistake again.

About ten years ago I let my good friend Janis talk me into training for a marathon. For those of you not in the running circles, a marathon is a race with a distance of 42.2 kilometers (26.2 miles). At that point in my life I would hardly have classified myself as a runner. A wannabe-jogger maybe. A turtle possibly. But a runner, not.

My only goal after agreeing to the marathon madness was to not finish last. That would have been an ego-killer for certain. My clinic leader at the local Running Room store convinced me I wouldn't be. With great enthusiasm he described the different types of people that run a marathon, from the ribbon-breaking Kenyans, to the disabled, and everyone in between.

Training went exceptionally well. Everything on race morning was exactly as the books predict for a personal best finish. It was all perfect. I was a positive-minded, happy gal and looked forward to the challenge of running my first marathon.

The gun went off and Janis and I started on the journey of a lifetime with no idea what lay ahead of us.

With remarkable ease we passed the first kilometer marker. I checked our pace, which was a little fast. We were warned about the start-line adrenalin rush, and as such slowed down accordingly.

A hundred meters up the road was another kilometer marker. Another one kilometer marker to be exact. I was stunned. I wondered what kind of dopey volunteer would put two identical kilometer markers along the route. Surely they had to realize this would be confusing. At the second marker our pace was too slow and I was irritated.

To add insult to injury, and almost as if in response to my angry thoughts, the skies opened up and rain poured down on us. I don't mean a 'great-for-the-garden' type of rain. I mean a 'someone's-building-an-ark' type of rain. I wasn't a fan of running in a thunderstorm and with a weatherman's promise of all-day sunshine, I was grossly under dressed.

We passed the two kilometer marker. Then the second two kilometer marker. Then the third. And the third. The rain kept pouring and I kept seething.

We ran along a highway full of traffic. I hated the noise. Janis was a half step stronger than me that particular day. I hated that too. My only saving grace was there were runners all around me, so at least I wasn't last.

I kept on sucking it up – the rain – the noise – the wonky kilometer markers – Janis' strength – everything. I paid money to be there and I was bloody well going to finish the stupid thing.

Close to the half way point every other runner turned a corner. A volunteer was standing in the middle of the road directing everyone in the ½ marathon (21.1 kilometers) to turn and everyone in the full marathon (42.2 kilometers) to run straight on through. I took no solace in finally understanding the purpose of the duplicate kilometer markers.

Everyone turned. Every last stinking runner except Janis and I. For as far as the eye could see, there were no other life forms ahead of us. I became acutely aware in that precise moment that we were dead last.

When the guy picking up the pylons is riding your butt in a mini van, you know you are last.

My misery hit an all-time high and in a life-saving moment of clarity, I suggested Janis run on ahead. She was feeling strong, was faster, and quite frankly I wanted to wallow in my misery alone. Although she never said as much, I am certain she was only too happy to leave my miserable, negative energy behind!

I was convinced my only options were quitting or failing, and this is the inspiration for today's lesson. The mind is the most powerful tool you will ever have access to on your journey through this life. More powerful than computers, technology, and medicine, it alone can control your perception of the place you find yourself in.

I continued to run for about five kilometers pondering my options – to quit or fail. I could not decide which was better and which was worse. To quit would mean I would jump in the van with Tom the pylon picker-upper (we had become friends by now) and follow Janis to the finish line. To fail meant I had to actually finish the race. I had to run another 21.1 kilometers just to fail in my goal to 'not be last.'

Janis was long gone and I was left with my thoughts, the road, and Tom. The rain kept pelting down. The kilometers drifted beneath my miserable feet.

At the twenty-five kilometer marker a man toting an umbrella sauntered through the gates of a billion dollar mansion, walked up to me, and advised, 'if things start to get tough, count your steps to eight!'

'If,' I thought!

His comment made me momentarily forget my quit/fail quandary and I wondered just who he was. What billionaire stands around in the pouring rain, hoping some idiot might happen to run by. It's not like there was a race still happening. The Kenyan's were done, showered and on the plane home. There was not a living soul near me, except for Tom, so it's not like this billionaire fellow was watching a riveting, action-packed event.

Or maybe he was the butler. I found that funny. I laughed out loud and then started to count my steps to eight.

This particular race was a rock n roll marathon that had bands playing all along the way. I hardly noticed them in the first half, and by the second half most had packed up and left because of the torrential rain.

Except for a punk band that only packed up after they were certain the last runner had passed. Then I came trudging by. With their equipment already tucked safely in the band van, they stared at me not certain what to do. Then a flash of artistic brilliance crept across the leader's face and with a heaping pile of humour, he led the blue-haired, tattooed, body-pierced group in a song and dance routine that would have put the Temptations to shame. All for me. The girl in last place. It was beyond hilarious!

I stood there and laughed and laughed and laughed. I hugged each one and gave them all a kiss on the cheek, careful not to get caught in any of the piercings.

And on I toddled. Me, Tom and the van he was slowly filling with pylons.

Around the 30 kilometer marker a bus pulled up beside me and once again I momentarily stopped counting to eight. Two non-runner gals complete with sandals and skirts got out and ran up beside me. With arms loaded full of supplies, they excitedly asked, 'Louise, do you need anything? Water? Gatorade? Food, a banana? Anything?'

'Oh my gosh,' I gasped, 'I have a pit crew!'

It never occurred to me they were tired of standing in the pouring rain at the finish line and someone suggested they drive on down to see if they could get me to quit. My mind never went there. I was too busy laughing and enjoying the hilarity of these people a) knowing who I was and b) running down the street in sandals and skirts with arms full of supplies.

This is where the power of the mind comes in to play as my lesson for the day. That race had two distinct halves. Both shared the same weather, conditions and elements. What differed was my attitude.

The second half of that marathon was by far more difficult physically. I was exhausted, my wet, sticky body was chaffed from rubbing against soaking wet clothes, my feet were blistered, muscles I never knew I had ached, and putting one foot in front of the other was excruciatingly hard. But I was having a great time and barely noticed. The same second half brought me joy, fun, peace and a calm understanding that the mind controls our perception of the places we find ourselves in.

The first half of that marathon, filled with doubt, anger, resentment and bitterness, brought me to a place of misery. A place where I saw no beauty, no joy, and nothing inspiring. If something fun or interesting happened, I never noticed. It was a place where I thought my only options were quitting or failing.

The difference between the two halves was that I discovered a method of calming my overactive mind, letting go of the negativity, and letting peace drift in. I accomplished this with the simple act of counting to eight over and over again. Once my mind was calm, I let go of everything negative. I let go of the bitterness at the weather. The anger at the kilometer-markers. I let go of self doubt brought on by Janis being stronger on that

particular day. I let go of the disappointment of finishing last. Once I let all that go, I was open to noticing the wonderful things happening all around me.

There are many ways we can calm our mind. Some of us hop on a bike and hit the trails. Some of us meditate. Dance. Golf. Read. What you do to stop the overactive mind chatter is less relevant than the fact that you DO it. Find something that stops the raging race in your head so that negativity can escape, peace and calm can drift in and you open up to noticing the wonder of the world around you. If nothing else works, try counting to eight. Again and again and again until you find that place.

I crossed the finish line that day, my first of many marathons, learning one of the greatest lessons of life. The words quit or fail don't apply. Not to me, not on that day, and not in my life. In finishing that grueling race, even dead last, I learned I can do absolutely anything I ever dream of. There are no limits. No boundaries. No restrictions. Even when the journey of life is difficult, the problems seemingly insurmountable and the odds are stacked up against me, I can find beauty, peace and contentment. What more could I ask for than that!

Enjoy the journey,  
Louise

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