



Creating the Spirit of the Olympics in the Workplace

In the Olympics, we see a lot of the same human issues that confront us at the workplace. What can we take from that international event to apply at work? If you look carefully, you will find that the ways world athletes behave before, during, and after the Olympics offer us a lot of lessons we can learn from to improve people's performance in the workplace. After all, sports have always offered us metaphors, models, and motivating examples to apply at work. Naturally, the Olympics offer us the ultimate best of these. Here are ways to create the Olympics' spirit at work.

The most significant lessons we can take from the Olympics to the workplace are:

- **Every Four Years, Not Every Quarter:** Most American organizations put too much focus on the quarterly reporting of results. Real change in human performance requires a longer view of things.
- **Coaching for Performance:** To perform at their peak, people need to be coached, not managed. The Coaching process of tough yet friendly feedback, modeling of desired behavior, constant guidance and continuance, incremental improvement is a model that works well at work too.
- **Practice Makes Perfect:** No athlete will think to perform in the actual competition without rigorous practicing for years before the event. At work, people cannot suspend work to practice. They must work and practice at the same time.
- **Build Teams, Not Individuals:** Even competitions that do not involve a team require effective teamwork between the coach and the athlete, and perhaps other people as well such as the managers, administrators, and the medical team. No Basketball team or Soccer team can achieve much without effective teamwork. How much training on team building have you participated in at work lately?
- **Motivation and Rewards:** The motivation for the Olympic athletes is never money. It's the global recognition of being the best. It's the satisfaction of beating the previous world record, and going just a notch beyond what was previously possible. That's the kind of culture you need to create at work. Monetary rewards are necessary to prevent good people from seeking work somewhere else, but it's never the main motivator for achieving truly great things at work. Recognition, of both team and individual performance excellence, is the greatest motivator.
- **Failure Is The Beginning, Not the End:** No athlete will strive to participate in the Olympics just once in a lifetime. Most keep going back and trying more. If they fail, they strive harder to win. If they win, they try harder to break their own record and win even bigger.

Contributor: Sharon Meagher, Deputy Director American Institute For Ethics. She is a certified Business Coach, graduate of Coaches Training Institute and 18 year business strategist for corporate, organization and government sectors. Nominated into the Who's Who in Business Women for her work in economic development at the city of Oakland California and contribution to the historical preservation of the Aircraft Carrier USS Hornet.