

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

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Running Doesn't Just Promote Health; It Advances Networking

by **Brendan Aloysius Barry**

While it is a given that golf is a great way to build business relationships, there is another sport that has relationship-building qualities, and which has the same potential to form bonds that lead to mutual benefits.

Ask a client or customer to join you on a run — a simple 5K or even a marathon — and you'll soon learn that running is an equally effective way to build a relationship of trust.

I'll never forget one early-morning run in Washington, D.C. While a client, a newly elected U.S. congressman, and I ran around the Capitol, the Vietnam, Lincoln and Jefferson memorials and the Washington Monument, we talked about the history behind the monuments, the complexities of government and the congressman's goals while in office. Five years later, the three of us are still close,



and it was running that cemented our bond.

Here is another reason to consider running as a networking tool. There is a good chance that an existing or potential client you want to engage is a runner. Case in point, more people run today than ever before, and the numbers keep growing.

- 25 million Americans golf, a number that has remained fairly constant since 1995

- More than 60 million Americans run or jog, up more than 30 percent from 2008

- American running event finishers more than doubled from 2005 to 2013 to 19 million

While those 60 million-plus runners include casual joggers,

more people of all ages are picking up long-distance running. According to Running USA, marathon runners have more than tripled to 550,000 since 1980 when only 10 percent of finishers were women. Now 43 percent of marathoners are female. During the same time, the distance running population has also matured with 48 percent of marathon finishers 40 or older, up from 26 percent in 1980.

Ultramarathon

Put it all together, and this is networking for the rest of us — young or old, amateurs or extreme. Running has given me access to clients, potential clients, business colleagues and community leaders who are usually stretched for time. When we meet early in a morning or stay up late to run together, we really get to know one another — more than we could at a lunch meeting in a busy restaurant. Running is more personal. There is time to discuss visions, ideas and struggles, and these conversations and shared experiences translate well into business relationships.

Jason Howe of Howe Real Estate ran a number of miles with me recently at the 100-mile Icarus Ultramarathon. Howe believes that running is deeper than it appears. As he puts it: “Seeing someone commit to a challenge like an ultramarathon,

you ask yourself: ‘What kind of character does a person have who believes in himself enough to say, ‘I’ll do that, or I’ll try that’? It really gives you insight into someone’s work ethic. If they would be that committed to a running event, my thought is that they’ll be just as focused and driven in business.”

Howe, an athlete since college, finds many of the most successful, competent people in the workplace played high-level sports when they were young. Plus, with fewer opportunities to play competitive sports after age 40, running is a viable alternative.

Disciplined And Motivated

Bill Lutes of BankUnited in Tampa agrees that there’s a strong link between commitment to an athletic endeavor and becoming a top performer in business.

“I have always thought that ‘serious’ athletes tend to be more self-disciplined and motivated than those who are not. If someone has the drive to get up at 4 a.m. to go for a bike ride or run for two hours before work, that takes a great deal of commitment,” says Lutes.

Justin Stone, an audit partner for Crowe Horwath LLP, says running provides a lesson nearly all of us can relate to: humility.

“Running together isn’t cut-throat like another sport,” says Stone. “There’s a synergy when you’re running with someone. If

I have to go at a slower pace, my running partners stick with me or if I should pick up the pace, they’ll tell me.”

For Stone, running has become a referral source. “There’s camaraderie that is shared among runners. It is a social network. It’s not like you just go out and run and that’s it. You meet people, you talk, you share stories of aches and pains, and you discuss business.”

While running may never take away golf’s crown as the ultimate recreation-networking combination, it’s certainly making great strides as its popularity grows.

Like golf, running in both its casual and competitive forms is a natural career-enhancing activity and an across-the-board way to build a long-term business relationship.

For us enthusiasts, you just can’t beat that feeling of accomplishment. After training and planning for a race for months and crossing that finish line, have no doubt: You have shared an experience neither of you will soon forget. Without saying a word, you will prove to a client that you will go the extra mile for them.

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