

## Role Models and Inspiration

People find inspiration in as many ways as there are individuals, however; there are some generalizations about finding incentives to work harder to achieve a higher standard. Typically, motives to begin an exercise program are to lose weight, to get healthy and/or to look good. As the process progresses, an exercise program becomes a habit and we achieve our initial goals. Then, our motives to continue regular exercise need to change. Often, role models provide inspiration to achieve a higher standard.

A friend of mine, who had become an all-American couch potato, watched Frank Shorter win the Olympic Marathon in Munich. This inspired him to start running and competing. Four years later, he was racing Frank Shorter in the U.S. Olympic marathon trials.

When I was in my early twenties and running in local road races, I met a 58 year old runner named Bob Horman. He was either just in front of me or pushing me across the finishing line. The experience of running hard shoulder to shoulder at the edge of my potential was tremendously exhilarating and memorable. He inspired me by illustrating that a man so many years older than me could be so fit and active. My admiration for Bob led to a personal goal of being able to run as well and as fast when I turn 60, as Bob was running when he was 58. In other words, my goal is to be able to run as fast when I turn 60 as I did when I was in my twenties. This is a tough goal but I figure that even if I fail, I will have benefited tremendously from striving to achieve it.

As our motivation to exercise wanes, looking to role models can be a means to lift our motivation. Envision what your role model would do when he or she doesn't feel like exercising or training hard. Would he or she run in the rain, in the dark or early in the morning? Role models can provide us with an example and inspiration to aspire to a higher level.

The obvious role models are elite athletes, however; it is often difficult to personally relate to them. Peers or training partners can serve as role models. I am envious of several Richmond Road Runner Club members who are working mothers yet still find time and energy to train hard enough to compete in road races at a very high level, often far beyond what I am currently achieving. Over the years, some of my best running and racing occurred when I was training with a partner who was slightly more talented, and endowed with a lot more drive than me.

A good idea is to occasionally seek out new, fresh, peer role models. Meeting and training with members of a running clique different than the one we usually train with expands our cadre of role models. A fresh example can help nudge a person beyond and off a plateau.

In choosing a role model, decide what attributes you need an example of and who exemplifies these attributes. Roles models that represent particular attributes can be found in a variety of settings outside the sports arena. Examples of tenacity, drive, and endurance are found in many situations. Who are potential new role models? How can you develop a relationship with this individual? What do you need to do to emulate a model?