

## LESSONS OF 2004

Before I move on to a new year, I always like to reflect back on the past year and see what I've learned and how I could have done some things better. It's always been my opinion that we never stop learning, or should stop learning, despite how much we think we know. I've told friends of mine that as soon as I think I know it all, I'm in trouble and I might as well quit being a trainer and coach, because this mentality will make me ineffective as a teacher. I, like you, get my lessons from all around. I continue to read books and journals, listen to people, reflect on my own experiences in racing and training, and I actually learn a great deal from the experiences of my clients. So sometimes my trainees actually instruct me. I'll take it.

The following are some of the little lessons I've learned or re-learned this past year:

**FOR THE MILLIONTH TIME, WILL I TAKE MY OWN ADVICE?!** I got to enjoy those lovely leg cramps at the Jacksonville Marathon in December. All was well until about mile 14 or 15, when I got this nice little dagger in my upper, inner left thigh, followed by its buddy on the right side a few minutes later. After that, both of my quads joined the game, and my calves felt so jealous that they had to join the cramp party a few miles after that. I was on goal pace up until that point. I wanted to run a 3:30, and came through the ½ way point at about 1:45 very comfortably, until the cramps appeared. So my second half was a nice 20 minutes slower than my first. This is okay, since it was still a PR for me, and quite frankly I was just grateful to finish. I've never hurt so badly in a race before, and I've done a lot of different races. If there would have been another ¼ mile, I would not have finished. I had already resorted to a run-trot-walk dance for the final 12 miles, with each mile getting worse. So what gives? I hardly drank anything—plain and simple. I let the nice, cool weather seduce me into forgetting to hydrate. I ran through each water stop carelessly, maybe getting half a cup at each reach. I ended up wearing most of my GEL because I was too impatient to open the wrapper all the way. So my impatience made me pay the price. Just think, if I would have relaxed through the water stops and taken in two cups of water along with my gel, just maybe I would have run the second half better than a shuffle! You think? A client of mine summed it up for me perfectly. He stated “Rob, you idiot—you know that. You told me to always take in 6 ounces of fluid every 20 minutes, and to eat one GEL every 30 minutes—even I know that!” Well said. Just because it's cool doesn't mean we don't need the liquid. We need it just as badly.

**IT'S NOT ABOUT THE RACE DAY:** This was a new lesson for me, because I had never thought about it in this way before. A few days before my Jacksonville Marathon, a friend of mine was giving me a pep talk. She was letting me know that she really thought I had done everything right in training and would certainly hit my goal. I, of course, appreciated the kind words. And I also know that in the past, I've been a touch grumpy if I don't hit my goal. I'm sure all of my friends didn't want to see that, so they were pumping me up. But I explained this to my friend that day: No matter what, I will not be disappointed. And the reason is because I've never been in better running shape in my life. And it was through this marathon training that I peaked in my running condition, so no matter what, this marathon was a good thing. Due to the training, I was able to PR in the 10K, and felt strong at all the other distances. After the race, did I feel the same way? You bet I did. After I got out of the med tent for my cramps and reflected back, I held the same belief that I went in with. I learned that we can't take a one day

event too seriously. Anything can happen. We have to look at a series of days and weeks and months to really evaluate what type of fitness we're in. The only way I would have been disappointed was if I hadn't prepared myself in training, or if I would have quit. It was a good day and a worthwhile journey!

**INSTILLING FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN OTHERS IS THE GREATEST LESSON A TEACHER CAN GIVE A STUDENT.** Since I've been coaching, I've seen this act out many times, but I really saw it happen this year. All of the exercise physiology lessons and workouts are very important. All the information I can give my clients on training leads to them improving, but I'm convinced that the most important element of coaching is getting the clients to have faith that they will reach their goals. With so many of the clients I coach and train, I simply tell them they CAN do something and they almost always do, and I'm convinced that when they believe they can, they will every time. I trained a couple of women this year who had never run a 5K, let alone a marathon. They asked me if I thought they could do a marathon—this year? Without wavering, I stated “Of course”, and “You will”. I kept up this mantra through all their training, and without any doubt they met their goals and ran a marathon. When you think about it—why not? Why assume you can't? I had this play out regarding hitting a certain time as well. I told a friend of mine over and over that she can hit a much faster time than she had in the past. This person is highly competitive, so I knew her finishing time did matter to her. I picked a time that almost seemed unreasonable. It was about 30 minutes faster than her previous marathon PR. But I was able to instill faith in her, because I was able to point out to how all of her other running times indicate that she can run this faster time. I kept all doubts out of the conversation and just kept stating “Oh no—you WILL hit this time”. You know what? She did. Blasting her previous marathon PR (which was already pretty darn good) by 30 minutes. Lesson learned: Don't ever underestimate the power of the mind and the power of positive thinking. The person who thinks that they can and the person who thinks they can't are both correct!