

Perseverance

By Dr. John C. Maxwell

Perseverance is not an issue of talent. It is not an issue of time. It is about finishing. Talent provides hope for accomplishment, but perseverance guarantees it.

Running Past Failure

As a small child, Vonetta (Jeffrey) Flowers dreamed about being in the Olympics. She ran everywhere she went, and gained a reputation among her school friends for being quick. At age nine, Vonetta learned she had special talent. While trying out for an inner-city track club in her hometown of Birmingham, she shocked coaches by posting the best sprint time for Jonesboro Elementary School - running faster than boys two years older than she was!

Vonetta's immense talent carried her to the University of Alabama-Birmingham on a track-and-field scholarship. While at the university, she continued to pursue her goal of gaining a spot on the Olympic team. She practiced meticulously to perfect her stride, spent hours in the weight room adding strength, and ran grueling intervals to shave seconds off her sprint times. Thanks to her combination of talent and discipline, Vonetta ended her college career as a 7-time All-American, competing in the 100 meter and 200 meter sprints, long jump, triple jump, heptathlon, and relays.

With her college career finished, Vonetta set her sights on the 1996 Olympics. Unfortunately, she failed to qualify for the team, running slightly behind the leaders. The failure stung, but Vonetta was determined not to give up. She found a job as an assistant coach and continued her regimen of training.

For the next four years, Vonetta put her body through punishing workouts with an eye on the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. In her words, "I devoted countless hours to lifting weights, eating right, and staying mentally tough. I knew that my time as an athlete was coming to an end, and I'd hoped that the 2000 Olympic trials would prove to be my year to finally find out what it's like to be an Olympian."

In June 2000, Vonetta lined up again to run at the U.S. Olympic Trials. Unfortunately, Vonetta placed 13th, and she failed to make the Olympic squad. Although one of the fastest women in America, she wasn't in the select group to represent the United States in Sydney. After 17 years of training, she had come up empty in her quest for the Olympics.

Two days after her second painful failure in the Olympic Trials, Vonetta's husband spotted an advertisement for tryouts for the United States Olympic bobsled team. He convinced her to go to the tryouts. Growing up in the South, Vonetta was not accustomed to cold and snow, and she knew next to nothing about bobsledding. However, at the tryouts her unusual blend of speed and strength proved to be ideal qualities for a brakewoman (the person who pushes the bobsled to give it initial momentum and then hops in with the driver). Vonetta was chosen for the team.

Vonetta's decision to join the bobsled team came with a price - two more years of a strict diet, sore muscles, and countless hours dedicated to attaining peak physical fitness. It also meant delaying her dream to be a mom. However, her years of perseverance paid off. Not only did

Vonetta achieve her lifelong goal of competing in the Olympics, but she also became the first African-American to win a gold medal in the winter Olympics!

Perseverance punctuates talent

Vonetta's talent seemed almost limitless, but it wouldn't have carried her to the Olympics without an admirable measure of perseverance. Life seems designed to make a person quit. For even the most talented individual, obstacles abound, and failures are commonplace. Only when a person matches talent with perseverance do opportunities become avenues of success.

Perseverance means succeeding because you are determined to, not destined to

If Vonetta had seen her Olympic dream as a matter of destiny than she likely would have given up after her second failure to make the track and field team. After 17 years of training, the results signaled that her dream wasn't meant to be. She had no natural reason to be hopeful about her prospects. However, she pressed on, determined to find a way to take hold of her goals, and in the end, she was rewarded with success.

Perseverance means stopping, not because you're tired, but because the task is done

Perseverance doesn't come into play until a person is tired. A year or two after college, Vonetta still was riding the excitement of her collegiate track and field championships. She was young, energetic, and optimistic about the future. Nothing was telling her to stop, and consequently she needed nothing extra to keep going.

However, after a taste of disappointment at the Olympic Trials, fatigue and discouragement crept up on Vonetta. The mountain of work in front of her began to look more and more daunting, and her dream began to be a little harder to imagine. Nonetheless, Vonetta persevered. She kept believing, she kept training, and she kept running until she finally caught up with success.

About

John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold over 16 million books. His organizations have trained more than 2 million leaders worldwide. Dr. Maxwell is the founder of EQUIP and INJOY Stewardship Services. Every year he speaks to Fortune 500 companies, international government leaders, and audiences as diverse as the United States Military Academy at West Point, the National Football League, and ambassadors at the United Nations. A *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Business Week* best-selling author, Maxwell was named the World's Top Leadership Guru by Leadershipgurus.net. He was also one of only 25 authors and artists named to Amazon.com's 10th Anniversary Hall of Fame. Three of his books, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, *Developing the Leader Within You*, and *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* have each sold over a million copies.

Printed from the GiANT Impact website (www.giantimpact.com).

The online version of this article can be found at http://www.giantimpact.com/articles/read/article_perseverance/

Content from this article may be used, but must be accompanied by the following credit line in its entirety: "This article is used by permission from GiANT Impact. Find other leadership content, resources, training, and events at www.giantimpact.com."