
S E C T I O N

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This Is Harder Than It Looks

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CHAPTER

1

The Arc of Your Potential

New Year's resolutions have been made, and broken, for centuries. They are handed down to us as a gift from the Romans. The idea of reflecting upon the previous year and looking toward the upcoming one with self-improvement goals in mind came from the Romans' worship of Janus, the god of two faces—one that looked back, and one that looked forward. It's also from Janus that we get the name for the month of January—which is about as long as most people actually keep a resolution. Research shows that around 40 percent of Americans set them annually, and, while survey data is inconclusive, some very creditable research shows that only about 10 percent of those who set NYRs actually keep them past January—of the same year. It's generally accepted that almost no one actually keeps a New Year's resolutions for an entire year. Simply observe a gym parking lot on January 2, and again on February 2. There is a startling abundance of parking spots in early February.

It is helpful to pause at the end of the year, reflect on your accomplishments, and develop a set of objectives for the upcoming year, and writing these goals down greatly improves your chances of achieving them. But resolving to lose 50 pounds, keep a journal, stop smoking, read 100 books, eat better, and be nice to the children every day without the assistance of a plan or a technique isn't helpful; it's actually harmful.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS ARE STUPID.

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An Uphill Run

Early in January 2004, I was eating lunch with my running buddy Steve Shaull, a former collegiate speed-merchant who demoralized opponents by trashing them on hills in cross-country races and marathons. We were at our regular burger joint, “The Loop,” in Jacksonville, Florida: elevation, eight feet above sea level. We were discussing New Year’s resolutions, which Steve never set, declaring them to be stupid and inane. I myself only opted for ridiculous ones, such as my vow in 2002 to no longer slow down for yellow lights. (Coincidentally, my 2003 resolution was to not get another ticket for an entire year—thus retaining my legal ability to drive.)

In a Ditch

Steve and I felt that this year would be different, though. While we still felt that creating a resolution was idiotic, we were in a position where we actually *needed* to do so. We were, perhaps, in the worst shape of our lives. Steve—beat up and down from years of running hard while ignoring pain—would always say, “The acceptance of pain is simply a matter of attitude.” He knew that his best athletic years were behind him, and that he had gained over 40 pounds since his competitive running days. While we were still running three to five times per week, we both weighed at least 200 pounds, and our exercise regimen was far from routine and disciplined. Clearly, our calories-burned to calories-consumed ratio was out of whack. We were in a rut, and we knew we needed a major jolt to escape the otherwise inevitable slide into the frailties of middle age.

As we ate our cheeseburgers and fries (how’s that for irony?), we expressed our complete dissatisfaction with our current sorry state of affairs. Without a major shift in our lives, we were on a trajectory that neither of us liked very much. We were accepting our reality; we were fat and out of shape. Steve suggested, and I agreed, that what we needed was a truly unrealistic and outlandish goal; something so completely outrageous and monumentally dumb that it would move us from fat and lazy to lean and mean. The question was what. We knew that a standard road race would never do it. Steve agreed to do the research and we would reconvene back at The Loop in a week.

Later in the week, I received the following e-mail from Steve:

We are running the Pikes Peak Ascent, August 21st, 2004.

Steve had chosen the hardest half-marathon in the United States of America.

Pikes Peak Ascent Is the Way Up

The Pikes Peak Ascent half-marathon begins in Manitou Springs, Colorado, at an elevation of 6,295 feet above sea level—6,287 feet higher than The Loop. The small town sits in the shadow of Pikes Peak near Colorado Springs. From there, the race goes up the Barr trail, a three-foot-wide dirt path that winds 13.2 miles up the mountain to the summit of Pikes Peak with an elevation of 14,110 feet above sea level—one of the highest peaks in North America. For those of you who care about these things, the course offers a 7,815-foot elevation increase over 13.2 miles, averaging an 11 percent grade. It's *super fun*.

The Pikes Peak Ascent is run on a Saturday; and the following day's Pikes Peak Marathon goes up and then back down the Barr trail. Each race has been run annually each August since 1966. According to local lore, the Ascent race actually began in 1956 when three smokers challenged 10 nonsmokers to a race up the trail. The smokers lost. Imagine that! As a former smoker, I question what they were actually smoking to have come up with such a ridiculous idea.

The annual event draws exactly 1,800 runners, nearly all of whom are nonsmokers from Colorado. The National Park Service limits the number to 1,800 to avoid overcrowding the trail. Typically, the race fills up in 48 hours. There are a disturbing number of runners who run both races, back to back.

Pain Is Inevitable; Serious Injury Is Likely

A number of factors can ruin a Pikes Peak Ascent experience. For example, if you become dehydrated you will become a zombie and wander around the mountain aimlessly before losing consciousness. Runners who get AMS—acute mountain sickness—experience headache, dizziness, shortness of breath, fatigue, and nausea, or, in serious cases, extreme fatigue, impaired motor control, and fluid accumulation in the brain and

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lungs. The faster one ascends, the more likely one is to develop severe symptoms of AMS, which can begin to occur above the elevation of 7,000 feet, or about six minutes after the start of the race. A competitor who is unfortunate enough to develop both dehydration *and* AMS requires serious medical assistance; and therein lies the problem. Unlike most half-marathons, Pikes Peak Ascent doesn't make for a particularly easy rescue. Emergency personnel cannot run up and down the Barr trail in ambulances to pick up the injured and stragglers; those who become injured or ill have to be rescued on horseback.

Well, Steve had certainly filled the parameters of “outrageous” and “ridiculous” in picking our joint resolution.

GIDDYUP!

At our lunch the following week, we made a commitment to run it. Just to show how seriously I was taking this whole run-up-the-mountain thing, I ordered the chicken sandwich instead of my customary hamburger—*without mayonnaise*. Next, we discussed how it would feel to actually run up a hill that big. I had no experience running hills other than the local bridges around Jacksonville. Steve had a lot of experience, and requested that I “quit whining and man up.”

QUIT WHINING AND MAN UP!

We Form a Plan

Steve and I would have to lose a lot of weight and get into serious physical shape to succeed. Steve set a goal of losing 35 pounds, which would put him near his former race weight of 165 pounds. I would shoot for 170 pounds, for a total weight loss of 35 pounds, putting me at “emaciated.”

Mathematically, it could work; 35 pounds over 8 months equals about 4.5 pounds a month, or about one pound per week, which is a “no-brainer.” But figuring out a way to train in Florida—essentially, a big sandbar with an altitude of about 345 feet above sea level at its highest point—would prove to be a “brainer.” We created a plan that included extensive treadmill training on an 11 percent grade, long runs of three to four hours, and extended bridge repeats over the various Jacksonville bridges.

The Plan

Figure 1.1

- Lose 35 to 40 lbs.
- Treadmill workouts at 11 percent grade.
- Long runs of three to four hours.
- Two hour bridge repeat workouts on Saturdays.

I Encounter Adversity

By the beginning of April, Steve was doing great. He was running faster, eating better, and had lost over 15 pounds. I had lost less than five—a *lot less than five*. The scale at the local YMCA became my worst enemy. Every time we ran together, Steve wanted to get on the scale and compare our weight. I was beginning to get really worried, and began to secretly hope he would pull something like a hamstring; nothing too serious, just debilitating. I wanted to lose weight—but exercising alone was not doing the trick. It was becoming clear that I was actually going to have to D-I-E-T—an obstacle that was nearly my undoing.

I shared my deep concern with then-girlfriend and now lovely wife Anita, and told her of my predicament. She agreed to help. On a trip to the Florida Keys later that month, we bought a diet book called *Secrets of Good-Carb Low-Carb Living* by Sandra Woodruff. While we drove south through the Everglades and into the Keys, we read the book to each other and learned how to eat better. Before our return to Jacksonville, we understood the eating habits that we needed to develop, which was a big turning point. I now had a plan I could execute, with Anita acting as my diet accountability coach.

Back in Jacksonville, Steve and I began doing our intense training to get ready for the race. Then it happened: my new healthy eating regimen helped me begin to lose weight.

NEWSFLASH: FOOD INTAKE AND WEIGHT LOSS ARE CONNECTED!

I Overcome Adversity

By race day, I weighed 167 pounds, was in the best running shape of my life—and looked like hell. Friends and coworkers thought for sure I was

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losing a battle to a serious illness. Steve weighed in around 162 pounds. We stood at the starting line at the end of the second-wave—behind the other 1,798 runners and at the absolute back of the line—and looked up at the peak. At that moment, our training regimen of treadmill and bridge running seemed like nothing more than a stupid, futile joke. *What on earth were we doing?*

However, once we got going and the idea of quitting began to evaporate, we made our way through the streets of Manitou Springs, past the Pikes Peak Railway, and onto the Barr trail. The actual running uphill was a blur of breathing, passing slower runners and walkers, stopping for frequent food and drink breaks, and moving ever forward and upward. Seconds became minutes. Minutes became miles. Miles became an hour. Before long, we were at the halfway point; and amazingly, neither of us was yet wandering aimlessly about the mountainside.

A Barren Moonscape

The last three miles of the race occur above the 12,000-foot tree line, where the landscape becomes barren, rocky, and boulder-strewn. As we passed the 10-mile point, runners everywhere were sitting or wandering around, no doubt suffering from one of the aforementioned maladies. Our pace slowed to a walk as we climbed over boulders. During the last 70 minutes of the race, we could hear the results announced as runners crossed the finish line above us, and we couldn't believe how long those last three miles took. I could hardly speak by the time we finished. It was 62 degrees at the start of the race, and four hours thirty-two minutes later, as we crossed the finish line at the peak, it was snowing—in August.

Steve and I collected our change bag filled with snack food and warm clothes and made our way to the bus for the ride down the hill. We knew we could have run it quicker; but we also knew we had *done it*. Steve could have finished the race at least an hour faster than me; the only reason I finished at all was probably that he waited. I was fighting negative internal messaging during much of the race about how I could not make it. Then I would look up, Steve would ask how I was doing, and I would yell “fine.” He knew better. In the end, it wasn't so much about the time as it was the experience. The next one will be about the time.

Nice Story, Dude

I can imagine what you're saying right now: “Hey Rob, that's a nice story; but it has absolutely nothing to do with selling.” But it does. This book is

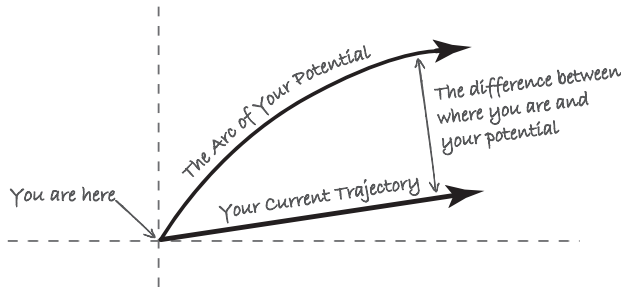


Figure 1.2 The Arc of Your Potential

about changing the arc of your potential and enhancing your life by improving your sales performance. My experience with Pikes Peak was about coming to terms with reality, visualizing something better, engaging the will to change, and developing necessary skills. It allowed me to deal with adversity, fight off fear and self-doubt, and execute the drill necessary to succeed. You'll read about how I struggled with sales as well, and used the exact same process to improve. Furthermore, I have used the principles, skills, processes, and daily drills we discuss in this book in *all* areas of my life—because many of the challenges we face in sales have very little to do with the actual sales process.

By running the race, Steve and I literally kicked our own asses, and permanently changed the arc of our potential. By making and keeping a commitment to do something big, I now knew that I could kick something *big's* ass. I had taken control of my potential, and succeeded. I am no longer afraid of hills or of the unknown. I am now a faster, smaller runner. But these lessons transcend running and fitness; they're a part of my DNA. I am a better salesperson and trainer—and a different human being—because of this experience. By opening myself up to entirely new challenges, I now allow myself to grow in ways I could have never imagined. (See Figure 1.2.)

What Is the Arc of Your Potential?

Each of our lives is on a trajectory or path that comprises our relationships, careers, health, knowledge, giving, happiness, and spiritual walk. Trajectories are predictable and easy to calculate. Your potential is connected to your life's trajectory, and a sales career is a part of your

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current potential. Doing nothing will keep the arc of your sales potential static. The reality is that you cannot have what you have never had by staying where you have always stayed. You have infinite untapped potential to achieve more than you thought possible. You simply must take the first step.

I personally know this to be true; there were many times during my life when I struggled to visualize my life ever getting better. It's difficult to envision what is over the hill or around the corner during tough periods; it's hard to accept our true potential. But the person that you have the potential to become is waiting for you to get off your couch and kick your own ass—into gear. It's simply a journey of small steps in the right direction. The arc of your potential rises and falls as you move in the direction of your most dominant thought. The more positive your thoughts and expectations become, the higher your capability becomes; but the more negative you are, the less you believe you can accomplish your goals. In either case, your thoughts will manifest in your actions and in what you really *do*—or don't—achieve.

You still have your life's story to write. Whatever has happened up to this exact moment is now permanently behind you. Nothing you can do will ever bring it back or change it; what you have is this moment forward. Your potential to do greater things is as yet unproven. I am living proof that you can achieve more than you thought possible—beginning now.

IT'S TIME TO START KICKING.

You Can Change Your Trajectory

Altering the arc of your potential requires a paradigm shift in how you manage and execute your career. Simply reading a sales book—even a very good one—won't help much. One sale doesn't make you a salesperson, a golf lesson won't make you a golfer, and a single run won't make you a runner. To achieve sustained superior results in your sales career, you must work daily on the three areas of will, skill, and drill of selling. In other words, meaningful change is the result of very hard work. The purpose of this book is to help you master the few basic skills and develop a daily sales execution program that will help you sell more than you thought possible.

To change your life's trajectory and the arc of your potential, you must take a first step.

KYOA Focus Questions

1.1. What is my trajectory if I choose not to change anything in my life and career?

1.2. Knowing how hard it is to see over a hill to the hidden arc of my potential, what positive small first step will I take today?

Get the Most Value from This Book

Get the free workbook offered at the web site, begin filling out your profile, and join the community. The workbook will help guide you through the process of changing the arc of your potential; it is an easy way to record your thoughts and build your plan.

See www.willskilldrill.com.

My sincere hope is that you'll decide to take a step toward change. You have to change yourself. You have to kick your own ass into gear. If you do, you will see amazing results.

Over the past 10 years, I've worked with thousands of salespeople and business owners to improve their sales performance. I've seen it work in their lives, and I know it can work in yours too. Regardless of what you are facing, I know that these principles, skills, and processes can work for you, too.

Enjoy the uphill run. (See www.pikespeakmarathon.org/entry.htm.)

Chapter 1 Recap: The Arc of Your Potential

- Each of our lives is on a trajectory or path that comprises our relationships, careers, health, knowledge, giving, happiness, and spiritual walk. Trajectories are predictable and easy to calculate.

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- Your potential is connected to your life's trajectory, and a sales career is a part of your current potential. You cannot have what you have never had by staying where you have always stayed.
- Achieving your goals is simply a journey of small steps in the right direction. The arc of your potential rises and falls as you move in the direction of your most dominant thought. The more positive your thoughts and expectations become, the higher your capability becomes.
- Altering the arc of your potential requires a paradigm shift in how you manage and execute your career. You must work daily on the three areas of the will, skill, and drill of selling. The purpose of this book is to help you do just that: implement a change management process, master the few basic skills, and develop a daily sales execution program that will help you improve your sales beyond belief.

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