

CHAPTER 1

Learning to Run



Trevor limped through the front door, sore again. These past few months had been tough on his joints. Six months ago he picked up running again after his doctor said he needed to get more exercise. To help keep himself motivated, he set a goal of completing a half-marathon within a year. But it didn't seem like this was going to happen—not the way things were looking now. Trevor was beginning to realize that his body just couldn't take a beating these days, and he joked with friends that he felt like an old man at 45.

It wasn't always this way. Trevor had always been a runner in one way or another. He played soccer in high school, and started to run as a way to stay in shape in college. He took to it naturally. But as he moved onto a career, his time became limited and he ran less and less frequently.

Trevor knew that something needed to change if he was going to complete the half-marathon. He tried a variety of tactics—buying new running shoes, wearing knee braces, and concentrating on stretching. However, nothing seemed to work, and the date for the half-marathon was drawing closer.

Trevor had recently been enjoying a drink with a friend and mentioned that he was having a difficult time preparing for the race. After some probing, his friend asked a simple question that he wasn't sure how to answer: "Have you tried changing how you run?" Perplexed, Trevor replied, "I'm not sure what you mean . . . I run how I run. It's always been the same—one foot in front of the other!" After a chuckle, his friend asked again "Seriously, have you ever thought about *how you run*—and what you could do to run *better*?"

The thought had never occurred to Trevor. He had always taken his running style for granted. After all, it had usually come easily to him, and he achieved the results he wanted. He assumed that his running style was as good as it ever could be, so he responded "Nah, the way I run is fine. And anyway, aren't we born with the ability to run?"

His friend replied, "Of course we can all run. But like anything, there is an art and skill to running, and part of getting what you want out of it is knowing how to run correctly."

Trevor had never considered that there might be a right or wrong way to run, and questioned incredulously, "What could possibly make my running better?"

His friend smiled and answered, "Look it up." And that is just what he did.

Trevor's perspective started to change within a few days. The more he researched, the more he saw running as a skill that he could improve. He learned about proper posture, stride, and how a foot strikes the surface, and discovered tactics that professional runners use to stay healthy. For the first time, he could see that his joint problems were likely due to *how* he was running. A feeling of relief came over him. Unlike his age, *this* was something he could change!

As he trained for the race, he began paying attention to his form and movements. Within a few weeks, his knee and back pain began to fade, and his endurance seemed to jump, which gave him the energy to run longer than ever. The half-marathon now seemed like a reality and it felt good.

If you ask Trevor about running today, he will tell you that his only regret is not discovering how he could improve his running earlier. But now that he has this new perspective, a full marathon doesn't seem too far away.

Like Trevor and his running, we all take *explanation* for granted. Because it is a natural part of how we communicate, the thought may never occur to us that

explanation is a skill we can improve and put to work in achieving our goals. In this way, running and explanation have much in common:

- We have the ability to do it
- We may do it so frequently that we never think about it
- We think the way in which we do it is normal
- We never consider that we could improve the way we do it, but,
- Improvement *is* possible, and creates positive results

Because explanation is a skill that we can improve and apply to nearly every part of our lives, let's get started in doing so. In Chapter 2 we'll define *explanation* and consider the characteristics that make it useful and powerful.

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