

Business Lessons from the 2006 Winter Olympic Games

Ever since I was a young girl, I've been captivated by the Olympic Games. My family would watch the television coverage together, and we'd marvel as the stories of victory and defeat unfolded.

My dad (Ron Soble) was a world-class track athlete who won medals in the national championships. He even tried out for the Olympic team. Sadly, he fouled out in his attempt at the running long jump and missed his chance to compete for Olympic glory, much to his great disappointment.

Stories about the athletes and their journeys to greatness or defeat have always captured my attention. That's why I continue to tune in, even though all the viewing statistics seem to indicate that I am one of few who make a habit of watching.

The lessons that unfold inform my storytelling as a public relations professional, and they offer compelling ideas to inspire business people worldwide. Here are a few lessons from the Olympic Games in Torino, Italy to inspire your winning ways.

If you can't go the distance, give your place on the team to someone who can. Figure skater Michelle Kwan recognized early in her practice that her groin injury would compromise her ability to win the gold. She gave up her place on the Olympic team to Emily Hughes to give the U.S. a better chance.

In business or sport, it is crucial to assemble the best possible team. Have the courage to make the tough calls when assembling your team so your vision for company performance has its best chance to shine.

It is far better to under-promise and over-deliver than run the risk of a highly visible defeat. The U.S. ski team was heralded as the best in the world prior to these games. Expectations were high, and many of them were dashed in the snow.

A lesson for business is to fly below the radar, keep focus on the end game, and emerge victorious with your team for having applied consistent effort on performance that speaks for itself.

If you falter, get up. Skier Lindsey Kildow took a horrific fall in her downhill race that resulted in an overnight stay in the hospital. Still, she returned the next day to give her next event her best effort. Courageous Olympic recoveries are sweet and give team members and fans courage to face their own challenges with keen resolve. In business, how one faces disappointments is an important measure of true spirit and leadership.

Jim Collins' best-selling book *Good to Great* maintains that successful organizations get the right people on the bus to achieve great results. **An important corollary to this is to avoid missing the bus and run the risk of poor performance when it counts.**

Olympic figure skater Peter Weir missed the bus to the long program warm-up and claimed to have left his aura at the Olympic Village. As a result, he arrived late to the ice arena and was unable to focus on turning in a medal-worthy performance.

In business, preparation, discipline, and focus on the goal are essential ingredients to winning performance. Being late to the big event offers cold comfort to fellow team members with every reason to expect extraordinary performance.



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If you can't deliver the goods, offer no excuses. U.S. speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno's star rose with his gracious comments about the Olympic experience and his competitors from South Korea when accepting one of his bronze medals. Sometimes, you just don't get it done. As Ohno says, "That's short track."

Wait to celebrate until the job is done. Skier Bode Miller came to the games prepared to party at the Olympic level. Too bad he was unprepared to perform on skis. In addition, snowboarder Lindsey Jacobellis got carried away in her apparent victory in snowboard cross and did a showboat move en route to the finish line. She lost the gold medal in the process.

In business, don't take unnecessary risks or missteps. Perform like a champion. Represent yourself and your organization in a winning way. Say and do the right things, and you'll never have reason for regret. And remember always that it's not over until it's over.

Use your 15 minutes of fame to make a difference for others. Long track speed skating gold and silver medalist Joey Cheek used his time on the podium to draw attention to a non-profit organization that would benefit from his Olympic cash winnings. In doing so, he set an example for people worldwide to follow. Corporate matching funds took the donation total to over a quarter of a million dollars.

The stories that unfolded in the spirit of Olympic competition gave us all pause to consider what is possible beyond the world of sport when we set out to achieve our wildest dreams and go the distance in our own authentic ways.