**Preparing for an endurance event.**

Notes from Norman Beech - Manager of the Raymond Priestley Centre for outdoor activities. Together with his son James they became the first British father and son to row any ocean. They have also cycled a tandem bike in 4 days from Lands End to John O’Groats and are riding in the 2014 Race Around Ireland, the European ultra-distance cycling championships.

The three things that typically you will need to balance your time and energy between are:

* physical preparation
* project management/equipment preparation
* fund raising/publicity

In many cases the easiest one is the physical preparation. The big danger is this becomes the focus of your attention to the detriment of the others. Ultimately this is likely to result in poor preparation and failure to complete the challenge. The areas itemised below therefore require careful consideration.

**Understand the event you are preparing for.** The more you know about the challenge the better. Has anyone done this before? Read about previous events, talk to people who have completed the event. Find out how they prepared - what would they do differently?

* Knowledge is really important in determining the successful outcome of any endurance challenge. Seeking advice and support is important.
* Find out what technical aspects maybe involved eg navigation, bike mechanics, extremes of terrain or weather conditions.
* How will you manage the nutrition? Carry everything with you, have a support team, rely on organised feed stations?
* What special equipment will you need? Running shoes, bike, boat, technical clothing.

**Do you still want to do this?**

* You must want to take this on. Otherwise when it gets tough either during training or the event itself you will find it very easy to drop out! Having a reason for doing the event is a massive benefit to your mental preparation.

**Make a plan.**

* Evaluate your current level of fitness – this may require the services of a sports physiologist.
* Based on this assessment of your fitness you can calculate how long you will need to acquire the fitness needed to complete the challenge. This is important because you need to count backwards from the date you plan to start the challenge to check you have enough time to prepare.
* Once you have a start date you can make a training plan. Training to run, cycle, swim, walk, row long distances don’t necessarily mean you have to train over super long distances. Quality over quantity is important. As is rest and variety of training to maintain your motivation. There are lots of training guides to running marathons, cycling long distances to be found in specialist magazines and on the internet. A sports coach experienced in the event you are going to take part in can also advise and discuss with you how to prepare.
* You may also need to plan for testing equipment, whether you like particular sports drinks and what food you will need to eat during your training and the event itself. Don’t start using in the event food or drinks you have not used in training.
* Plan in rest and recovery to your training plan. Keep a training diary to monitor progress.
* If the event has rules you will need to know these, as will your support team. You will need to plan for compliance with these rules. If taking part overseas there will be planning for travel, transport of kit, travel documents, insurance requirements etc,
* Create a time line showing when all these jobs need to be completed. Leave some spare time as a contingency in the event of any problems cropping up.

**Practice/simulation.**

* Aim to practice with a training event simulating as many of the conditions you expect to encounter. This maybe the time of day the event will operate in. The type of terrain, weather conditions you expect to have to deal with, use the kit you will have in the event, use the food you will use in the event, have the support team you will have in the event.
* If it is a multi day event aim to try at least a 24 hour practice. Work out sleep patterns. Most people can go for 24 hours without sleep. After 26 hours you will need some rest. Someone will need to stay awake to time this. Don’t sleep for more than 2 hours. A 10-20 minute sleep is effective in refreshing you. The longer the event the more sleep breaks will become essential to prevent hallucinations, chronic fatigue and decrease in performance.

**Nutrition.**

* You will burn a lot of calories in an endurance event. Workout how you will replace these in terms of small regular intakes of food.
* You will need a rehydration plan to take on board sufficient fluids.
* Nutrition to support your training as well as your activity in the event will need to be considered, as recovery after exercise is really important to enable you to train effectively.
* A sports nutritionist can advise on this. The longer the event the more crucial nutrition becomes.

**Publicity.**

* If you are taking part in an event to raise funds for a good cause then letting people know what you are doing is important.
* Local press, television and radio are likely to pick up on your story if it is distinctive and has a different angle. Someone running the London Marathon may not attract interest from the media. Someone completing it in a deep sea diving suit is likely to capture the imagination and be a source of media interest.
* Publicity means people are more likely to follow your progress and donate to your cause. A website may help with this, there are lots of charity donation page options you could use. Social media is also a key way to let people know what you are doing and how they can donate.
* The charity you are raising funds for will have advice on this area that you can tap in to.

**Fund Raising.**

* You are likely to have to cover project costs such as entry fees, transport costs, nutrition costs, equipment purchases etc.
* Create a budget for these costs and include this in your project plan as costs you will need to cover and a timeline as to when these funds need to be available.
* Make it clear to people what you are raising money for – project costs or the charity. How will funds be divided between these two areas.
* Have a clear message as to what the money raised will be used for. Why is this important? How can you communicate this?
* Be imaginative as to how you can raise funds. Bag packing at supermarkets, advertising on clothing or equipment, fund raising ball, car boot sales, use of Easyfundraising website etc.

**Mental Preparation.**

* Know why you want to do this. It may well be you have some difficult times. If you are not clear in your own mind as to your motivation to continue it is likely you will give up. Don’t do this!
* Prepare properly. Think of what will help motivate you. A picture of an important person associated with the challenge. Inspirational quotes. Messages from family and friends. Motivational music. Food you will look forward to eating. People that will phone you up to find out how you are doing and encourage you.
* Set clear and realistic goals for your training, project management, fund raising and for the event itself. If these are attainable they will help to maintain your motivation. If they are too difficult you will become discouraged and this can be a drain on your mental resolve to keep going.
* Picture what it will look and feel like when you finish.
* What will finishing the challenge mean to other people you are raising funds for?
* Think through how you will cope with a setback. They will crop up. How you deal with this will be key to successfully completing the event.
* The more obstacles you overcome along the way the greater the mental toughness you will have to keep going and see things through.

**Don’t forget your family and friends!**

Preparing for an endurance challenge is going to take a lot of time, effort and determination. Your family and friends are your support network. Show your appreciation for their help. They will also be sacrificing a lot to help you.

**Smile!**

Keep a sense of humour. Remember laughter is good for you!

Norman Beech

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