

OLYMPIC SKIER • NFL PLAYER • CEO • PHILANTHROPIST

JEREMY BLOOM



FUELED

BY

FAILURE

USING DETOURS AND DEFEATS TO POWER PROGRESS

If you're in need of inspiration and actions to get you through the inevitable failures in business, and life, this book hits the mark. Jeremy recounts his journey from athletics to entrepreneurship with humility, sharing the backstory behind his very public defeats, and more importantly, revealing priceless lessons in competing for success. If you compete at anything—sports, business, or life—you need this book.

—Scott Blackmun, United States Olympic Committee CEO

Jeremy has emerged stronger from failures in his life and is truly the embodiment of positive energy in everything he does. In these pages Jeremy will show you how to move forward in business and in life without letting the disappointments get in your way.

—David Karnstedt, former Adobe Systems, Inc. SVP of media and advertising solutions

Jeremy believes in possibility rather than limits. What stops most of us is our fear of failure, not failure itself. The dread of losing keeps us from the bold pursuits that create success. Jeremy, on the other hand, gets excited about an idea and pursues it with a fearless passion. What could you do if you didn't limit yourself from the start? Jeremy Bloom shows us how to focus on what's possible and just go for it!

—Jillaina Wachendorf, Wish of a Lifetime CEO

I took Jeremy snowboarding once . . . he had never done it before. He went from being terrible at it to excelling in a matter of hours. Part of it was natural talent, but part was that he didn't fear failing. The rest was sheer tenacity. That embodies how Jeremy goes about learning things and this book reflects it. He's done the research—practical and theoretical—and delivers great guidance on staying the course to reach success.

—Bill Maris, venture capitalist and managing partner at Google Ventures

Jeremy has packed a lifetime of experience into 32 years. While he's led an extraordinary life thus far, the ups and downs he's experienced are something we can all connect with and learn from. His story is inspiring and the lessons he imparts are invigorating.

—Tony Bates, president of GoPro, former Skype CEO and Microsoft VP

Part of what has made Jeremy's life so remarkable is that he takes on challenges and doesn't look back. When something doesn't work out he learns why and uses that knowledge to better himself. His book is the proverbial kick in the ass that most of us need when we start retreating or giving up on a challenge or a goal.

—Brad Feld, American entrepreneur, author, blogger, and venture capitalist at Foundry Group

Jeremy's super smart and he gets the big picture. He realized that after sports he would need to do something more. He surrounded himself with very strong, very bright individuals who shared their insights, advice, and best practices. He took those lessons and made sure they were transferrable to the stage he was on. To me that was a huge cornerstone for him. Now you too can learn those attributes in this book.

—Apolo Ohno, eight time Olympic medalist in Speed Skating

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Thank you first and foremost to my mom, Char, and dad, Larry. My parents have supported every dream that I have ever had in my life. They are my heroes and the two people that I look up to the most. I also want to thank my brother, Jordan, and my sister, Molly. As the youngest of three, I spent most of my childhood losing to both of them in just about everything. Those losses inspired me to set goals to become the best in the world. And to my dear grandmother Donna, who, at 89 years old, lives high in the Rocky Mountains in Keystone, Colorado, and volunteers every week at the elementary school and senior center.

I'd like to also thank the following people for contributing to this book: Tony Bates (former CEO of Skype and current president of GoPro), an entrepreneur who understands how to set an intention and accomplish his goals regardless of the circumstances; Brad Feld (managing director at Foundry Group), for his infinite wisdom and honesty, and for believing in me as an unproven entrepreneur; David Karnstedt (former CEO of Efficient Frontier), for being one of my closest business advisors; Bill Maris (managing director at Google Ventures), for first introducing me to the tech world and later becoming one of my closest friends; Eric Roza (CEO at Datalogix), for showing me that turning around a company when it seems impossible is, in fact, possible; Apolo Ohno (Olympic champion), for showing what hard work was all about as a young aspiring athlete; Karen Cogan (U.S. Ski Team sports psychologist), for helping me sharpen my ability to handle pressure; Jillaina Wachendorf (CEO at Wish of a Lifetime), for her infinite energy and passion in helping make sure the wishes of the oldest among us are fulfilled and don't die with them; and to Greg Besner, Dr. Sydney Finkelstein, Gail Sagel, Roger Staubach, and Brian Swette, all of whom I have not had the privilege of meeting personally, but whose stories inspire me. I would also like to thank Reggie Bradford, Seth Levine, Bruce Dines and Sam Landman for not only investing in me but for also becoming close friends and mentors along the way. I would not be where I am today if not for their support.

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GETTING FUELED

When I first started thinking about writing this book, I asked ten people what they thought about the title *Fueled by Failure*. All ten people told me not to use the word *failure* in the title. They said that the word brought such a negative connotation it would scare people away from reading the book. But every human will fail many times during his or her life, so why not be more prepared for it? The consistent negative bias toward the word failure only increased my desire to write this book.

The following pages are not simply about failure; they are actually much more about how to succeed against all odds. However, it is my strong belief that before you can become the world's best at anything you have to become great at leveraging adversity to refine your road map to greatness.

The most successful and happy people that I have been around in my life are those who are exceptional at doing this. They have developed the mental skills necessary to effectively deal with life's biggest curve balls, so they won't be thrown off their game. Throughout this book I will share stories of experiences and lessons I have picked up along the way that have helped me become more successful in athletics and startup life.

Baby Steps

We are born into this world and spend our first several years failing at everything. We fall down hundreds of times before we learn how to walk properly and we mix up the sounds of just about every word en route to learning proper English. We are thirsty for knowledge, and trial and error is our only method of learning. During these young years we haven't developed an ego yet, so the effect that failure has on us is almost nonexistent. We just keep trying and trying until we get it right. However, as we get older, we become more sensitive, our ego builds, and failure can have a much bigger effect on our determination to persevere and learn.

I once read that Thomas Edison failed nearly 10,000 times before inventing the electric light bulb. Edison claimed, in a now famous quote, "I have not failed 10,000 times—I've successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work."

For me, as a young athlete, I saw great athletes who were crushed by adversity, and later witnessed entrepreneurs struggle with failed businesses before they finally made their marks. I determined that whatever happened to me in my life, I would never allow myself to be defeated by failure. And although I have not yet mastered many of the skills discussed in this book, I am a passionate student of the topic.

Today, as I enjoy my position as CEO of Integrate, a venture-backed technology company that I cofounded a few years ago, I still look over my shoulder every day, aware that things could come

crashing down around me at any moment. But I also recognize that my own path to success has always been paved with wins and losses, ups and downs, and both great and challenging times.

I wrote this book to share the trials and tribulations I went through to become the best skier in the world and an all-American football player, as well as my transition from professional sports to startup founder entering a new and unknown world. I tell my story, from my early successes to falling on my face, to rebounding and fighting to pick myself back up. There is a chapter on reprogramming your ego, something paramount for me to become a world champion. I also explore the difference between being extrinsically motivated by others and intrinsically motivating yourself, a concept that I believe is crucial to master a happy and fulfilled life. And I share how I chart my road map for success.

I have had the great fortune of being surrounded by some of the best athletes and entrepreneurs in the world, and I have learned more from being around them than anything else in my life. Many of them share their wisdom and experience throughout this book. We'll look at changing careers and starting a business, along with management, team building, weeding out the victims, constructing a bad-ass culture, and how to manage the daily roller coaster of life.

The book concludes with an important chapter on leaving a legacy, which for me comes from starting a nonprofit that helps the oldest people in our country realize their dreams. It's my reminder that neither gold medals nor dollar bills define the most important things in life.

My goal is that by the end of this book you will become better equipped to use adversity to help you succeed while picking up some new ideas on how to make you, your team, or your business more successful.

22 SECONDS TO GLORY

I had 22 seconds to make a 23-year-old dream come true.

As I stood in the staging area at the 2006 Winter Olympics, in Torino, Italy, I thought about how I wanted to be able to call myself an Olympic champion. I thought about all my friends around the world watching me on TV and about my dad back home in Colorado and my mom who was in the grandstands waiting for me below. I flashed back to the years I spent competing in regional competitions around Colorado, the phone call I received at 15 when I found out that I had made the U.S. National Team, and the thousands of hours that I had spent preparing myself for this moment.

Images shot through my mind of the journey that had brought me to this point. I remembered the time, at 10 years old, when I first watched mogul skiing in the Olympics with my dad and my mom. My dad has a passion for the Olympics that goes back to the Carl Lewis days at the 1984 games and continues to this day. When a U.S. athlete stands atop the podium and “The Star-Spangled Banner” plays, he gets very emotional. My dad was my first football coach and ski coach, and my hero. I wanted nothing more in my life than to win an Olympic gold medal, not only for myself but also for my family. The thought of my family watching me as I stood on top of that Olympic podium, with a gold medal wrapped around my neck, was a major driving force in my lifelong quest.

I had won more consecutive World Cup races than any freestyle skier in history the year before—I was skiing great in 2006, and this was my moment. I had trained well all week and knew that I was going to ski flawlessly.

One Move, One Moment

As I slid into the starting gate, I got my first glimpse of the 230-meter mogul course where my fate would be decided. It was a beautiful night in Torino; the snow sparkled off the bright lights like Manhattan sidewalk on a warm summer evening. I went over the three key things I needed to remember:

1. *Mind like a river.* Any thought that might come up that didn't have to do with my run would flow from the front of my head out the back. Nothing can stay still in a fast-moving river. This was also how I moved quickly past any self-defeating thoughts like “I'm going to fall,” “I'm going to miss my top jump,” or “I don't feel ready.”
2. *Live downstairs.* I imagined myself downstairs in a cellar where no thoughts from the outside could get in. This was my way of eliminating any thought that wasn't focused on the skiing task at hand. It helped me achieve tunnel vision.
3. *Focus on your skills.* They are what will get you down this mountain every time. This was my method of going back to the basics.

I had an unusual sense of confidence that day. In my head I knew I was going to ski up to my full potential. Finally, the judges were ready; my time had come. I wasn't nervous. My moment was now.

“Three, two, one,” over the loudspeaker, and I pushed out of the gate. I felt the snow under my skis and quickly got into the top jump. I nailed my takeoff and landed my 720 iron-cross perfectly. As

landed, I started to accelerate faster and faster. The snow was icier than it had been in training. I felt myself getting a bit out of control, but I was determined to fight my skis back underneath me. I got back together quickly and was flying into the bottom air. The takeoff on my D-spin 720 was near perfect, and I landed with a small compression. But I blazed through the bottom section of the course to the finish line. My heart immediately dropped—I knew it wasn't my best run.

Even though I wanted to win a medal, in reality, my biggest goal at the Olympics was to ski to my potential. If I did that, everything else would take care of itself. But I had made one mistake, and I knew it would cost me. The only question was how much. In those fleeting moments while I awaited my score, I felt the same gut-wrenching feeling I had experienced when I was 19 years old and participating in the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. That year, I had been the number-one ranked skier in the world, but I made a small mistake on my final run and it cost me an opportunity to medal.

My score came up. I was in fourth place with two skiers to go. My dreams of becoming an Olympic champion were over. I had prepared my entire life for this one moment and I knew there would not be another opportunity. Skiing through the media gauntlet that awaited me, I tried to smile, said the right things, and kept myself together, masking the disappointment as best I could. My mom came over, hugged me, and told me she was very proud of me. My mom was my biggest supporter and fan. She flew all over the world to see me compete and had not missed a single football game I played in during high school and college. Yet she always cared more about how I treated other people and how I handled winning and losing than she did about where I placed or whether I won.

When I returned to my apartment in Torino, I closed the door, sat down on the bed, and, well, that was it. I lost it. Tears flowed down my face. A torrent of emotion flooded over me. I wanted to crawl outside of my body because the pain was so unbearable. It was the lowest moment of my athletic life. I felt totally defeated once again on skiing's biggest stage.

I woke up the next morning hoping that it was all just a bad dream. Still engulfed in the emotion of what had occurred, I kept replaying the run again and again in my mind. I didn't want to talk to anyone, I just wanted to keep to myself and be alone. But there wasn't much time for mourning and self-pity. Within 48 hours' time, I had to move on. There was another dream that wasn't going to wait for me to recover from this devastating emotional blow: football.

My Other Dream

The next day, I boarded a plane to Indianapolis for the 2006 NFL Combine, the showcase for college football players to perform physical and mental tests in front of National Football League scout coaches, and general managers. It was the prelude to being drafted by an NFL team. In spite of the failure on the slopes, I needed to focus all my attention on football. At the time, becoming a professional football player was my other dream.

This would be one of the first times I truly felt what it meant to be fueled by your own failure, to take the negative feelings from the stumbles and rather than let them take control of you, instead use the power of failure to boost what came next. (I'll talk more about what failure looks like and how to take control of it in [Chapter 3](#).)

I couldn't let the pain I felt about the end of my Olympic dream cloud my mind—or my chance of making an NFL team. I would come back to this idea of letting things go over and over in my athletic career and my entrepreneurial life.

My love of football came from my dad's love for the Denver Broncos and our hero, John Elway. He was drafted in 1983 by the Denver Broncos, a year after I was born. Growing up, I was a huge

Elway fan. He was the ultimate competitor. He let his playing do the talking, treated people well, and was a humble leader. His goal was to take the Broncos to a Super Bowl title, and he accomplished that twice. I wanted to be a part of that same football ethos.

My Double Life: Downhill and Downfield

At the age of eight, I began competing locally in ski competitions and won in my age group for several years straight. In skiing I often heard people say that I was a prodigy from a young age, while in football at every level I heard that I was too small to play.

By the time I was ten years old, my dad reached the limit of his coaching abilities and signed me up for a ski team in Breckenridge, Colorado. Two of the greatest mogul coaches in history were associated with that team, Scott Rawles—who later became my Olympic team coach for many years—and John Dowling, who had been an Olympic coach and is the freestyle program director at the Ski and Snowboard Club Vail.

Not long after becoming part of Team Breckenridge, I also started playing Pop Warner football en route to making my junior high school team. Then, at 15, I became the youngest person at that time to make the U.S. Mogul Freestyle Ski Team. My ski coaches wanted me to quit playing football and move to a ski academy in the mountains. But I had always been a weekend skier, playing football during the week, and going to public schools in Loveland, Colorado, like a regular kid. I didn't want to give up that much of my life, especially not football, where I made my high school team. So I opted to stay put and maintain a somewhat normal life, getting the public school experience, enjoying homecoming, prom, and all sorts of teen activities—things that I wouldn't trade for anything.

In my freshman year of high school I played quarterback and defensive back. My sophomore year, at the urging of my coach, Tony Davis, who was a prolific running back at Nebraska, I switched to wide receiver, and this move allowed me to start on the varsity team. Midway through my senior year of high school, the University of Colorado offered me a full scholarship to play football.

Meanwhile, as part of the U.S. Ski Team, I was now competing and winning in freestyle events on the Nor-Am tour run by the International Ski Federation. At the age of 17, I also won big series skiing events in the Pro-Am series and had become the best skier that was not yet competing at the World Cup level. It seemed obvious that I would be chosen to compete in a full World Cup season. But I was not selected. I was confused and frustrated. Without World Cup starts it was nearly impossible for me to make the Olympic team the next year, so I quit skiing in 2001 to focus on football. I lived on campus at the University of Colorado and trained with the team. Our strength and conditioning coach was the world famous Doc Kries. Kries kicked our asses every day—there just isn't any other way to put it. I didn't miss a single day of off-season conditioning and completely reshaped my concept of what hard work meant.

But then, that July I got a call from my skiing agent Andy Carroll. The U.S. Ski Team was having a pre-Olympic camp in Chile, South America, and he told me that the best skier at that camp would get one World Cup start, in France. My first reaction: "Hell, no." I was excited about playing football and felt that the University of Colorado wanted me and the U.S. Ski Team did not. But Carroll challenged me to go so I could show the coaches how hard I had worked and how much better I was than everyone else. He told me that a sponsor would pay for my trip.

For a few days the challenge wore on my mind. There was no doubt that I was in the best shape of my life. I decided to go down there on a mission to prove a point. For the 22 days of the ski camp, I was the first one on the ski hill and the last one off. I was skiing top-to-bottom runs like my li-

depended on it. After each day, I would literally limp back to my apartment, soak in an ice bath for 20 minutes, and try to get myself ready for the next day. I was as hungry as ever to prove to my coach that I was ready to become the best skier in the world.

I had to leave camp four days early to fly back for fall football camp in Colorado. The day before I was set to leave, U.S. Ski Team coaches Donnie St. Pierre, Liz McIntyre, and Scott Rawles asked to meet with me. We met in the lobby of the hotel in El Colorado, Chile. They looked me in the eye and told me that they had never seen anyone attack a training camp like I just had. They wanted to offer me one World Cup start in Tignes, France. If I finished in the top 12 there, I would be able to compete in every World Cup event leading up to the Olympics. It was an opportunity, although a small one. I had never placed in the top 12 of a World Cup race.

I flew back from Chile thinking about this situation the entire time. When I landed in Colorado, I called my mom and dad, and then I met with my football coach, Gary Barnett. I told Coach Barnett that I committed to play football this year and if he didn't want me to try to make the Olympic Ski Team, that I wouldn't do it, and I wouldn't think twice about the decision, even for a second.

Coach Barnett looked at me and told me something that I will never forget. He said, "Jeremy, I'm going to treat you like my son right now. I want you to go for your dream of becoming an Olympian and your full-ride scholarship will be waiting for you here at CU next year. We will be cheering for you. Go make it happen."

I was so fired up, I was ready to run through a wall.

The next stop was Park City, Utah, to train full time with Chris Marchetti. He was introduced to me by my agent Andy Carroll, and training with him turned out to be one of the best decisions of my skiing career. We took our training to the next level. Sometimes I would wake up at 3 A.M. and hike a mountain because I knew my competitors were sleeping. It was intense, but I loved every second of it.

As the season approached, I felt nervous about having one shot to make the Olympic team. I flew to Tignes, France, for my first World Cup on the same day that the University of Colorado beat Texas to win the Big 12 title. I knew the pressure was on; not only did I turn away a chance to be part of a football team that just won a division title, but my dream of becoming an Olympian could be decided at this one competition.

In my qualification run, a big gust of wind covered the course with snow while I was skiing. The judges lost sight of me for a split second, so they made me take another run. That was a lucky break because I had made a big mistake on that first run and would have never qualified for finals. In my next qualification run I told myself to let it loose. Don't hold back anything—a concept I've carried with me as I've built a company, too. My second run was much better and I qualified—in 12th place!

I couldn't believe it. I needed a top-12 finish to ski the rest of the World Cup and I qualified by tenths of a point. You couldn't wipe the smile off my face if you tried. In the finals, I skied my heart out. I ended the event with a third place finish and qualified for the 2002 Olympic team!

While the 2002 Olympics didn't go as I had hoped, I ended the season as the number-one ranked skier in the world and won my first World Cup Overall Trophy. Over the next four years I won three world championships and 11 gold medals, and stood on the podium 26 times.

Back on Campus: A Football Dream Builds

As I arrived back on campus for my freshman football season, I did so with a national spotlight on me. It made me feel uncomfortable because as a freshman on a football team you don't want the attention on you; you want it on your team. To make things worse, the NCAA told me that they were not going

to allow me to play college football and still get paid by my skiing sponsors. I decided to fight the NCAA in court over this decision, and that didn't exactly help remove the spotlight. I ended up losing my case and decided to forgo about \$500,000 of skiing-related endorsement money to realize my dream of playing for the Colorado Buffaloes.

Many people called me foolish for turning away that type of money and told me that as a five-foot-nine, 175-pound receiver, I would never see the field. But I was confident in my ability, and I knew that I was the fastest guy on the field. As the season opened up against our in-state rival Colorado State, I was not in the starting lineup as a receiver and was listed third on the punt return team. It was a tough three quarters. We were down 10–0 and couldn't seem to make anything work offensively.

As the third quarter ended, I heard Coach Barnett calling my name. I ran up to him and he said, "Jeremy, I want you to go return this punt." Without thinking, I said, "No problem," and grabbed my helmet. As I started jogging onto the field, the moment hit me. I looked around and saw 80,000 people, national TV cameras, friends, and family in the stadium . . . and here I was returning a punt for my school.

All I could think was . . . "Don't drop the ball!"

The punt seemed to hang in the air forever, but as it came down, it did so right into my chest. I caught the ball, took two steps up the middle, then cut to the right sideline. I saw my ten teammates in front of me set up a perfect wall, and I raced down the sidelines. A few defenders missed me, and before I knew it, my hands were in the air and I was in the end zone. The first time I touched the ball in college football, I took a punt 75 yards to the house and scored a touchdown. I remember looking around seeing my teammates going crazy and fans jumping up and down and I thought to myself, "This is why I turned down that money." No amount of money could compare to that feeling.

For two years at college, I had the time of my life. I returned punts and played wide receiver for the Colorado Buffaloes. I set several school records, including the longest pass reception for a touchdown at 96 yards, and after my freshman season I was named First Team All American as a punt returner.

But I had a problem. There was still skiing and another Olympics was coming up. Yet, at this point I was broke. It was now 2004, and without the money I'd given up to play football, I would not be able to train for the 2006 Olympics. So I drew a line in the sand and told the NCAA that I was going to accept skiing-related endorsements so that I could train and compete for the United States in the next Olympics. I told them publicly that I was not leaving school, and if they didn't want me there, they would have to kick me out. They waited seven months to do so, and in August 2004, right before fall football camp opened, they declared me permanently ineligible.

I was incredibly upset. I couldn't understand why an organization would take something away from me that I had worked so hard for. But the decision was made, and there was nothing that I could do about it, so I packed my bags, left college, and began training for the Torino Olympics.

The Road to the NFL—and Beyond

Those of us on the U.S. Ski Team in Torino, Italy, were proud to represent our country. For me, however, it was more than that; it was a second chance to finish what I set out to do when I first watched skiing in the Olympics as a ten-year-old boy. Torino didn't turn out as I'd hoped, but I would not take the memory of that Olympic disappointment with me to the NFL Combine.

Or so I thought. It turned out my frustration in Torino was exactly what I needed as motivation

truly excel at the Combine. At the Combine there were more than 300 players ready to take part in a series of evaluations that include the 40-yard dash, 20-yard shuttle, vertical jump, broad jump, bench press, and position-specific drills along with injury evaluations, interviews, and more. For some players, it can help propel them higher up in the NFL draft. For others, like me, it can draw attention from scouts who might know your name but have not seen what you can do. I had been out of the action for two years at Colorado, so I needed to remind the NFL representatives what I was capable of on the field.

On April 30, 2006, two months after competing in Torino, I was selected by the Philadelphia Eagles in the fifth round of the NFL draft, the 147th selection overall.

I had gone from the Olympics to making it to the NFL in a few short months. I was on cloud nine. I spent two seasons with the Eagles and a season with the Pittsburgh Steelers. I had a blast playing in the NFL, sharing the locker room with guys like Donovan McNabb, Brian Dawkins, Ben Roethlisberger, Hines Ward, and Troy Polamalu. And it was incredible to be coached by legendary coaches such as Mike Tomlin and Andy Reid. While I would end up injuring my hamstring during training camp in 2008—ending my professional athletic career—I'd reached my goal of the NFL.

Now that my days as a professional athlete were over—all I focused on for so long—I worried about what life would be like for me after sports. I had ridden the waves from highs to lows and back up again, learning what it meant to be on a team as well as what it meant to stand on your own with everything riding on your shoulders.

I had been in the limelight, which was sometimes exciting, and other times overwhelming. Now I had my whole life ahead of me. What to do next? It would take time for me to figure that out.

But one thing was for sure—the failures I'd experienced would only serve to fuel whatever success I'd make for myself next.

MOVING FORWARD: THE 48-HOUR RULE

The night I failed to win a gold medal in the Olympics for the second time was one of the most painful nights of my life. I was heartbroken, angry, and confused. My dream of becoming an Olympic champion was over, and I didn't think I could find any way to snap out of it. But as I wrestled with the pain and the deluge of emotions, I made a pact with myself. I would allow myself 48 hours to obsess over everything that had happened—and then I was going to completely move on and not look back.

If you're going to succeed, you cannot dwell on defeat or missed opportunities, and you can't allow them to define you. I've found that to be true for both sports and business.

When it comes to dealing with adversity, John Maxwell describes how people deal with negative situations in his book *The Difference Maker*: "I've found that there are really only two kinds of people in this world when it comes to dealing with discouragement: splatters and bouncers. When splatters hit rock bottom, they fall apart, and they stick to the bottom like glue. On the other hand, when bouncers hit bottom, they pull together and bounce back."

The most evolved bouncers I know hit rock bottom, methodically dissect what happened, resist the urge to allow the loss to define them, and decipher learning to refine their road map for success. Although certain personality traits are characteristic of a bouncer or a splatter, the good news is that understanding how to constructively deal with adversity is a learned skill, not something that you are born with.

Much of what I discuss in this book is designed to provoke thoughts and ideas to arm you with the skills and insights necessary to improve your ability to constructively deal with adversity.

The Power of Deadlines

The most important step to overcoming adversity and negative feelings: Don't wallow. Instead, set a deadline for accepting what has happened, at least emotionally. This emotional acceptance stage is crucial—and so is the deadline.

This stage is defined by the amount of time it takes for you to accept your new reality. You'll have to give yourself a deadline for getting through this period.

During this time you will take these steps:

1. Replay what took place in your mind.
2. Go through emotional phases that will likely include despair, anguish, anger, and a desire to retaliate. Allow yourself to feel these emotions and try not to hold back.
3. Examine what went wrong prior to the failure or defeat and consider what signs you may have missed that might have led to failure.

4. Look at what you could do differently in the future.

The third and fourth points on this list are critical. Examining what went wrong can take two paths. The first path looks back and leads you to understand what contributed to your failure. Was there a flaw in your preparation? Did you lose focus? Were you distracted by outside noise or doubt? Were you mentally prepared? Did you feel too much pressure? For athletes, there's also the question of training hard enough and getting enough sleep.

The second path leads you down the road ahead to what you can do differently next time. Areas you identify as contributing to a failure inevitably can be improved upon, and understanding what contributed to the negative outcome is a key to getting a better result. During this time, I ask myself, "What did I learn in this experience that I can apply next time?" I try to imagine myself in the same situation and think about how I might prepare for it differently or how I might act on opportunities to react to specific obstacles.

Then I take what I've learned and I move on. It's very important to set a defined deadline for yourself to move past this stage. In life we are surrounded by deadlines, whether it's for completing homework, earning a spot on a team, passing an audition, filing our taxes, or completing a business deal. Some deadlines are outside our control, while others, if we are honest with ourselves, are of our own making. Limiting the time that we allow things to consume us strengthens our ability to control our thoughts and actions.

That is the key to using failures to fuel your successes. Setting deadlines for dwelling on failure can play a major role in whether we succeeded at our future goals, or even go after them in the first place.

Setting a deadline gives us:

- ▷ Practice for disciplined control over our minds;
- ▷ Something to look forward to;
- ▷ A sense of resolve.

48 Hours—and That's It

After leaving Torino in 2006, I headed straight for the NFL Combine. I was devastated, but I had to put everything that happened into perspective—and I had to do so quickly if I wanted to give myself the best opportunity to fulfill my dream of getting drafted into the NFL. It was during that transition from the end of my skiing dreams to pursuing my quest to fulfill my football dreams that I developed the 48-hour rule to get over major disappointments.

Earlier in my career, mistakes or disappointments would sometimes weigh too heavily on me and stay with me for a very long time. They were difficult to shake and caused me to lose focus and concentration. I needed to develop a consistent structure and process for dealing with disappointment to effectively learn from my mistakes and keep moving. It's the same in business, where losing a client or a big deal can sit with you and actually make it harder to win that next client or deal.

During my 48 hours, I gave myself freedom to feel the loss, to express the emotion, to attach to the behaviors, to roll it over in my head time and time again, and to sequester myself from the outside world to deal with everything that I had just experienced. After the 48-hour window was up, I committed myself 100 percent to moving on.

How Much Time Do You Need?

Of course we are not all alike, so how long you need to recover might be different. Not every failure or disappointment is so big that you need 48 hours to process it, while some might be much bigger and need much more time—and sometimes, you simply don't have the luxury of that much time. It's healthy to employ a variety of time frames, depending on the severity of the experience. For example, if I lose a client I'll give myself an hour to deal with it, put together a go-forward plan that includes ideas on how to get them back, and then leave any feelings of lost confidence behind. For moments of adversity like the Olympics, I allow myself the full 48 hours. However, for someone else it might be 96 hours or even a couple of months or more.

The time you'll need is predicated largely on three factors:

1. Significance of your goal
2. Time invested
3. Having another goal, or several other goals

People who have invested every dollar of their personal capital in a business venture only to see it crumble may very well take more time to move on than someone who started a company on a whim. The same holds true in our personal life, where it's typically much easier to get over a dating relationship that lasted a few months than to get through a painful divorce after 20 years of marriage. And, of course, having another big goal (for me, the NFL) makes it somewhat easier to set shorter time frames for getting past a failure.

My challenge to you is to set shorter deadlines. It will feel uncomfortable and unnatural, but you need to work your way through the process without taking too much time to dwell or fall back into negativity.

Three Mental Keys

When I won my first World Championship gold medal in skiing, I employed three mental points of focus: to keep my mind like a river, live downstairs, and focus on my skills. Here's how they work.

Mind Like a River

The concept of "mind like a river" was one that I came up with after all the times I knew I made a mistake because I hadn't been able to get rid of a self-defeating thought that was trapped in my mind. One time I was competing in a World Cup, and I had qualified in first place, which means that you are the last person to ski in the finals. A skier who I did not like was winning the competition, and if he didn't have a great run, he was going to win. I hated the idea of this guy winning, and all I could think about was him winning his first World Cup—and not wanting that to happen. As I approached the take-off jump, I was more focused on beating him than on what I needed to do to land the trick. I landed on my back and finished last. Other times, I would be in the starting gate and a thought would pop into my mind, such as: "I am going to crash," or "I didn't prepare well enough," or "My legs don't feel good" or "The score is too high to beat."

Self-defeating thoughts are very normal; almost everyone has them. They might come up just before a big business pitch, a company presentation, media interviews, or a critical meeting. You need

to have a game plan for how you are going to deal with them.

For me, I decided to make my mind like a river. It was a simple, but powerful idea that I could also “see” in my mind’s eye. I would picture a fast-moving river flowing through the back of my head and out the front. No thought could stick in this fast-moving current. This took a lot of practice and mastering—it didn’t happen overnight—but it was one of the best mental skills that I ever learned.

For someone else it might be releasing the momentary disappointment or frustration into an imaginary balloon sailing off into the wind, so it simply blows away. The point is, you need a strong visual image of something that will move the emotions away from you. Visualize putting them in a bottle, and tossing that into the ocean.

Using such mental imagery is also very successful when you need to react quickly. We don’t always have 48 hours to come to terms with adversity. For example, if a goalie in hockey or soccer holds onto the negative feelings about the goal he just gave up, he is more likely to give up another one. If I dropped a pass in football and did not let the bad feeling that came with that flow out of my mind, I knew I would be more likely to drop another one. Why? Because holding onto the negative thoughts about the previous play would make me doubt myself. Athletes cannot dwell on an error or mistake as the game continues. They must regain focus quickly. This is also the case in business. Consider a stockbroker making trades in the market. He simply cannot let a drop in the market eat him up or he will miss the opportunities to jump back in and make profitable trades—sometimes trades that need to be made moments after a big loss.

Living Downstairs

The second skill that I attempted to master was a concept that I created called “living downstairs.” We all encounter distractions that we can’t control, and many of them put enormous pressure on us—but only if we allow them to. In my athletic career these outside pressures included knowing my parents were traveling halfway around the world to watch me compete, a nationally televised event, *Sports Illustrated* picking me to win, a girl that I was trying to impress, and more.

In business these distractions often include fear of letting down employees, noise from a competitor, or a naysayer trying to break your confidence, among other things. At times when I really need to focus but am facing a lot of outside noise, I close my eyes and picture myself walking downstairs into a cold, windowless cellar where no outside thoughts can get in. And if those thoughts ever pierced the cellar of my mind, I would simply picture a fast-moving river carrying them away immediately.

For you, living downstairs might mean creating a space below the big-picture thoughts, pressure, and distractions. It provides a safe space. Maybe for you it’s upstairs above the grinding news of the day to day. Whatever it might be, create a mental space where there are no windows or doors so that once your mind is clear, you can focus on your tasks and goals.

Focus on Your Skills

The third concept I relied on was to “focus on the skills.” This was a concept that I learned from former U.S. Olympic Ski Team coach Cooper Schell, who successfully coached American Jonny Moseley to a gold medal at the 1998 Nagano Olympics. Schell taught me that no matter what situation I was in, I could always come back to my skills. I knew in my mind that I had worked harder and

longer than any of my competitors to master the skills necessary to be best in the world, so this id gave me more confidence. In skiing, that meant reminding myself that my skills would get me down the mountain 100 percent of the time. In football it was remembering that my skills would allow me catch every ball, punt, and kickoff.

We all go through periods in life where we feel a little lost. When you do, always come back to what you know and have the confidence to trust in your skills. In business, that could mean reminding yourself that your skills as a salesman will allow you to clinch a deal, or that your skills as a marketer will give you what you need to create a successful campaign, or that your financial acumen will allow you to budget just right every time.

EVEN-KEELED

As the old saying goes, “Don’t allow the good days to go to your head or the bad days to go to your heart.”

One characteristic that I have found shared by the most successful people I know is their ability to stay even-keeled through the highs and the lows of life, business, and sport. John Elway is one of those people. Although he’d been a hero of mine, I didn’t meet him until he was thinking about bringing an arena league football team to Denver. He wanted my thoughts on how to make the team relevant to young people. After getting to know Elway over the next several years, it became obvious to me that his success in athletics and business had a lot to do with his calm mind and even temperament.

During his 16 seasons as an NFL quarterback, and even today as a general manager and executive vice president of football operations for the Denver Broncos, Elway has always remained even-keeled. Sure, he’s had his triumphant moments and his disappointments, but one of the things that always impressed me was his approach to the game. He never seemed unnerved or shaken by what occurred on the field. He had the head for the game and a disposition that kept him under control.

I’m the type of person who wears my emotions on my sleeve, so it has been a challenge for me to evolve into someone who can keep his emotions in check. I have not come close to mastering this skill, but it is something that I have improved on. And in doing so, I have become more consistent and prepared in almost everything I encounter.

Passion, Resiliency, and Steve Jobs

Once you’ve mastered these three keys, you can put your passion and resiliency to work.

Steve Jobs provides an inspiring story of passion, resiliency, and tenacity. His 2005 speech to the graduating class of Stanford University is one of my favorite keynotes. In it, Jobs, who never graduated from college, talked about the ten-year journey he had taken with his business partner Steve Wozniak, from a small business in a garage to a \$2 billion company with more than 4,000 employees. Passionate about their work, they had succeeded in creating Apple and had released the Macintosh. They were elated. Then, about a year later, Jobs was fired from the company he had founded.

During the commencement speech, he asked the question: “How can you get fired from a company you started?” It does baffle the mind. However, I see it happen all the time.

“What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating,” said Jobs about walking away from his passion. For some time, Jobs felt the pain and guilt of letting others down. He even apologized for “screwing up.”

It was shortly thereafter, though, that Jobs realized that he had lost his position at Apple, but he had not lost his passion. He would refocus and move forward. “I didn’t see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me,” he says. “The

heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.”

He moved forward and started NeXT Computer, Inc. and NeXT Software, Inc., and then moved on to launch Pixar Animation Studios. Today, Pixar is one of the most successful animation studios on the planet. And Jobs eventually came back to Apple, reviving the company and overseeing the development of the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

“Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don’t lose faith.”

—STEVE JOBS

I can’t say how long it took Jobs to rebound from being fired from his own company, but like others who are steadfast in their desire to succeed, he rebounded quickly. Moving beyond the disappointment does not mean losing your passions, but reprogramming them. Most significantly, it means getting on with life and no longer dwelling on something that has already occurred.

Bill Buckner will probably never forget letting the ground ball slip through his legs—the play that prevented the Boston Red Sox from winning the 1986 World Series. But these days, Buckner signs autographs for fans alongside the very guy who hit the ball, Mookie Wilson.

It’s part of his life and he has wrapped his mind around it and even used it to his advantage. You can be sure that superstar entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, of Virgin Airlines and Virgin Records fame and fortune, can tell you all about Virgin Cola and Virgin Vodka, since he moved on from those failed ideas but never lost his drive for success.

Planting Seeds

Of course you might think it’s easier to use the 48-hour rule and bounce back when you have another goal waiting in the wings, like my goal of making the NFL. And you know what? You’re right.

Planting seeds in other areas has always been part of my long-term strategy. Doing things actively to invest in your future is just a very smart thing to do. Too many people put all their eggs in one basket, as the saying goes. They have one goal, one dream, and one pursuit for better or worse. I can’t count the number of times growing up that I heard I should only focus on skiing because I was too small to play football and that I might have a better shot at getting to the Olympics if I maintained single focus. Some coaches wanted me to specialize when I was as young as 12 years old! I didn’t listen—and I’m happy that I didn’t.

Gary Barnett, my football coach at the University of Colorado, used to tell me to “never leave a stone unturned.” That is something I have tried to always adhere to.

I planted a lot of seeds in a lot of different areas throughout my athletic career. Most of them didn’t grow, but they all taught me some important lessons, and I got to meet some very interesting people along the way. It was having a variety of goals that led me to where I am now, my role as the CEO of Integrate and founder of Wish of a Lifetime. However, each of us only has so much bandwidth, and you need to be careful how much time you dedicate to investing in your future when you’re currently attacking a goal. I think a good rule of thumb is about 5 percent of your time—devoting that amount to planting future seeds you can grow if your current plans fall flat.

Eliminating Distractions

There are strategic times in life when you need to close off all distractions and focus on one goal. The United States Olympic Committee commissioned a report on what the most common distractions were for Olympians competing in the games. By far, the number-one distraction for many athletes has to do with family members. Families traveled across the world to see their athlete compete, and they would often request tickets or want to spend time with them the nights leading up to the competition.

Because of this, I would turn my cell phone off for the three weeks leading up to the competition and had a game plan with all family members that included no contact until after my competition. I shut off my emails and set up a new email address for only a few people. This was all part of my “distraction elimination plan,” and it worked. I never felt distracted by family, friends, or acquaintances while competing at the games.

In business I have also had occasions where my mental bandwidth had to be so focused on specific activities that I became unable to respond to people or even to be with my family. Everyone needs to work on and master his or her own work-life integration plan.

Today, I spend most of my time at Integrate, but I am also at my nonprofit, Wish of a Lifetime, that has a mission of granting life-enriching wishes to some of the oldest people in our society. While I am passionately dedicated to both, I know that I cannot be in both places at once, so I have hired people to run the day-to-day operations at the nonprofit. Yet when it comes to a major decision or a major fundraiser, I am 100 percent mentally present because of my passion for the nonprofit and my goal to see it succeed.

KEEPING FOCUS

The two most important actions to take in order to stay mentally focused are:

1. Eliminate the outside noise.
2. Focus on what you want to master.

DEFINING FAILURE

There was nothing in the world that I wanted to do more than win an Olympic gold medal. The thought of standing on top of the podium, watching the American flag being raised, and hearing the national anthem play gave me chills. I was 19 years old, the number-one ranked skier in the world, and the Olympics were being hosted in my home country. With almost every one of my family members in attendance, I finished in ninth place. It was the first time I'd ever experienced this kind of loss. I didn't know how to handle it, how to learn from it, or how to move past it. I certainly didn't know how to embrace it—at least not yet.

What Is Failure?

Webster's dictionary defines failure as “the nonperformance of an assigned or expected action” or “falling short of one's goals.” I consider the first definition to apply to the short-term failures that we all experience often when trying to do something, such as missing a sales quota for the quarter. The second definition, however, has far greater impact on us since our goals can be very closely tied to who we are as individuals.

The fact that there is an inherent fear of even the mention of the word *failure* was part of what ultimately led me to write this book. “I even avoid using that word *failure*, as it seems to have such a negative connotation,” Karen Cogan, senior sports psychologist for the United States Olympic Committee, tells me. I worked with Karen during my ski career and she helped me a lot during those years. She also says, “For some athletes, if they make an Olympic team, that's the most amazing accomplishment ever, but for others, if they don't get the gold medal at the Olympics they feel that they have failed, so the definition of failure is going to vary greatly. It's a very personal thing and each person defines their own idea of success and failure.”

LEARNING FROM LOSING

Former NFL quarterback Fran Tarkenton has his own philosophies about winning and losing, some of which he has shared in his book *What Losing Taught Me About Winning*.

In an [Entrepreneur.com](#) article by Tarkenton, “4 Success Strategies I Took from the NFL to My Business,” he writes: “Losing a game taught me so much more than winning one. When we won, the team went out to dinner with our families. We talked, laughed, and reminisced about the game, the plays, and even a fumble or two. But the team didn't go out when we lost. I went home and studied. I watched film. I needed to understand what went wrong and how I could have played better to change the outcome. I applied my learning to our next practice and game, which helped me constantly improve.”

Tarkenton, who today runs Tarkenton Companies, a financial firm that is focused on small-business and retirement

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