Chapter 3
Running with the Seven Cs of Success

Gregory Bassham

Prologue: September 12, 2005

I'm a 46-year-old philosophy professor, and in seven weeks I'll run my fourth marathon and make my second serious attempt to qualify for the world's greatest road race: the Boston Marathon. My quest to run Boston has been by far the hardest thing I have ever done. If I succeed, it will be the culmination of four years of sweat, pain, and frustration, but also of joy, self-discovery, and renewal. Throughout this process, I have drawn inspiration not only from running experts like George Sheehan, Jeff Galloway, and Bob Glover, but also from many philosophers, including one of America's leading public philosophers, Tom Morris. A former philosophy professor at the University of Notre Dame, Morris is the author of 18 books, including True Success, If Aristotle Ran General Motors, The Art of Achievement, The Stoic Art of Living, and Philosophy for Dummies. Today he is one of the most active business speakers in America, with clients that include many of America's largest corporations. In his talks around the country and in his many books, Morris often speaks of "the Seven Cs of Success," a simple but universal framework for achieving excellence in business, academics, sports, leadership, or any challenging endeavor. Although I first encountered Morris's Seven Cs more than a decade ago when I was his teaching assistant at Notre Dame, it wasn't until I began running that I realized how relevant and powerfully motivational they were not only to my running goals
but to my personal and professional life as well. In this essay, I explain how Morris’s Seven Cs of Success can help any runner achieve his or her fitness and competitive goals.

**Condition One: We Need a Clear Conception of what We Want, a Vivid Vision, a Goal Clearly Imagined**

Let all your effort be directed toward some object, let it always keep some goal in view!

Seneca (4 BC–AD 65)

“The quest for success,” Morris writes, “always begins with a target. We need something to aim at, something to shoot for.”\(^1\) To be successful in any challenging, worthwhile endeavor, we need goals both to motivate and to guide us.

Runners, of course, run for lots of different reasons. Non-competitive runners may run to get fit, lose weight, reduce stress, enjoy nature, or just to relish some time alone or with good friends (human and otherwise). Competitive runners run for all these reasons, plus others (testing themselves, meeting challenges, winning awards, lowering their blood pressure, whipping their boss’s ass in a 5k). But whatever their reasons for running, all runners understand the importance of motivation.

Nearly all runners enjoy running. For some, it’s even addictive. But for serious runners there are many, many times when running isn’t enjoyable. Times when the voice of temptation — “It’s too cold,” “I’m too sore,” “I’m too busy,” “My girlfriend said she’d dump me if I ran a marathon on her birthday” — becomes loud and insistent.

Goals keep us focused on the prize and motivate us to stay the course. As University of Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino notes, goals “give us a vision of a better future. They nourish our spirit; they represent possibility even when we are dragged down by reality. They keep us going.”\(^2\)

Goals not only motivate us to aim high and to persevere, they also keep us on track and guide our progress along the way. As Morris points out, “vague goals can’t motivate specific behavior” (Morris, p. 37). That’s why we need clear, specific short-term goals as well as lofty long-term ambitions. Specific short-term goals — logging 45 miles this week, running three races this month, starting my kick a quarter-mile earlier — keep us focused and disciplined, challenge us to improve, and help mark our progress along the way. As George Sheehan notes, “we must keep our eye on the goal, keep looking at the hills.”\(^3\) But it’s also important to remember to take the hills one at a time.

Most of us are capable of achieving far more than we think we can. Only by setting high, demanding goals can we maximize our potential. Of course, it’s also important not to deceive yourself and set wildly unrealistic goals. That only leads to frustration and wasted energy — and sometimes embarrassment. Case in point: The guy who crowed, “I’ve been waiting to do this for three years” as he passed 59-year-old George Sheehan halfway through a six-mile race. He riled the wrong competitor. A mile down the road Sheehan passed him back.\(^4\)

**Condition Two: We Need a Strong Confidence that We can Achieve our Goal**

Self-trust is the first secret of success.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82)

“Our life,” said the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–80), “is what our thoughts make it.” This is a point on which philosophers, running coaches, and successful people in all walks of life agree: Winners believe in themselves. They are confident, enthusiastic, and consistently positive. As the extraordinary successful University of Tennessee women’s basketball coach Pat Summit remarks:

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No one ever got anywhere, accomplished anything, or survived any amount of ill luck, by being negative. ... Attitude is a choice. What you think you can do, whether positive or negative, confident or scared, will most likely happen. When you doubt, you create a negative. ... How many times have you watched someone fail, because they were full of self-doubt? Afterward, what do they say? "I knew it."  

Confidence is important in many areas of life, but it's absolutely vital in running. Confidence gives us the courage to set high goals and launch out boldly to achieve them. It keeps us going when we encounter defeat, disappointment, or discouragement. And confidence is contagious: by acting and being confident we create a climate of positive thinking and feeling that gives everyone in our running circles a lift, including ourselves.

Bob Glover, longtime director of the running classes for the New York Road Runners Club, tells the story of a woman who badly wanted to make the Greater New York Racing Team but felt she wasn't good enough to meet the time standards necessary for membership. Glover had seen her progress in speed sessions and believed she was not performing to her ability due to lack of confidence. He gave her a series of challenging but realistic time goals and asked her to visualize achieving them. "But do you really think I can run that fast?" she asked nervously. "I don't think you can, I know you can," Glover replied. A short time later she ran a personal best and qualified for the team.  

Condition Three: We Need a Focused Concentration on What It Takes to Reach that Goal

We should work hard with all the courage we can muster, ignoring any distractions, and struggle with a single purpose. 

 Seneca

It's not enough to have a goal and to be confident of achieving it. Like about 50 million other kids around the world, my 10-year-old son hopes someday to play major league baseball and is confident he will do so. Clearly, however, the odds are stacked against him. Those few kids who will fulfill their dream of playing in the Bigs will need luck, talent, and an intense focus on achieving their goal.

Meeting challenging running goals requires dedication, planning, and sacrifice. Many novice runners start out like a ball of fire, but like the people in Jesus' parable of the sower and the four soils, fall victim to distraction, adversity, or the "worries and riches and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14). To get from A to B to C to D, where D is some performance at the very top of our powers, requires an uncommon singleness of purpose. Those who succeed prioritize their running in ways that others may find difficult to understand. They keep their eyes steadily on the prize.

The price of losing focus can be high, as Australian runner Ron Clarke learned at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Clarke, the world-record holder at nine distances, was the overwhelming favorite to win the 10,000-meter run. Three days before the finals, he jogged onto the track to begin his last easy workout. Caught up in the moment, he began to run faster and faster. He blazed past 5,000 meters in world-class time. His time at four miles was an unofficial world record. A half-mile later, yielding to the pleas of fellow Australian runners, Clarke slowed down and ended his workout. The damage, however, was done. In the finals he finished a disappointing third. Losing his focus meant losing the contest.

Condition Four: We Need a Stubborn Consistency in Pursuing Our Vision, a Determined Persistence to Achieve Our Goal

He who would arrive at the appointed end must follow a single road and not wander through many ways. 

 Seneca

We all love to take credit for our successes while blaming external, uncontrollable factors for our failures. It's never our fault that we lost; it's always [fill in the blank with the appropriate excuse].

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Runners are no different. You almost never hear disappointed runners after a race say, "I wasn't in shape" or "I didn't put out." It's always: "the weather was bad," "the course was hilly," "my ankle was hurting," or "the course seemed long."

The truth is, most of the time we're to blame for our lack of success. As Morris remarks, "one of the single most widespread and powerful sources of failure nowadays is a form of self-sabotage—self-destructive behavior" (Morris, p. 143). We yield to temptation, backslide, act inconsistently with our own goals and values. If only we stayed the course, we would succeed. But time and again, we don't. We lack what philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626) calls "the foundation of virtues." We lack consistency. In running, as in any challenging endeavor, consistency requires tenacity. Tenacity, as Olympic bronze medalist Allan Lawrence notes, is the distance runner's "stock-in-trade." "Tenacity is what drives him on to finish the race when he wants to quit, what makes him pick up the pace when he is about to be passed, what makes him go out in the cold rain for the long training run he knows he needs." The history of running is full of stories of extraordinary tenacity, from Phidippides' three-day, 260-mile run to seek help from the Spartans in 490 BC, to Guy Gertsch's amazing feat of running the 1982 Boston Marathon in 2:47, despite having snapped his right femur at the five-mile mark. But my favorite example of runners' tenacity is a true story featured in the 1984 film Chariots of Fire.

As most readers of this book will recall, the film centers on the exploits of two British runners, Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell, both of whom defied long odds to win gold medals at the 1924 Paris Olympics. Liddell, a sprinter whose best distance was 100 meters, set a world record in the Olympic 400-meter finals, an event he ran only because he refused to compete in the 100 meters since the heats were held on Sunday. But Liddell's gutsiest race may have been a year earlier, in July 1923, when he won a 440-yard race in Stoke-on-Trent to qualify for the British Olympic team. Fifteen yards into the race, Liddell was cut off and knocked over the wooden railing by J. J. Gillies, who was favored to win the race. After rolling over two times on the grass, Liddell got up, vaulted over the railing, and began chasing the other runners, all of whom were now at least 20 yards ahead of him. Throwing back his head in his patented, unorthodox style, Liddell sprinted all-out to win the race by two yards.

Tenacity, however, is a two-edged sword for runners, because it's easy to injure yourself through overtraining. This is a problem I've run into repeatedly during my short running career. I began running four years ago, at age 42, as a way to get fit and to work toward challenging goals. The first year I ran I had one problem after another—blisters, blackened toenails, muscle pulls, sore knees, and repeated cases of tendinitis. The second year was better, but as I increased my mileage in preparation for my first marathon, I hurt my knee, had to cut back a week, and ran the Harrisburg Marathon in a disappointing 3:59. Ditto for my third year, when I began regularly to medal in my age group, but over-trained and developed severe tendinitis in my right ankle four weeks before I hobbled through the Scranton Steamtown Marathon in 4:11. This year, finally, I've been injury-free, and I feel like I have a good shot at qualifying for Boston. My times in races have been good (three miles in 18:15, a five-miler at a 6:25 pace, a half-marathon in 1:37); but this year I've deliberately sacrificed mileage in order to avoid injuries. To qualify for Boston I need to run a marathon in 3:30:59 or less (an 8:02 pace). Marathon experts generally recommend a 20-week base of 40–60 miles weekly before running a competitive marathon. Over the past 20 weeks I've probably averaged 25–35 miles per week, with five or six medium-long training runs (13–18 miles), and one very painful marathon run in 82-degree heat, which I finished in 3:43. Whether this relatively light training schedule will be enough to get me to Boston remains to be seen. But it seems to be the best way for me to avoid injury, and in line with the best philosophical advice on success, I'm sticking to it consistently.

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Condition Five: We Need an Emotional Commitment to the Importance of What We're Doing

To succeed at anything, you need passion.

George Sheehan

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," said philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. In running, as in life, we need passion.

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a robust sense of the value of what we are doing — to energize us, to motivate us to overcome challenges and disappointments, to prod us to dig deeper, and to give us the courage to take risks.

No one has written more eloquently about the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits of running than physician-philosopher George Sheehan. A respected New Jersey cardiologist, Sheehan began running in his mid-forties, and quickly established himself as both a standout runner (at age 50, he ran a mile in 4:48, for example) and as a popular writer and lecturer. An avid reader of philosophy who frequently quoted Plato, Nietzsche, and William James in his weekly columns for Runner’s World magazine, Sheehan found running to be “a path to maturity, a growth process” that continually challenged him “to go further, to grow more, to become a more complete human being” (Sheehan, p. 244). More than this, running became for Sheehan a spiritual experience, a path to self-awareness and transcendence. He writes:

When running becomes for me, as my poet friend put it, “a totally entered experience,” it becomes a religious experience. I give it my body. I give it my mind. I give it the yearnings of my heart, the further reaches of my soul. From the act of running — now an act of awareness, of love, of stretching myself — comes whatever wholeness, whatever certitude I possess then for the rest of the day. . . . When I run . . . the body and spirit become one. Running becomes prayer and praise and applause for me and my Creator. (Sheehan, p. 274)

Clearly, philosophy deepened Sheehan’s experience of running, and running enriched his philosophy.

As a great philosopher once said (or was it my friend Sal, the salesman of erectile dysfunction treatment?), sustained excellence requires sustained passion. This can be difficult, however. Running races is like eating pizza: it’s hard to feel as passionate about the fifth slice as you felt about the first. So how can a runner sustain enthusiasm and commitment over the long haul?

There are two keys to keeping our emotional commitment high. The first is imagination. The most passionate people tend to use their imaginations well. They envision vividly some new challenge, or the

best results of whatever activity they’re passionate about, or even put themselves into a compellingly interesting fantasy in their mind’s eye. Think of my son imagining his triumphant day at bat in a major league ballgame, with the game on the line and the crowd roaring. As Sal and all the great thinkers of the past have noted, imagination fuels passion.

The second key to renewed emotional commitment is to continually set new goals. Think of another sport that often generates sustained, avid commitment: golf. Why do so many golfers enjoy the game just as much at age 70 as they enjoyed it at age 40? Yes, it still gets them out of the house, but mainly it’s because they’re continually setting new goals. As they get older, the goals may get lowered (breaking 80 after age 60, breaking 85 after age 70), but with the changes of age, the new goals can be just as challenging as the old goals were. A goal is never fully defined by just one number. The number is always set in a context, and it’s the overall context that endows the number with its true value. This is true in running as well: at a certain point every runner has to face the fact that he or she will never again run a total personal best. But as long as there are new and interesting goals to be met in each year, at each season of life, mountains to be climbed, and dreams to be dreamed, a runner’s passion can be sustained.

Condition Six: We Need a Good Character to Guide Us and Keep Us on a Proper Course

Character is destiny.

Heraclitus (c. 530–470 BC)

Is a good ethical character necessary for success? No. Sometimes, as the Psalmist laments, the wicked do prosper. Scoundrels do sometimes rise to positions of great wealth, power, or fame. Nevertheless, there are two important connections between goodness and success, Morris argues. First, a good character may not be necessary for worldly or material success, but it is essential for what Morris (following Aristotle) maintains is “true success”: “success that is deeply satisfying, that involves making the most of our potential, and that is sustainable over the long run, the sort of success that contributes to all forms of health and human flourishing” (Morris, p. 221). Second, in most cases
a good character is either necessary or at least helpful in achieving long-term worldly success. Unethical people tend to make enemies, create distrust, and engage in patterns of unethical or illegal conduct that, when discovered, lead to their downfall. Moreover, unethical people tend to lack virtues such as hard work, integrity, fairness, sensitivity, and trustworthiness that often contribute to long-term success. By contrast, good people cultivate the virtues necessary for real achievement, and attract to themselves the people who can help them make good things happen. Few people want to help a jerk. By contrast, lots of people will rally around you and offer their assistance if they see you as a genuinely good person. And this is very relevant to real-world success. Rarely is anything of great value accomplished alone, even when it comes to the solitary-looking pursuit of running.

Certain qualities of character are absolutely essential to running success. Without virtues such as commitment, courage, self-discipline, drive, resiliency, toughness, consistency, hopefulness, and persistence no one can achieve their potential as a runner. Through practice and habit, running can help us to develop these virtues. What's more, running can teach us important lessons about life. He who can muster the self-discipline to run in rain and snow, fight back against adversities and disappointments, and dig deep to discover his own inner strengths and resources — he is the one most likely to be what A. P. Cullen calls “a true sportsman in the greater game of life.”11 A person who has cultivated ethical self-discipline in other aspects of his life is also more likely to be able to muster the self-discipline that is needed here. An ethical foundation can facilitate sporting success, as well as the sportsmanship that makes for true success in the realm of any athletic endeavor.

Condition Seven: We Need a Capacity to Enjoy the Process along the Way

Life must be lived as play.

Plato (427–347 BC)

Some kinds of goods, Plato reminds us, are both desirable for their own sake and also desirable as means to other ends.12 Happiness is such a good. Happiness is an intrinsic good, something we want for its own sake. But it is also an instrumental good, a means to other goods, including true and durable success. By cultivating a capacity to enjoy the process along the way, we can learn to kick back and savor the fruits of our hard work. But we can also find in such moments the motivation and refreshment for pushing on to even greater successes.13

Most runners don't run to lose weight or get fit, they run because they enjoy it. It becomes a huge part of their life, of who they are. It was only in running that George Sheehan felt “whole and true and living at the peak of my being” (Sheehan, p. 135). And as Morris notes, such moments of peak contentment are usually times of what poet Donald Hall calls “absorbedness.”14

People are absorbed when they are totally into what they're doing, totally engrossed in the present task and the present moment. George Sheehan experienced such a moment when, at age 54, he ran a sub-11:00 indoor two-miler:

I was for those minutes completely and utterly relaxed, unconcerned about the outcome, yet completely absorbed in what I was doing. I was in what has been described as a cocoon of concentration, absolutely involved, fully engaged in running. Not racing or winning but simply running. Everything was harmony and grace. Everything was pure. Effort had become effortless.15

The feeling of contentment that often accompanies moments of absorbedness illustrates a fundamental insight about happiness that

11 Speaking of refreshment, it should be noted that running is one of the few sports in which performance can actually be enhanced by (moderate) beer drinking. As George Sheehan notes (This Running Life, p. 90), sports physiologists have found that many runners actually run better following a night of beer drinking. To running history buffs, the performance-enhancing effect of beer is hardly news. On January 2, 1884, after downing either 26 or 27 beers the night before, Harry Hutchens ran 300 yards on a curved track in 30 seconds flat. And in 1816, after three days and nights of drinking, the legendary Abraham Wood bet that in an hour he could: catch a duck on the turnpike road, pluck it, roast it, eat it, then run a five-minute mile. He won the bet. After eating the duck (washed down with a quart of ale), he ran a mile in 4:56, all in less than an hour. And just last year, after no more than about a dozen beers, I believe I was able to run to the closest men's room in near-record time. For beer-fueled accomplishments other than my own impressive dash, see Edward S. Sears, Running Through the Ages (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2001), pp. 89, 56.
13 Sheehan, Running and Being, p. 174.
The best way to enjoy your life is to have something to focus on other than enjoyment. And something bigger to focus on than just your life. Cultivate enjoyment, look for pleasure in what you do, adopt a spirit of playfulness in as many ways as you can, but always have in your life an overall structure of goals that are worthy in themselves to pursue, goals other than pleasure or enjoyment, toward which you can work. And always have goals that go beyond the confines of your own immediate self-interest. Only that can bring the deepest enjoyment.\footnote{Morris, \textit{The Art of Achievement}, p. 177.}

Runners understand the hedonistic paradox because they live it daily. They find happiness through sweat, sacrifice, and struggle. To most non-runners this is a complete enigma. Cars pass a lonely runner on a solitary road – lungs burning, knees aching – and the passengers shake their heads. Why would anyone want to do that, they wonder. The runner, in turn, barely notices the car. For her, reality is this road, this moment, this feeling. Soon she will be back in the world of deadlines, piano practices, and endless loads of laundry. But for the moment there is nothing but this road, this feeling of wholeness, this Zen-like effortless effort. For her, journey and destination have fused. Success is now.

Epilogue: December 18, 2005

Conquer yourself rather than the world.

\textit{René Descartes (1596–1650)},
as paraphrased by Jean-Paul Sartre

November 6, the day of the New York Marathon, dawned warm and sunny. Much too warm and sunny, in fact. The forecast high was 70 degrees Fahrenheit, a record for that date in New York City (plus 97 percent humidity at the start). According to exercise physiologists, runners slow an average of one second per mile for every degree over 60. I knew that New York was already a notoriously slow and congested marathon course. All the information I had read had cautioned that runners should expect to run 5–10 minutes slower than they would in most other marathons. Now, if the exercise physiologists were right, I could expect to lose another four minutes and 20 seconds due to the heat.

Minutes after the race began I knew I was in serious trouble. With 37,000 runners crammed onto the Verrazano Bridge, the pace was agonizingly slow. At 10k I was four minutes behind my projected race pace. Most frustratingly, with a nearly solid mass of slow-moving runners constantly in front of me, it was impossible to speed up for more than a few seconds at a time, and even that was possible only by constant zigzagging across the course. At the halfway mark my time was 1:45:52, more than seven minutes slower than my half-marathon time at the Erie Marathon seven weeks earlier. In my previous three marathons, I had never run the second half of the race in less than two hours and five minutes. Now I would need to run 20 minutes faster than that to qualify for Boston.

As impossible as this seemed, I knew I had one thing going for me: In the seven weeks prior to the marathon I had thrown caution to the wind and trained hard, including frequent two-a-days, speedwork, and several long runs of up to 22 miles. At mile 16, as we entered Manhattan, the sea of runners ahead of me finally began to thin a bit, and I picked up the pace.

At mile 20 my time was 2:40:49, just slightly off pace. Yet I knew that this was the point in all my previous marathons when I had hit “the Wall” and slowed to a crawl.

At mile 21, just slightly later than usual, I did hit the Wall. But this time, whether because of my training or the extra adrenaline provided by the cheering crowds, I ran through it. My legs felt like 150-pound sacks of hamburger meat and my kidneys were killing me, but I knew that Central Park was less than three miles away. I began passing other runners right and left.

Then, as I got into the Park, my heart sank. The narrow streets and paths of the Park funneled runners into a tightly congested pedestrian version of rush hour in Manhattan. I frantically zigzagged right and left, squeezing past slower runners whenever there was the slightest opening, hearing curses in a polyglot of languages as I brushed...
people's shoulders and nearly tripped a couple of runners. At mile 25, I saw “Team Bassham,” friends and family who were there to cheer me on. I choked up as my son Dylan, the major-league wannabe, ran beside me for half a mile. With 50 yards to go, a slight opening appeared in the sea of runners, and I sprinted to the finish. The time on the race clock was 3:33:05, but I knew that what mattered was the “chip time,” the time it took me to go from the start to the finish as recorded by the computer chip I had attached to my shoe. I looked at the time on my watch, which I knew would vary at most a few seconds from my chip time. My watch read 3:31:08. I had missed qualifying for Boston by nine seconds!

As trite as it sounds, I tried to be “philosophical” about this bitter disappointment, but it wasn't easy. But even before I had received my finishers' medal, I had resolved to try again.

Two days later, I was out pounding the pavement in my blistered feet. Soon I was running two-a-days again, usually in the dark, and frequently on snow and ice as an early winter hit Northeastern Pennsylvania where I live. Six weeks after New York, I boarded a plane in Philadelphia to run the Jacksonville Marathon.

During my weeks of training for Jacksonville, Morris's Seven Cs of Success had kept me focused and determined. Yet as I stood in a cold rain on the starting line in Jacksonville, I felt like all “philosophy” was behind me. My only thought was: “You came here to do this. Now do it.”

Three hours, 20 minutes and 40 seconds later I crossed the finish line, more than 10 minutes faster than I needed to qualify for Boston. I did it. I attained my goal.

Now I have some new goals and I face four months of winter training to get ready for Boston, which is in mid-April. I doubt, though, that I'll worry too much about running a good time there. That will be a time to remember Morris's Seventh C: a capacity to enjoy the process along the way. Whether I run a good time or not, I now know I will have a very good time indeed!17

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