

RUN WITH THE BULLS

WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED

DR. TIM IRWIN

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INTRODUCTION

I'm pleased you've chosen to take this journey. It will expand your workplace perspective and enhance your effectiveness on the job—critical factors for anyone in the throws of the often-unpredictable, ever-changing marketplace. They are perhaps even more important for the follower of Christ.

Christians in the workplace face a unique challenge. From a general standpoint, we are encouraged to work “as for the Lord rather than for men” (Colossians 3:23, NASB), which does not always come natural, especially when most industries place a high premium on productivity, money and results. To seemingly make matters worse, we're also told that “...the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light” (Luke 16:8, NIV). Do these passages suggest followers of Christ are disadvantaged from the get go? Not quite, but they do suggest that there is more at stake for us than paychecks and promotions.

To work as unto the Lord is to work with intensity and integrity with His glory as our standard. To work hard *and* smart, righteously.

Applying this skill in a bullish work setting can seem impossible. For instance, how does one work with intensity without trampling on the backs of others? Or, how does one work with integrity for a crooked or incompetent boss? To be sure, applying righteous answers to such questions can feel a lot like scrambling through a flailing mob while two-dozen horns and hooves barrel toward you. Both messy and dangerous. It is an *understatement* to say you ought to be prepared to address these challenges definitively. But it is an *overstatement* to say the solutions are easy to come

by. The goal of this curriculum is to help you develop a Godly mindset and God-given skill-set to navigate your workplace bulls with confidence.

Before we begin, I should mention these lessons are intended to be completed in conjunction with the book, *Run with the Bulls without Getting Trampled*. By reading through each chapter in the book before going through the corresponding chapter in this curriculum, you will not only see a more vivid illustration of the topics being discussed, you will come to better understanding of your place in the running. Are you a pacing well and avoiding your workplace bulls? Or are you merely staying out of the way, a bystander watching the bulls and brave runners passing by? Perhaps you're somewhere in between. If you don't yet know your place in the run, rest assured you will soon. And from there you can take steps to become a harder and smarter runner. In fact, before we jump into the first lesson, I strongly encourage you to visit www.runwiththebulls.net and take the online assessment. It will only take you a few minutes and your specific results will provide you a foundational understanding of your strengths and weakness in the workplace bull run.

Once you've completed the assessment, print your results and keep them handy. You will want to reference them as we move through each lesson. Now, let's begin the first one.

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LESSON 1: THE RUN

“In bullfighting they speak of the terrain of the bull and the terrain of the bullfighter. As long as the bullfighter stays in his own terrain he is comparatively safe. Each time he enters into the terrain of the bull he is in great danger.”

-- Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 1 IN THE BOOK, *RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED*.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

It started innocently enough on the back deck while grilling steaks. “It might be fun,” my younger son William pondered aloud. The harmless comment inspired purely theoretical talk—the sort of vision-casting guys engage in with no intent to actually follow through. The only problem, I would soon learn, was that my son was not merely musing.

Summer approached and William was planning his second semester of language study in Spain when he referenced the topic again. Why don’t we do it this summer? He suggested. When I realized he was serious I was compelled to agree out of concern for his safety. Soon thereafter, we stood waiting on a narrow, wine-soaked street among 1,800 white-suited, red-sashed runners. Suddenly quiet prevailed and our comrades burst into beautiful prayer-song to the city’s patron saint. “We ask San Fermin to guide us in the bull run, giving us his blessing.” Awaiting the song’s final line was a loaded bottle rocket that would announce our peril—ten-thousand pounds of muscle, hooves and horns surging down the street like a landslide looking one-hundred yards beyond us.

The song ended. The explosion filled the air.

We looked up the street and saw them coming fast. It was time to move. But which way and how we moved was critical to our survival.

...

The running of the bulls in Pamplona seems a gratuitous danger to some and therein lies the appeal. To others it is an obligation. But despite the varied motives that brought the runners there that day, once the bulls came rushing down the cobblestone street we all faced the same danger and held the same prospect of survival. It is a striking metaphor for our lives at work. No matter what brings us to the workplace—a sense of adventure, a sense of responsibility or something in between—we must all run a race toward success and survival filled with challenge, opportunity and great danger. Which way and how we run is critical.

The Pamplona bulls serve as useful symbols for certain uncontrollable elements of our work lives—the events, the circumstances and the obstacles. Organizational bulls constantly rage around us. Inept managers, downsizings, misguided compensation systems, constant churn, outdated IT systems, ill-designed processes or structures that make our jobs difficult or even obsolete—they’re all part of the organizational territory.

Yet, to view these realities as unfair or out-to-get-us is impractical and even naïve. Like the bulls in Pamplona who want only to leave the bedlam of the

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streets and munch on some grain, organizational bulls are indifferent to us unless we get in their way. It's as Hemingway explained, "Each time he [the bullfighter] enters the terrain of the bull, he is in great danger."

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. When you hear Jesus' statement that begins, "In this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:33, NIV), do you normally consider the statement to include your work circumstances? Here, we call certain workplace troubles your organizational "bulls." Describe your organizational bulls and how they affect your ability to work hard and smart, righteously:
2. On page 7 in the book, the bulls in Pamplona are described as territorial and aggressive but not mean. As we sprinted down the street ahead of them, they were indifferent to our presence unless we got between them and their goal. In the same way, your organizational bulls are ultimately aimed at achieving survival and success—the primary goals of your entire organization. While your organizational bulls might seem territorial and mean, they also pose no threat to you unless you get in their way. Knowing this, what do you think it means to be relevant or irrelevant to the primary goals of your organization?
3. One young man running fifty yards ahead of us broke the cardinal rule of bull running not once but twice (you can watch the video on my website www.runwiththebulls.net). He was knocked to the street by a charging bull the first time and the second time flung into the air, back arched and head snapped backwards. The live TV commentators gave him high marks for courage and style but low marks for judgment. The cardinal rule he broke: if you fall, stay down until the bulls pass. In this way an individual can survive a mistake amidst the Pamplona bulls. Are there cardinal rules for survival amidst your organizational bulls?
4. Proverbs 1:7 says, "Fools despise wisdom and discipline" (NIV). How does this verse affect your treatment of the survival rules in your workplace?
5. People join the organizational bull run for different reasons but all face the same prospect of danger, survival and success. Additionally, all possess different skills that set them at an advantage or disadvantage. How does being a Christian affect your ability to survive and/or thrive amidst your organizational bulls? Do you feel as though you're at a disadvantage (see Luke 16:8)?
6. During the Pamplona bull run, each runner makes many choices in an attempt to stay out of danger. In some cases, a different choice would have made an enormous difference in preventing an injury. Especially painful to see are the people who make the same mistakes over and over—like the runner on the video trying repeatedly to rise after falling. It seems such people refuse to learn from experience. What has your experience taught you about effectively running with your organizational bulls? Do you feel these lessons support or undermine your faith?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

In most cases, you are running with organizational bulls whether or not you want to be. You officially joined the race when you took your job. You must

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now learn to run with many other anxious runners around you intent on finishing their own race. Some are skillful and some are not. Some have integrity and some do not. A few will try to elbow you out of the way or push you to the ground to accomplish their goals. You must run skillfully to avoid getting trampled, gored or abused. This requires practical skills backed by Godly insight that helps you make wise choices. This is why Moses, a man called to lead a nation, prayed, “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17, NASB).

In the end, running the race well and avoiding the many dangers is more about perspective, common sense and getting along with others than about intelligence. Perhaps this is one reason the writer of Proverbs 22:29 wrote, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men” (NASB). With the right strategy for improving perspective, action and relationships, you can run hard and smart, righteously, and finish strong each day. You’ll learn about all this in the following sections. But what you’ve learned to this point is just as critical: without a God-led strategy for running with the workplace bulls, you are putting yourself in serious danger. That’s why every great man or woman of God made prayer—not token prayer but the connect with God at every level kind of prayer—a non-negotiable part of every day. You should do the same.

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SECTION I: COMMITMENT

Friends ask me why I ran with the bulls (and there's always an accompanying look that says, "Are you absolutely nuts?"). The simple answer is that I am committed to raising two sons who make courageous but prudent decisions. Their safety and well-being is worth any price to me. William had broken his back in a very serious snowboarding accident a year-and-a-half before our trip, so I ran with him in Pamplona because I am committed to his well-being. Of course, the ultimate irony was that he was the one watching my back when the bulls rushed up behind us.

Dictionary.com defines commitment as: "The trait of sincere and steadfast fixity of purpose; the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action." Our commitments exert great power over our lives, so it's critical that we thoughtfully examine them. Even without a conscious decision, we are all committed to something. Lessons 2-4 look at what commitments ultimately bring significance to our work and our lives.

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LESSON 2: RUN TO WIN

“I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I’ve got a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations.”

-- George Bernard Shaw

**STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 2 IN THE BOOK,
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GETTING TRAMPLED.**

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

I held my son as his body shook with sobs. Eight years of his young life came down to that one Friday night. He’d poured himself out to inspire his team—and they far surpassed everyone’s expectations.

The night began as a portrait of Norman Rockwell Americana—lush green turf with clean white stripes, bouncing cheerleaders and blaring bands, clean jerseys and proud parents all full of hope. What then transpired was no ordinary game—it was an epic battle in the third round of the high school state playoffs. Two great teams scrapping to win. My son’s team fought from two touchdowns back and nearly tied the game in the closing minutes. But when the scoreboard clock read zeros, his high school football career was done.

Parents and friends flooded the field. As others celebrated nearby, I held my son and tears streamed down his swollen face. Then through the steam rising from his sweaty head I noticed the opposing coach approaching. His eyes turned to me as he stepped to us. “Sir,” he said, “May I speak with your son?”

I backed away as he put his hands on my

son’s shoulders and looked into his red eyes. “Son,” he said, “tonight you left nothing on the field. You gave it your all and it was an honor to play against you.”

Isn’t it the supreme compliment? Isn’t it what we’d all like to hear at the end of a tough endeavor? You dug in. You expended yourself. Your efforts were extraordinary and honorable. What solicits such a compliment? Furthermore, what does it mean to run in such a way that one day our Creator says, “You left nothing. You gave it your all and I was honored by your effort”?

I believe deep down we all long to pursue a high and noble goal—what Aristotle called a “telos” or a life purpose. And I believe we also long for that purpose to in some way be linked to the work we do every day. But just as there are moments when a higher purpose is awakened in us, there are also periods when we feel numb to anything noble. Numerous realities of life insulate us from meeting our need for significance. So the question we ought to ask is not whether we want to give our all to a higher purpose but rather what hinders us from doing so. “The problem with life,” as the saying goes, “is that it’s so daily.”

Like you and I, every bull runner that day in Pamplona started with a noble goal in mind—running the race well. But once the bulls came running, not every runner’s race went as planned. Some sprinted five

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yards and stepped to the side. They gave the appearance of participation but accomplished nothing more than glorified observation. Others also started well but their weaker wills were shoved to the ground. They ran but ultimately failed to finish. And then there were others who ran hard but abused others in the process. They ran with the bulls without being trampled but did so in disgraceful fashion.

The point is this: Whether it's fear of workplace bulls ... or lack of strength and skills ... or misappropriated ambition, many are hindered from running their best race in one way or another. As a result, many fail to achieve the noble goals for which they set out in the beginning. In this lesson we'll discuss some common obstacles to running a committed, honorable race and then conclude with thoughts on how we can overcome them.

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. On pages 17-18 of the book, I talk about a client who suffered from what he called, "The Whore and Harley Syndrome." While his description is extreme, do you ever find yourself feeling similarly overwhelmed with your many commitments?
2. Complacency is a decision to let circumstances and events control your life. The writer of Proverbs 1:32 asserts, "The complacency of fools will destroy them" (NIV). Describe how this can be true as it relates to your work.
3. Getting up and going to work, taking care of family, managing a few friendships and paying the bills are about all most people can handle. Add in an unexpected crisis like a sick child or an overflowing septic tank and the wheels come off. Yet, this is merely life. We all face a similar challenge each

day. When you feel crushed under the daily-ness of life, how do you typically react?

4. Read Matthew 6:25-34. Describe in your own words Jesus' prescription for dealing with the typical concerns of life?
5. Conformity is one of the most common obstacles to staying committed to our noblest goals. It is much easier to fit in than to stand out. Still, to remain committed we must, as Henri Nouwen puts it, "give up measuring our meaning and value with the yardsticks of others." If you gave yourself a grade in this area, what would it be and why?
6. Of the three main commitment counterfeits described in Chapter 2 of the book (materialism, careerism, and self-fulfillment), which one is the bigger struggle for you? What steps are you taking to improve?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

While many of the obstacles to steadfast commitment toward our work and life goals might not divert us down a path of self-destruction, they remain extremely powerful influences in our lives if we do nothing to combat them. Ultimately, they can alter what we are truly committed to. This is one of the reasons Paul asserted these words to the people of an early church: "In light of all this ... I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off down some path that does nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily" (Ephesians 4:1-2, *The Message*).

His admonition is not merely an empty

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“just stay committed” message. He understood life’s obstacles to commitment as well as anyone. In his own description, he tells another church, “Five times I received ... forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea ... I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen ... I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked” (2 Corinthians 11:24-27, NIV).

Yet, despite his many obstacles, Paul was still compelled to claim, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14, NASB). In the lessons that come we will discuss how this perspective is possible no matter how bullish the obstacles are before you. You can run a steadfast race with purpose and significance by focusing on two things:

1. the work that you do
2. the worker that you become.

In the end, your work has a powerful influence on how, when and whether you reach your highest goals. Like Moses, you and I ought to specifically (and daily) ask God to “teach us to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12, NASB) so that they are aligned with 1) who He created us to be and 2) the work He created us to do.

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LESSON 3: THE ARENA

“So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly.”

-- Ephesians 5:15, *The Message*

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 3 IN THE BOOK, *RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED*.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Our deep yearning for a life of significance should drive us to make our work significant. After all, we spend nearly three-quarters of our waking hours working. Our jobs are the road between us and the arena. To arrive there—to meet our noble goal without being trampled by the charging bulls—we must carefully consider the steps we take. With the majority of our time spent on this road, we’d be foolish to not consider the impact our steps have on our overall life goals. This will only occur if we’re intentional in two areas:

1. The work that we do
2. The worker that we become

Unfortunately, most people aren’t.

Nearly every day in the small community where I grew up, a red-haired, balding man could be seen walking aimlessly up and down our main road. He seemed harmless but his face always wore a distressed look. My mother said he was shell-shocked and my dad explained that the man had suffered severe battle trauma during World War II and just snapped. The “walker,” as I came to call him, never regained his emotional bearings.

This unfortunate soul provides an image of how many of us go to work. We show up and stay busy,

but we have no passion or emotional focus in our work. All of us know people who are miserable in their jobs but doing nothing about it. We have heard people say, “If I can just keep my head down for another ten years, then I can take early retirement.” Many of us know someone who counted the days until they retired and then died within a year or two. Equally distressing are the people who retire emotionally but still come to work. They’re so emotionally checked out they haven’t been truly invested in what they’re doing for years. They’re shell-shocked.

Many of us had idealistic goals about what we would do with our lives as we finished high school or college, but there were numerous realities waiting to snuff out the bright candle of youthful idealism. The *New Yorker* cartoon below illustrates this well:



“I’m looking for a position where I can slowly lose sight of what I originally set out to do with my life, with benefits.”

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Running a strong race means channeling our energy to pursue our ideals, not survive until retirement. When I was growing up, my dad would talk about his work as a commercial pilot and say, “I would do this job even if they didn’t pay me.” It showed—his company received hundreds of letters over the years, all expressing appreciation for his work. He cared about his passengers and crew. He loved his work. And loving our work—being passionate about the tasks that fill our days—is a core tenet of running with our workplace bulls and doing more than counting the days to retirement.

As followers of Christ, we were made to thrive in our work and navigate it toward a purpose bigger than ourselves alone. This purpose is eternal and involves us becoming the individual God had in mind when he formed us in our mothers’ wombs (See Psalm 139:14 and Jeremiah 29:13). Running successfully down this road requires preparation of our heart and mind, and a purposeful plan of action. The results are a sustained sense of accomplishment, joy and significance. The Apostle Paul understood this when he reminded the Roman church, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10, NLT).

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Work that advances your life toward greater significance doesn’t happen by accident. How significant would you rate the work you do right now? Are there any immediate improvements you can make?
2. A lawyer once admitted to me how painful his days were—he’d always wanted to teach English at a small liberal arts college. When I asked him

why he didn’t pursue that dream, he said he was a prisoner to \$300,000 a year. After law school, his lifestyle quickly absorbed his high income and changing jobs was now unthinkable. How does income affect a person’s ability to orchestrate a job in which personal and eternal significance are high?

3. God created each of us with a unique combination of ability and ambition. Understanding this combination is the key to forging a career we love. What challenges do we face when trying to find and stay on this road?
4. The Apostle Paul told the church at Philippi, “Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk our way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand” (Philippians 2:2-3, The Message). How do you think Paul’s words should play out in the way you go about your work?
5. Our work is an extension of ourselves—perhaps the greatest extension. But so few people take pride in their work. Why do you think this is so?
6. In the late 20th century, the phrase “take care of yourself” was a popular mantra. At its heart was the notion that pleasing yourself will lead to happiness. Oddly enough, quite the opposite is true. How can pleasing God remain our primary objective without stunting our worthy and noble ambitions?

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STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

A personal and loving God created us for a purpose. We each have dignity and value because we are His. Augustine rightfully asserted, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”¹ Our dream job, whether a forest ranger or the CEO of Microsoft, will fail to cure the common restlessness if we are not investing our lives in the way God desires.

Fortunately, God desires for us to flourish more than we do—He is our greatest advocate. Our role in flourishing in the work arena is twofold:

1. Continually develop the gifts God has entrusted to us so that no matter where we work, the acting out of our strengths will glorify God
2. Continually navigate our career toward work for which God has given us a passion.

Most of us know a talent or gift we possess. And most of us have—inside ourselves—a passion toward a certain type of work or activity. These are not things to take lightly. They are, in fact, the most important ingredients to our work promoting a life of great and eternal significance.

¹ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, AD 397-398.

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LESSON 4: GOING TO THE ARENA

“Our destiny is largely in our hands. If we find, we shall have to seek. If we succeed, it must be our own energies and our own exertions. Others may clear the road, but we must go forward, or be left behind in the race of life.”

-- Frederick Douglass, 1866

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 4 IN THE BOOK, *RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED*.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

A few summers ago, my brother-in-law Carl took me and several of our children climbing on the group of volcanic mountains known as the Three Sisters in Eastern Oregon. The South Sister towers majestically above the desert floor with its snow-capped rim. A disciplined planner, veteran outdoorsman and Eagle Scout, Uncle Carl carefully mapped out our route and inventoried the gear and food needed for our assault of the famous peak. Just before the trip, the boys and I went to the basement to assemble our camping gear. With his prodigious checklists, it occurred to me that Uncle Carl might be overdoing it a bit on the preparation. After all, this was a family outing, not an expedition to the top of Mt. Everest.

Several nights later I watched a breaking news story about the dramatic rescue attempt of a group climbing Mt. Hood, just north of where we would soon be camping. While trying to lower an extraction stretcher, the evacuation helicopter’s rotor blades hit the side of the mountain. The copter crashed to the ground, burst into flames and rolled hundreds of yards down the steep precipice into a pile of twisted metal—the tragic consequence of attempting to rescue some ill-prepared hikers. The newscaster pointed out that

every year people die of hypothermia, avalanches, falls and other mishaps in the Oregon mountains. In each case the unpredictable conditions of the backcountry outmatched the planning, preparation and skill of the hikers who died. Suddenly, Uncle Carl’s insistence that we plan and prepare as if our lives and the lives of our children depended on it made sense ... because they did.

Unfortunately, many approach their work like the stranded hikers on Mt. Hood. They’re unclear about where they’re going and are often content to leave the route to chance. What such individuals try to pass off as a plan is more like a collection of good intentions—and the results are regrettably predictable and often tragic. It’s fine to be spontaneous and unplanned on Friday nights or on vacation but your work is too important not to be intentional.

Intentionality precedes any major accomplishment—and a life of significance is the most major accomplishment of all. If your work is to promote your overall goals in life, you must not only keep those goals in mind, you must enact a plan to reach them.

Those who manage to reach the arena despite the bulls behind, around and before them are well planned. They run with their strengths and follow premeditated steps. They rely on four basic tools: 1) a strategic mindset, 2) disciplined preparation, 3) commitment to action and 4) courage in the face of difficulty. The bottom line is that they think enough of

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the looming danger to prepare for everything—and they succeed because of it. The same principle holds true of your approach to work.

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. What type of planner are you? Do you think several steps ahead or do your thoughts remain on your current situation?
2. Does the advice to “plan ahead” go against Jesus’ message in Matthew 6:25-34? Describe why or why not?
3. Proverbs 21:31 says, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord” (NIV). How do our planning efforts affect our expectations?
4. How you handle opportunities plays a significant role in your ability to remain a stable, straight path to your goals. Many people struggle to find work that adds significance to their lives because they jump at every opportunity that comes their way. As followers of Christ, how should we handle potentially good opportunities that arise?
5. Every successful person has jumped to action at some point. If the timing is in line with God’s plans for you, author Erwin McManus calls this “seizing your Divine moment.” Do you feel you will know such a moment when it comes? What will seizing that opportunity require?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

When we attempt something significant, challenges inevitably follow. Detractors speak up and question the wisdom of our decisions. After graduating from college, my son worked for four years and found

his work to be very challenging and significant. He also knew that he wanted to accomplish more in his career, so after months of deliberation, he concluded he would return to business school to grow his leadership skills. To his surprise, an important mentor challenged his plans. “Jim, why do you want to leave a perfectly good job? You have a stable position with a good salary, excellent benefits, and you work with many interesting people.” His mentor’s questioning jolted Jim, but he concluded that he must press forward.

It is totally normal to struggle with how to move forward in our careers. Often the opposing forces seem insurmountable. Where do we find the discipline to persist and the courage to stay the course? A dominant theme of the Bible is God wanting to encourage us with his power and strength. Through the prophet Isaiah God said, “Don’t panic. I’m with you. There’s no need to fear, for I’m your God. I’ll give you strength. I’ll help you. I’ll hold you steady; keep a firm grip on you” (Isaiah 41:10, *The Message*).

God is limited neither by our circumstances nor our past. He wants to strengthen our vision and part the Red Sea before us. The prophet Jeremiah insisted of God, “There is nothing He can’t do.” God replies to us, “Call to me and I will answer you. I’ll tell you marvelous and wondrous things that you could never figure out on your own” (Jeremiah 33, *The Message*).

While reaching the arena is often a perilous, trying task. We have the greatest Advocate there is. God not only wants us to achieve all He set in our hearts to accomplish, He promises to help us get there. “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). With His assurance and strength, step forward confidently into the race and begin to run the path before you. There is no avoiding the risks but your Advocate is greater than any danger.

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SECTION II: CHARACTER

Of the numerous corporate values statements I've read over the years, I cannot think of one that did not include *integrity*. Rooted in the same Latin word from which we get "integer," integrity means whole, sound, integrated, unimpaired. Integrity is the best indicator of our character and trustworthiness.

It is commendable that leaders provide direction and clarity of expectations for our organizations by stressing lofty values. Companies *should* aspire to integrity in their business dealings; however, integrity is reflected in individual action, not corporate aspiration. Enron was an example of a corporation who aspired to integrity but failed to act it out. "Integrity" was the second item on the company Values Statement.

In similar fashion, your integrity is a result of your actions alone. And your actions can make or break the greatest efforts to run a significant and successful race. Lessons 5-7 surround the critical role your character plays in running with the bulls without getting trampled.

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LESSON 5: RUN BY THE RULES

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
and it must follow at the night the day,
thou can'st not then be false to any man.*

-- Shakespeare¹

**STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 5 IN THE BOOK,
*RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT
GETTING TRAMPLED.***

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Eerie blue light illuminates their pensive faces. Sweat and streaks of black grease glisten on their tense, furrowed brows. Dread-filled eyes dart furtively to their captain, desperately hoping he is right to make this dive. Panicked, hushed voices—"She's turning around." The pinging of the enemy's sonar increases as rapidly as their heartbeats. "Keep it quiet, boys." The cramped gray compartment filled with pipes and gauges packs the crew too close together. Noxious odors from the diesel fuel and sulfuric acid in the sub's batteries make the air almost unbreathable. The flickering lights threaten to plunge them into darkness. "Deeper, chief, it's only pressure." One man's quiet sobbing and the awful creaking of twisting metal portends the deadly implosion each man knows to be seconds away. Suddenly, the deafening blast of depth charges rocks the boat violently—fire, smoke, screaming—and then the dreaded leaks spring from weakened seams in the hull. Broken bolts fire with the velocity of bullets. At first a trickle, and then an explosion of freezing water—the hull is breached.

¹ *Hamlet*, Act I Scene II, ll. 78-80.

To evade their enemy, a German submarine descends far below its safe depth, and the captain pushes the boat and its crew far beyond their psychological limits. Under excessive depth pressure, the integrity of the hull is finally compromised.

Many of the great war movies are about submarines—*The Hunt for Red October*, *Crimson Tide*, *U-571*, and one of my favorites, *Das Boot*. Naval officers in such films often refer to the "integrity of the hull" because nothing is more important than the trustworthiness of the hull of a submarine. A compromised hull puts the boat and those on board in jeopardy. A trustworthy hull enables the submarine to do its work—to go underwater, navigate around the danger, and complete its mission.

The psalmist applied this principle to an individual's life when he prayed, "May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you" (Psalm 25:21, NIV). Our character protects us just as the hull of a ship protects the sailors inside. It enables us to do our work effectively despite the dangers all around. Therefore, any thoughtful person will regularly ask, "Is my personal hull trustworthy, reliable, and structurally sound?" At work, there are many potential challenges to the hull of our character. If it is compromised, our best efforts can be wasted and our lives endangered.

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STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. When William and I ran with the bulls, one of the rules was to not touch the bulls. The rule ensured the animals would be treated with respect. Inevitably, some runners still tested the rules and got themselves gored or trampled. We all know people who push ethical limits. Have you seen an example of this type of behavior in your current or past work setting?
2. United Airlines Flight 232 was mid-flight when the fan disk in the DC-10's rear engine exploded, severing all three hydraulic lines. Only the extraordinary skill of the crew saved the lives of 300 people on board. An investigation later revealed that a titanium ingot used to make the fan disk had a tiny bubble that eventually weakened to the breaking point. The tiny bubble was the cause of a nearly catastrophic effect. Can you think of an example of a small character flaw that can lead to a huge consequence?
3. Regardless of our position in an organization, we have significant ethical responsibilities—how we handle expense accounts, use of a company car, use of the internet or how we use sick leave. What are some ways people bend the rules in these areas and thus compromise their integrity?
4. One of the most common catalysts for a compromise in character is an inability to be honest with ourselves. This is what the prophet Jeremiah was getting at when he said, “The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle no one can figure out” (Jeremiah 17:9, The Message). Do you have a system for checking on your self-truths?
5. We tend to base our determination of a person's

character in part on his treatment of others. How can a person diminish his character through interpersonal interactions?

6. One seasoned CEO told me he always assumes people will act in their own self-interest, so he's never surprised when they do. Yet it's always better for us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, even when it disadvantages us. Can you describe a recent situation where you had to choose between an easy wrong and a hard right?
7. Do you agree or disagree with a motto to “underpromise and overdeliver”?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Rosie Ruiz won the women's 84th Boston Marathon on April 21, 1980. Suspicious race officials eventually determined that she hadn't actually run the marathon. She just hopped the subway and ran the last mile or so. The organizers disqualified Rosie's win.

Earlier in this book I suggested that a race works well as a metaphor for our work lives, and I indicated that we should run to win. Yet, in order for the race to have meaning it must have rules. Rosie cheated. She crossed the finish line first, but her win meant nothing because she didn't run a true race. The apostle Paul pointed this out when he wrote that an athlete “... does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:5, NIV).

Ultimately, living according to God's standards establishes our personal trustworthiness at work, but it seems like many in the workplace follow a different set of rules. In most organizations employees strive to be upwardly mobile, and we all know the guy who is constantly angling for his own advancement.

It's confusing. Being rewarded with a promo-

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tion is normal and expected for effective performance in our jobs. Using manipulation, deceit, and gamesmanship is quite another matter—yet it too seems to work sometimes. So why should we try to follow the rules? Because trustworthiness protects us like the hull of a ship from forces and factors outside our control. God’s word assures us, “...your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23, NIV). People’s misdeeds eventually catch up with them—even the smallest of cracks in their hull can lead to tragic consequences.

In the complicated maze of our motives and desires, we can somehow manage to convince ourselves that our behavior is okay even when our conscience denies us peace. David, a powerful king of ancient Israel, once committed adultery with a beautiful woman and then had her husband murdered to cover up his crime. Only after a religious leader confronted him with the truth did David finally cry out to God in gut-level honesty, “You desire truth in the innermost being” (Psalm 51, NASB). An open, authentic relationship with God helps us sort out our complex motives and guides us to running our work race with uncompromised character.

If there is anything you have not yet confessed to Him, take a moment to do it now. He already knows your every action but the act of confession and the acceptance of responsibility return you to a platform of integrity both outwardly and in your innermost being.

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LESSON 6: STAYING ON TRACK

“Never, never, never ... give in.”

-- Winston Churchill

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 6 IN THE BOOK, *RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED*.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Most people in the workplace started off with the best intentions. Like our fellow red-sashed runners in Pamplona, most entering the workplace bull run do so with high hopes and honorable intentions. Then somewhere along the way, many get off track. They fall down, get knocked down or simply get lost and can't find their way back to the path they initially set out on. Some of these workers become captive to high paying but boring, purposeless jobs; they're paid to be miserable. Others become anxious and stressed about their work, the huge changes in their organizations or even the potential consequences of being out of a job. Many wear panic and despair on their faces.

We don't think clearly when we're under excessive stress, and our productivity slides; it's a vicious cycle. It would also be so much easier if every workplace had a leader who knew when to say, "Everything's ok ... we're going to get through this; here is our direction." But often leaders seem lost themselves and fail to communicate.

On pages 17-18 in the book I point out that 85% of Americans are unhappy in their jobs. The workplace is filled with misery and distress. Incompetent managers lack even basic interpersonal skills and clumsily try to lead their unwilling associates. I received

an email recently that said, "When trouble arises and things look bad, there is always one individual who perceives a solution and is willing to take command. Very often, that individual is crazy." Scott Adams became famous writing about these managers in Dilbert. Adams frequently points out that people email him about actual events in their organizations, providing him with ample material for the cartoon strip.

There are notable exceptions: some organization's cultures are healthy, supportive and uplifting, but many modern organizations' cultures are toxic. Some companies foster a dog-eat-dog competitiveness even among their own employees. This makes it extremely difficult to remain on the path on which you initially set out. As unfair as it may seem, your fiercest workplace bulls are often those running right beside you.

In the previous lesson we looked at how wisdom leads us to conclude that there is a relationship between cause and effect and that the universe is orderly and predictable ... yet our work world often seems the opposite. We have colleagues who make good decisions, and the business does well. We then see the same coworkers let go or moved to an irrelevant position, and watch them be replaced with incompetent people. It just doesn't make sense.

How do we continue running a hard and smart race amidst such uncertain and unpredictable conditions? How do we run with the bulls along a path that is often difficult to see or control? In the end, these

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are questions about how we should handle change and adversity.

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. When I observe people who successfully navigate the unpredictable paths of the workplace, I notice that one of the most common traits they possess is an ability to detach themselves from the immediate context of their circumstances. It is described well by Paul in Phillipians 4:10 when he said, "... for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." How might this contentment serve as an advantage?
2. I once knew a CEO whose favorite question when faced with a problem was, "What's the worst thing that could happen?" It nearly always led to a conclusion that the worst consequence was not catastrophic. Do you think this is a wise or unwise strategy?
3. In the workplace, problems often have a glare that prevents us from seeing solutions and opportunities right in front of us. Proverbs 3:5-6 reads, "Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track" (The Message). How does this verse alter your perspective on workplace problems?
4. There can appear to be a contradiction between the Proverbs that urge us to be diligent and ambitious about our days and the Proverbs that urge us to trust God with our steps and "lean not on our own understanding." How do you (or don't you) resolve this in your head and heart?
5. Genesis 37-48 tells the seemingly tragic story of Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, then falsely accused of rape by a country official's wife, then falsely imprisoned. For years, he seemed to suffer for having integrity and the excellent leadership skills. The best runners find a way to grow through adversity. Do you have an example of a critical lesson you learned from an adverse work experience?
6. What is your most difficult adversity at work and how can you run a hard and smart race amidst it?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Perhaps your work circumstances are difficult or uncertain right now. When you are unhappy at work it inevitably affects your feelings about life. In our jobs it's not unusual to feel that we are under someone's thumb or that the value of our personal stock is low. It is also common to feel a sense of apprehension, even mistrust, about the motives of those around us. Are they running the race with the same code of conduct, with the same noble motives and standards? Maybe you're the one making them nervous. Still, you may get so caught up in all the distractions that by the time you look up you find yourself so far off track, returning to true form seems impossible.

In such circumstances, telling someone to gain a proper perspective can sound so trite—but there is probably no other trait so underestimated and so misunderstood than perspective. It plays perhaps the most critical role in every step you take and every emotion you feel as you run your race. This is why the Apostle Paul urged the church at Colossi, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23, NIV).

If we truly believed that, "victory rests with

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the Lord” (Proverbs 21:31, NIV), then we would find it easier to focus on taking one wise step at a time. We would worry less about the forces around us that we cannot control and focus on controlling what we can. When we are truly serving Christ in our jobs, our perspective shifts. In a strange way, we can actually be thankful for adversity and how God is using it to refine our character and prepare us for something else. We’ve all had the experience where hindsight has proven us shortsighted—where we looked back at an experience we complained our way through and realized that God had used it to prepare us for something much more significant. It’s a difficult lesson to remember the next time we face adversity but one the writers of the Bible came back to constantly. God knows our nature is to memorialize what is good and forget what is bad. But often the most significant and useful lessons come by way of less-than-ideal paths. We don’t need to remember the pain of them forever, but we should never forget their lessons. Create a habit of asking the question, “What can I learn from this?” in every challenging or adverse circumstance.

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LESSON 7: DON'T GET DISQUALIFIED

*“Good judgment comes from experience...
and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.”*

-- Cowboy Wisdom

**STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 7 IN THE BOOK,
*RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT
GETTING TRAMPLED.***

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

It was a glorious Sunday afternoon in the foothills of north Georgia. My sons and I were enjoying one of our favorite after-lunch activities. We drove to a little-known spot near our home with a view to the Appalachian Mountains that we called the Overlook. When visibility was good you could see forever.

The fall air was pleasant and the sun-filled sky was so bright and clear you had to squint to look at it. You could see the mountains to the north, the lower plains to the south, and the Chattahoochee River meandering around the sprawl of Atlanta in-between. The sun cast a glow on the city below, and the yellows, reds, and oranges of the fall foliage were spectacularly beautiful. It was one of those days that just made you feel happy. For those few tranquil minutes I began to think world peace really was possible.

A few minutes after we arrived, a couple drove up in their new red pickup truck to enjoy the view. Riding in the truck bed was a vintage black lab that jumped out and introduced himself—his name was Jasper. He was one of those affectionate, never-met-a-stranger type of dogs. Jasper also knew what kind of day it was, and he was going to suck out all the marrow of life that beautiful afternoon.

Then without warning, the exuberant Jasper took flight over the four and a half-foot guard wall snaking along the edge of a deep precipice. We all watched with horror as Jasper plunged 120 feet to the bottom of the cliff below.

Sadly, we all know workers who act just like Jasper. They have boundless energy, but it's undirected and impulsive. We often see in them a lack of self-management, precipitously jumping over the walls of good judgment. We all have clumsy moments, but these individuals are perpetually in danger. They don't seem to learn from their mistakes and tend to deflect the critique that is so necessary to improve at work.

Such individuals eventually get trampled and never saw the bulls coming. They are blinded by their own lack of judgment; they miss the connection between their behavior and its impact on others. They seem to have impenetrable blind spots. The prison warden in the movie *Shawshank Redemption* lacks basic common sense in dealing with the prisoners, so Tim Robbins' character asks him, "How can you be so obtuse?" The warden's arrogance, greed, and narcissism eventually lead to his downfall. Although any number of factors can cause someone to get blindsided by the bulls, the most common are 1) poor interpersonal relationships, 2) arrogance, 3) volatility, 4) aloofness, 5) continued underachievement, and 6) inability or refusal to change. These negative character traits will quickly disqualify a person from the race.

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STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. James 3:5-6 warns, “It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that” (The Message). Have you ever been the recipient of a carelessly placed word at work? How did it change your feelings toward the person who said it?
2. The wise King Solomon insisted, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20, NIV). How have you seen this principle played out positively or negatively at your current or past job? What does it say about our work relationships?
3. King Solomon also said, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted...” (Proverbs 27:6, NIV). How does this advice indicate you should handle others’ feedback at work?
4. How are persistence and impatience related? Is it possible to apply one without the other?
5. Of the six race disqualifiers—1) poor interpersonal relationships, 2) arrogance, 3) volatility, 4) aloofness, 5) continued underachievement, and 6) inability or refusal to change—which could be your nemesis?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

In Lesson 1, I described a young man in the bull run who violated one of the two cardinal rules: “once down, stay down.” The classic definition of a fool is someone who keeps making the same mistake, expecting a different outcome. This young man fit the definition perfectly, at least three times. The disqualifiers described in this chapter also fit the description. To make them requires us to be oblivious to the predict-

able consequences. Eventually obtuseness can derail our careers. My Grandma Goldie, who did not tolerate fools lightly, used to say, “A fool isn’t worthless . . . he can at least be used as a bad example.” The disqualifiers described here are great “bad examples” for us to avoid.

Ultimately, what we’re talking about here are failures of character, to which we are all vulnerable. It’s critical that we regularly look ourselves in the mirror and ask the tough questions. The three that seem to get us to the heart of the matter are: 1) Am I particularly susceptible to any of these major character flaws? 2) Under what conditions are these characteristics most likely to surface? 3) How can I manage these vulnerabilities more effectively?

Once you know your vulnerabilities, getting advice from a trusted advisor provides further insight and helps you change. Just looking at a few of the “bad examples” mentioned here should compel you to pay careful attention from here on out, lest you get disqualified from the race.

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SECTION III: COMPETENCE

Competence in the work setting is in large measure a product of two types of skills, *unique* and *universal*. The distinction between these two types of skill is critical for those who aspire to achieve exceptional levels of effectiveness in their work. Unique skills make us competent for a specific job, like flying a plane, stitching up a torn knee, or making a presentation to the partners of the firm. These skills enable us to be hired for a specific job. They are necessary, but not sufficient for success—they simply qualify us for the race.

We have all seen people who are exceptionally talented at some unique skill and yet fail to achieve larger success in the work setting. There are ancillary skills, universal in nature, that distinguish good performance from great performance. These universal skills allow us to deal effectively with the inevitable barriers that can keep us from successfully applying our unique skills. Simply put, unique skills get us into the race, and universal skills help us run it successfully. They are universal because they transcend every job and supplement every unique skill. Fortunately, they can be learned and developed.

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LESSON 8: BE FIT TO RUN

“I think the guys who are really controlling their emotions ... are going to win.”

-- Tiger Woods, in a 2001 interview

**STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 8 IN THE BOOK,
*RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT
GETTING TRAMPLED.***

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

We all know people who are skilled at the art of living. They always seem to know what to say, what to do, and what to wear. They're good at relating to other people and get themselves out of bad moods quickly. These individuals are usually also *wise at work*. They seem to land good jobs and get promoted more often. People like working for them; they team well and always seem to know the best way to get something through the system. They have great emotional stamina. When they make a mistake, they bounce back with good humor and learn from the experience. When they get promoted, there is a widespread endorsement within the organization.

Undoubtedly, we also know others who constantly stumble. They have a knack for saying the wrong thing. They lack practical judgment or “horse sense.” For example, it is amazing how many people in customer service jobs lack basic judgment in handling customers. Many times big problems evaporate when a customer service rep makes a small, conciliatory gesture toward the customer instead of becoming defensive.

The person who exhibits good judgment is refreshing, and employers long for associates who manage themselves well and are good at dealing with

others. In rare circumstances, organizations tolerate “interpersonal train wrecks,” who are brilliant technically, but more often, the price for keeping such individuals is too costly.

Competence—our ability to perform effectively in the work setting—is in large measure a product of skills and seven *Critical Success Factors* (CSFs) we'll address in the final three lessons. Both skills *and* CSFs are essential for those who aspire to achieve exceptional performance in their work—for those who aspire to do more than show up for the race and act like they ran with the bulls. (If you didn't do it before Lesson 1, visit www.runwiththebulls.net now and complete the self-assessment exercises to see how you measure up).

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Individuals who are smart in a textbook sense have a high intelligence quotient, or IQ. Those who exhibit a keen ability to manage themselves and relate to others are said to have high emotional intelligence, or EQ. Which do you think is more important in a work setting?
2. On pages 121-122 in the book, I detail the marshmallow study conducted by Daniel Goleman that indicated an important gap between those who are able to effectively self-manage and those who are not. How do you think you handle the constant battle between impulse and restraint? What does the message in Proverbs 21:23, “He who guards his

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mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity,” tell us about winning this battle?

3. In Galatians 5:22-23, the Apostle Paul describes the primary signs of a person who is allowing God’s Spirit to direct their steps. Of the nine “fruits” exhibited by a person following God’s Spirit, the fourth (patience) and ninth (self-control) fall in the category of self-management. What does this say about improving our ability to manage our impulses?
4. Many people who continually exhibit poor or misguided judgment are very self-unaware. In light of this knowledge, what role does the “truth in the innermost being” (Psalm 51) play in our ability to use good judgment and remain fit to run?
5. According to Marin Seligman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, optimism is a primary factor to success in many areas, yet Proverbs 13:12 tell us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (NIV). Do you think optimism is an important characteristic to a Christian? How is Biblical hope and optimism the same and/or different?
6. The writers of the Proverbs speak out time and again about the perilous effects of uncontrolled anger. Why do you think this is such an important theme in the Bible?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Many people are working from only a small portion of who they really are, so each day is a poor substitute for what could have been. Work is a painful place in which success and significance are illusory. Such individuals often maintain low expectations of themselves and usually meet them. As a result, they’re

constantly stressed out and never seem to have effective work relationships.

Instead, work should help us find our meaning and maximize our significance. Of course, we make money, which provides for ourselves and others, but it should also be a place in which the best in us comes out. Self-management means using our unique skills to serve our customers and coworkers and reach important goals.

Self-management is Critical Success Factor 1; and everything else rests on top of this fundamental building block. Running a good race is always rooted in self-awareness, which supports the choices we must make every day to be optimistic, control our negative emotions, be assertive, manage stress, maintain high expectations, and regulate our speech. This is not a simple undertaking but one that is more easily attainable when we allow God’s Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, words and deeds. When we do, Psalm 1 promises we will be “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (NIV).

As you prepare for work each day, make sure you’re in the habit of connecting with God’s Spirit. Throughout the Scriptures, the men and women God used accomplished this most often through regular prayer and an infusion of God’s word. Furthermore, the Bible gives numerous accounts of Jesus rising early or staying up into the night to pray through the work before Him. He understood, as should we, that the strength, wisdom and skill God has given us can only flourish when our connection with Him is constant. Staying connected to God is the most important strategy for remaining fit to run the race before us.

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LESSON 9: RUN WELL WITH OTHERS

“I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element.”

-- Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 9 IN THE BOOK, *RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED*.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Despite technology, virtual offices and highly efficient ways of getting work done, the workplace is more interdependent than ever. In fact, being truly effective in our jobs requires that we collaborate well with others. Critical Success Factor 2, Relationship Management, is another major key to running the workplace race well.

Being good at our jobs requires that we learn to work effectively with others. More often than not, we need help from people over whom we have no authority. In such scenarios, skillful relationship management relies on the influence gained from knowing people, understanding differences and recognizing conflicting agendas. Skillfully managing relationships with our boss, our peers, our direct reports or our customers can make or break a career. One wrong move can get us trampled or remove us from the race altogether.

The bottom line: How well you work with others determines how well you perform in the workplace race. Competence spans not only the accomplishment of a given task, but also how well you collaborate with others in the process. Working on a team, managing conflict effectively and influencing others can spell the difference between progress and peril.

We are all working around our own imper-

fections and dealing with the imperfections of others. While some are not obvious, all are profound in their impact on our behavior. Fundamentally, running well with others is rooted in the trust of imperfect people.

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Has a defective relationship at work ever affected your ability to be productive? What did you do to change it?
2. In Romans 12:18 Paul encourages Christians with these words: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (NIV). What are some of the obstacles to applying this verse in the workplace?
3. King Solomon asserted, “Answering before listening is both stupid and rude” (Proverbs 18:13, The Message). How important is one’s ability to listen in the work setting? Is it more important than one’s ability to communicate?
4. One of the keys to managing relationships effectively is forgiveness. How does one’s experience with God’s grace affect how they forgive?
5. Proverbs 14:3 asserts, “A fool’s talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them” (NIV). How does this play out in a work setting? Do you tend to play the fool or the wise?

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STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Relationships are the most complex dimension of our workplace but they are one of the Critical Success Factors. When we think about work—our accomplishments, our challenges, our hopes and concerns—it usually involves other people. Integrity, competence and effective relationships are the ingredients that form the foundational trust on which all work is effectively conducted.

Managing solid relationships requires effort and focus. The good ones truly have to be built and fostered over time—but having comrades in the race is critical to not only your survival. It is critical to your ability to be your best. The path stones of running well with others are the attribution of positive motives, showing empathy, handling conflict skillfully and forgiveness. Applying these actions is often complex and challenging but no less essential for success and significance in the workplace bull run.

This is one of the reasons Paul often urged the early Christians to continually offer grace, forgiveness, generosity and love to each other. He understood that for the Body of Christ—the Church—to flourish and carry out God’s plan for the world, Christians would have to exemplify effective teamwork in the major settings of life. There is no more major setting than our workplace. Consider each day how you might improve and strengthen your work relationships.

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LESSON 10: RUN WITH SKILL

Bob: *If you would, would you walk us through a typical day for you?*

Peter: *Yeah.*

Bob: *Great.*

Peter: *Well, I generally come in at least fifteen minutes late, ah, I use the side door—that way Lumberg can't see, heh—after that I sorta space out for an hour.*

Consultant: *Da-uh? Space out?*

Peter: *Yeah, I just stare at my desk, but it looks like I'm working. I do that for probably another hour after lunch too. I'd say in a given week I probably only do about fifteen minutes of real, actual work.*

-- Scene from Office Space (20th Century Fox), 1999

STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 10 IN THE BOOK, RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT GETTING TRAMPLED.

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

A house painter recently described to me in great detail how he was going to paint my front door in cooperation with how the wood grain had originally grown. Monet could not have held more reverence for a canvas than this painter had for that front door. It truly was a work of art when he finished. Watching a highly skilled person holds our attention: the flashing knives of a chef, the sprinter gliding down the track, the surgeon repairing a knee or the conductor guiding a vast symphony into perfect harmony.

Conversely, watching the truly incompetent, unskilled person can yank us to the depths of despair and make us feel like Edvard Munch's famous painting, *The Scream*. Oh, how we dread that glazed-over look in the eyes of someone on which we're depending that says, "Man, I don't have a clue what I'm doing." Many in the workforce exhibit such a look—and

when the bulls come charging they freeze like a doe in headlights and can barely muster a blink. This is why highly skilled, competent employees are greatly prized. Organizations value such employees because they provide *the* competitive edge in today's marketplace. Among the executives I've interviewed over the years, many were smart and had great interpersonal skills. But ultimately the effective ones distinguished themselves by being great at what they did—they were highly competent. They achieved results in areas that mattered to the organizations they served—and this was the primary catalyst for their continued progress.

In the end, there are many who enter the race with noble goals, who learn to avoid obstacles and disqualifiers, and who learn to be effective at managing themselves and others ... and then fail to finish the race strong. They do so because they fail to continue developing the unique skills necessary to take them the distance. They often lack one or more of Critical Success Factors 3-6: foresight, dependability, resourcefulness and the ability to continue learning. Such people are like a sprinter running a marathon. At some point,

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their short-term resources are not enough to keep them in competition for the long-run.

The Apostle Peter hoped to keep Christians from this unfortunate result when he asserted, "... Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive..." (2 Peter 1:5-8, NIV).

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Our self-esteem is directly tied to our sense of mastery in our work. Has your work positively or negatively affected how you feel about yourself?
2. Dr. Pauline Rose Clance's *The Imposter Syndrome* documents how many professionals, some with years of training and experience, worry they are frauds. Why do you think this is such a common "syndrome"?
3. Forethought is looking ahead and being prepared for what's next. Proverbs 21:5 promises us, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty" (NIV). Do you find planning ahead difficult amidst the busy-ness of day-to-day life? Explain.
4. Being opportunistic is a characteristic shared by all successful people. Many of the best opportunities must be seized immediately or lost forever. Yet, there are also times when "jumping in with both feet" is extremely unwise. Describe how resourcefulness and the ability to learn allow us

to jump at prime opportunities without getting in over our heads?

5. I once conducted a study to discover what senior managers most valued in younger associates and dependability was at the top of all their lists. They all wanted workers who took ownership of their work. Read Colossians 3:17. Do Christians have a heightened obligation to be dependable and conscientious with their jobs?

STEP 4: CONCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Critical Success Factors 1-6—self-management, relationship-management, forethought, dependability, resourcefulness and the ability to learn—are like a Porsche engine that can make a Carrera go 170 mph but needs high-octane fuel to do so. CSFs must be fueled by passion. Earlier we talked about the attitude of running to win. How many people do we know who are highly talented but content to drift along without achieving anything significant? They don't understand that talent must be fueled with passion, which stems from purpose and intentionality.

Skilled-but-passionless people litter the workplace landscape. The Notre Dame football player immortalized in the film *Rudy* illustrates how even a person with modest skill can excel with passion.

Passion, however, is not a substitute for skill—they are both essential. Rudy only played in one game at Notre Dame because he just didn't possess the skill necessary to play football at that level, not because he didn't have passion. Some of our colleagues at work are passionate like Rudy but their enthusiasm needs to be paired with the necessary skill to achieve results. This is why the Success Factors we've discussed are called "Critical" and not "Optional." Without them, you might navigate your way down the bull run—but

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eventually, before you reach the goal, you'll run out of options and get run down or run out of the race.

Remember Peter's words at the beginning of this lesson? Here's how he concludes the thought: "...For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and productive... But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind... Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8-11, NIV). If you've never asked yourself, "What is God calling me to do?" running with skill begins there because purpose fuels the passion in everyone. But you can't stop there. If you have a good sense for what God has created you to do, you must continue developing the skills necessary to accomplish that purpose with excellence and determination.

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LESSON 11: RUNNING OUR BEST RACE

“It is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.”

-- Max De Pree, Founder of the De Pree Leadership Center,

**STEP 1: READ CHAPTER 11 IN THE BOOK,
RUN WITH THE BULLS WITHOUT
GETTING TRAMPLED.**

STEP 2: CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

The Greek poet Hesiod once said, “Badness you can get easily and in quantity. The road is smooth and it lies close by. But in front of excellence [is] sweat, and long and steep is the way to it...”

The first six Critical Success Factors—self-management, relationship management, forethought, dependability, resourcefulness and the ability to learn—require a lifetime of disciplined intentionality. The seventh CSF, how to transform, describes how we develop and sustain these vital competencies.

As with most things in life, going downstream requires so little energy that we’re naturally drawn in that direction. Transformation requires that we possess and develop the resources to go upstream. The payoff is increased effectiveness and the achievement of success and significance, regardless of what type of work we do. If we truly believe we are vessels of God’s Kingdom in this world, ongoing transformation is not only a critical factor to our work, it is the foremost factor in 1) becoming all that God created us to be and 2) doing all that God created us to do.

After all, this race we are running is no simple task. Have you been to your high school reunion lately? It’s always interesting to see how our old

classmates have fared. Some are unrecognizable—they have a lot less hair. Gravity has changed their faces and too much food and not enough exercise have changed their shapes. Many are on their second or even third marriage and have several children. It’s striking how some seem frozen in their adolescent mind-set.

Most of us graduated from high school with dreams and ambitions. Maybe we wanted to get out of our hometown, do better than our parents or have a meaningful career. The longer we talk with some old classmates, the more we see in their faces that the initial bravado of “everything’s fantastic” diminishes. We see in their countenance that their dreams of youth have faded like an old yearbook photograph. They left high school to face a challenging and uncertain world, ill-equipped to become the person they once felt called to be.

Why don’t people realize their dreams? Why have so few, even the ones with talent, achieved their ambitions? Most never created enough velocity to get outside the gravitational pull of their comfort zone—a space that requires little risk and none of the self-discipline it takes to transform. Change by its very nature tends to upset our personal balance and make everything more stressful, so we avoid it.

More than 850 men, women, and children died when the giant ferry MS Estonia sank in the Baltic Sea during a 1993 storm. Many of those who tragically perished clung to the outside railings of the huge white

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ship as it sank, pulling them under the frigid water to their deaths. A bitter irony frustrated the rescuers—dozens of empty lifeboats bobbed on the ocean waves just a few feet from the victims clinging to the “safety railing.” Many simply wouldn’t let go of the boat—the familiar. To greatest paradox in life (and the one which is the central theme of the Bible) is that survive and thrive in this race we are all in, you must be willing to let go.

STEP 3: DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Why do you think God created us with such strong desires for our lives and then asks us to learn to surrender them?
2. What is so appealing about the familiar and so frightening about the unknown? How might our knowledge of God help us work through this dilemma?
3. Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (NIV). How do you think we can excel at transforming ourselves while simultaneously allowing God to prepare us to do the good works He has planned?
4. A transformational event is a wake-up call that can inspire (or force) a person to change. Have you ever experienced a transformational event in your work life? How has it affected your spiritual life?
5. Pain, potential consequences and future promises are the three “compelling whys” of personal change. Though a transformational event slows us down enough to consider changing, it is more often the “compelling whys” that drive us to change. What is a recent compelling why that drove you to

make a change in your life?

6. There are inevitable forces to making positive and even necessary changes in our lives. What are some that you’ve experienced and how have you overcome (or attempted to overcome) them?

Step 4: Conclude the following:

More change in the world of work occurred in the last twenty years than any period in history. Technology, globalization and telecommunication are changing the way we live and work; however, the most important transformation must still occur in us—the ability to continually change is now a basic requirement for effectiveness in the workplace. It is also critical from the spiritual standpoint. As God leads us down the path He intended for us, transformation—becoming more and more like Him—is the foremost prerequisite. Why are New Year’s resolutions so transient? Why is it that some people seem to make change happen while most don’t? Personal transformation is the most difficult challenge in life. Jesus knew this when he said, “With man, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26, NIV). Realizing the possibilities of God in our lives—especially in the work that we do and the worker that we become—surround a simple but profound acknowledgement made by John the Baptist: “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30, NIV).

In our era of self-help, it can seem like a paradoxical truth that as we allow God to do His work in us and through us, we will become more like the people we’ve always desired to be and accomplish more of what’s always been in our hearts to accomplish. But Paul marries these seemingly opposing concepts when in Romans 8:37, he asserts, “We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus” (NIV). This life—most of which

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is spent working in some capacity—is about more than conquering the bulls, about more than avoiding the inhibitors to success and significance. It's about thriving along the unique paths God intended for us, which is found in knowing and following Christ Jesus. Our deepest desires and childhood dreams become realities along this path. However, we must be willing enough, wise enough, skilled enough and courageous enough to go down it—even though we may not always see where it is leading us. This is the culmination of Christian faith.

...

FINAL THOUGHT

We live in a world filled with challenge and uncertainty. Simply put, whether or not we acknowledge it, we run with the bulls every day and that's unlikely to change. What we can change is how and why we run the race, and that's what these lessons are about.

Helen Keller said that “life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” My hope is that every day you will find significance in your work and that you will discover a grand adventure. This is how certainly God intended it to be. Still, a life dedicated to the pursuit of high and noble ends is not an easy life, but it is filled with a level of adventure and fulfillment that cannot be experienced any other way. Given the primary role that work plays in this accomplishment, my hope is that in the end you will feel that you invested your work hours well, and when you go to bed at night, you'll never wonder why you are on the planet. As Paul says in I Corinthians 9:24, “Run to win” (The Message).