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Just Go For It!

Written by Dame Kelly Holmes

With Linda Bird

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DAME KELLY HOLMES

with Linda Bird

JUST GO
FOR IT!

6
Simple
Steps to
Achieve
Success



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INTRODUCTION

I don't know about you, but without a goal or direction, I don't feel I'm living my life.

I'm one of those people who sets high goals for herself and is always searching for a new challenge, or a different direction.

There are people out there who are unaware of who they are or what they want out of life, or who may just have lost the will to do anything. There are also plenty of people I've met who, like me, are motivated, always looking for a new venture and not afraid to give their all to achieve it. The hard part for us all can be working out *what* it is or *how* to do it...

I've been lucky. I am driven and focused and my commitment to my goals has certainly paid off. From the age of 14 I dreamed about being an Olympic

champion. I spent years single-mindedly trying to reach that dream – 20 years in fact of learning about myself and challenging myself, undergoing hard training sessions and pushing my body to exhaustion.

During that time I experienced heartbreaking setbacks and disappointments alongside amazing victories and achievements, both in my working life in the Army and in my sporting career. For many of those years I was thinking of little else but being the best.

Yes, it paid off. Winning two Olympic gold medals is an incredible achievement; it's something most sportspeople dream about (including me). Those medals are more than I could ever have asked for, the richest reward of all. I'll never be able to describe the feeling of euphoria as I stood on that rostrum to receive my medals.

Being an Olympic champion has changed my life and opened many doors to me. It has enabled me to meet many inspiring people, and enjoy extraordinary experiences. And yes, it has provided me with certain financial rewards (though, believe me, not as many as people might assume). I'm certainly not paid enough to sit in the garden and twiddle my thumbs all day! (Although I probably wouldn't anyway.)

The truth is, after many years of training and competing, my life has been taking a different direction. Athletics was a route to life-changing

success for me, for which I'll always be grateful. And it's led me down other paths, which have been truly rewarding. For example, since the Olympics I've taken on lots of roles that have helped me give something back and encourage individuals to get the most out of themselves.

After retiring from athletics at the end of 2005, I was awarded the role of National School Sport Champion, which I held for three years. (I had a great interest in young people doing sport, and I was also concerned about what kids were actually doing in terms of PE at school.) The job became a Government-backed role, supported by Norwich Union (now Aviva), and basically involved my working on ideas to get more kids doing more sport. Telling the then-Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, (on his second day in office) what I thought needed to be done was a weird experience – but what an opportunity. During those years, the UK Government target of getting 85 per cent of children doing at least two hours PE a week was realised (up from 25 per cent in 2002 – pretty good going!). I was so proud of that role and I'm glad I was able to inspire and motivate young people into a more active lifestyle – particularly those hardest to encourage: teenage girls, who often shy away from PE. In fact, the GirlsActive initiative (which I launched in 2006) was very much

aimed at disengaged teenage girls. I found it shocking and disheartening to think that many girls have such low self-esteem or lack of confidence – whether as a result of peer pressure or because of body image issues.

In that role I ended up meeting young girls from all walks of life – including some who clearly didn't want to be there at all! (Teenagers do get a lot of bad press these days, but I suppose you could see why judging by the attitude of some of the girls that came through the door!) But I tell you, all the girls we met were great kids deep down, and clearly just needed someone who would listen to and believe in them. Some probably get in with the wrong crowd and others admitted they lacked structure in their home life generally. But despite all that, I believe they all had a hidden talent. (I just hope that, in time, they come to believe that themselves.) My aim was to get them interested in sports or activities, and to bring out those all-important qualities such as teamwork, self-belief, leadership, discipline, camaraderie and learning how to communicate – all the skills that sport itself helps to develop, and which you need in life. And I also wanted to tackle some of those body image issues. (Because, let's face it, if getting fitter makes you feel better about yourself and your body, then it's probably worth doing something active.)

I can't tell you how satisfying it has been seeing disengaged, unmotivated kids with their finger on the self-destruct button go from, 'I don't want to' and 'I can't,' to 'I can – and I want to...!' or at least 'I'm going to try!'

Mentoring people, especially up-and-coming young athletes is really important to me, too. It just occurred to me one day back in January 2004 that my experience as an athlete – all those setbacks, successes and disappointments – could help guide other young athletes through their own careers.

Mine was a real emotional and rocky ride – an athletics career often is – and young people need all the guidance they can get. So 'On Camp with Kelly' is my own mentoring and educational development programme funded by Aviva that aims to help junior international athletes reach their full potential. Seven years on I have supported and guided over 50 elite junior international standard athletes through their careers, and have seen them going through the big changes of life – physiological, social and emotional – such as leaving school and home, going to university or finding jobs – living as normal teenagers but with exceptional talents.

The initiative has been able to provide ongoing medical support and advice, which has been so important, rehabilitation training and guidance,

coaching support and one-to-one advice. My team and I are also here to give the girls support through any difficulties they may face – due to performance issues or educational demands, for example. At some stage they have all had injuries and some have had real downtimes to battle through, too, and I know they have all really benefitted from the additional support. With this support behind them, I hope these girls can at least go through their athletics careers saying they have given it their all. It's been really exciting and rewarding to know I've been part of their journey and to have seen them grow into respectable, talented young women. So watch this space! Maybe one day they will be writing a book too!

Helping people believe in themselves and find a purpose in life is one of the reasons I launched my own charity, The Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust, www.dkhlegacytrust.org. I'm fully aware of the significant influence that someone like me – an elite athlete who has been there and done it – can have over young people.

We make the most of the talents of retired sportspeople, and harness their expertise as they make the transition into new careers working within sport and education. I think people forget that sportspeople are all human – we just found our talent and made the most of it! Sportspeople come from a range of

different backgrounds and take very different routes to success (mine certainly wasn't all plain sailing).

But what we tend to have in common is an ability to relate to kids and really get through to them. So in the 'Get on Track' programme, the sportspeople use their talents and abilities to help mentor disadvantaged young people. The kids on this programme have not had the best start in life, and they need guidance and intensive personal development before they can even be fit for employment and acquire the necessary social skills to get a job.

So yes, there's a lot in my life to keep me busy – and I still have plenty of other goals, too. I'm always looking for another challenge, a new career, a new path, something to get me out of bed in the morning, to put that fire back in my belly. All of which makes me just like so many of you out there.

So, what's next for me? Well, it's to make my mark in the business world – I'd like to set up my own business, from scratch, and watch it grow. I want to create something I can call my own, using my own ideas, my own hard work. I have a million and one ideas; I have needed to refine them, do my research, meet the right people. Then it's just about getting started.

Many people have dreams – to start their own business and be their own boss. For other people, the 'big goal' is to leave a job that no longer makes

them happy, to take the plunge and find a new one somewhere else. Or change careers entirely. For a lot of people it may be to lose the weight that has made them unhappy for years. Or perhaps it's to run a marathon, or just to get a bit fitter, little by little. However big or small, these are challenges that require hard work, commitment and a belief in yourself that you can do it. And yes, it's a frightening thought and definitely not easy.

I have to say I well up with tears when I see the emotion on people's faces after they have achieved something they've been striving for. It doesn't have to be a massive accomplishment – but it's clearly a passionate desire, a huge goal to them. Losing just a few pounds, or toning up and actually liking their body again after years of struggle. Or getting round a fun run without collapsing. Finding out they're good at something when they thought they had no talent. You can just see that sense of triumph on people's faces. There's no feeling like it. It takes me back to my own life and reminds me of the hard work I had to put in and the overwhelming feeling of success ...

I remember – and understand – the rollercoaster ride it can often be to follow a dream. It can be exhausting, scary, time-consuming and really painful at times. But it's so worth all of that when that one thing finally comes to fruition.

I know I was lucky: I had a talent to run, but I also knew what I wanted. Not everyone does, they just know that what they have isn't quite enough to fulfil them. For those people, the hardest part is probably answering that first question: what is going to make me happy?

What's more, I know that plenty of people don't have that innate determination or insatiable drive. It's not in their make-up, so for them taking that step is much harder. But it's not impossible. And the rewards may be even greater when you reach your own target.

That's why I'm writing this book. I understand the quest for success and to feel good about yourself. I've been on a massive journey myself, and now that my Olympic dream is behind me, I feel I'm on another one. My career in the Army definitely shaped me when I was younger. Now I am older, there are different challenges ahead, but I really feel I am ready to make the most of what life offers now.

I'm aware that my experiences as an athlete have given me some valuable tools to guide others on their path. I understand what it's like to have to make changes to the pathway you thought you were on, taking tiny steps and having patience, and having to work really hard on your self-belief when you lose confidence in your ability. I did it every day. I know

how easy it can be to talk yourself out of something before you actually get started. But I also know how to dig deep, summon that willpower and find the guts and determination to break through the barriers.

I believe everyone has a talent for something, and some have a unique ability. For me it was to run, and I'm lucky that my talent was clear enough to propel me to great things. Sometimes a person's gifts may not be so obvious, but that doesn't mean we can't all develop our skills. It frustrates me to see people waste their lives dreaming of changing something but never getting on and doing it because they (mistakenly) believe they're just not sufficiently talented or capable of achieving anything, feeling there are too many barriers in the way. My attitude is 'just go for it!' Even if it doesn't work out, or it takes longer than you thought or is much harder than you thought – at least you've given it a shot. What's crucial is to make sure your dream or aspiration is realistic – that way when you reach each little milestone along the way, it keeps you motivated.

I am not a psychologist or doctor, but I am a high achiever and love passing on my advice to help other people succeed. So, for everyone out there who, like me, never wants to live with 'if onlys ...', let's get started!