

Why Women in Sports is Better for Business: My Experience Training for Marathons



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Unlike many athletes – both those competing in the Olympics this week and those we encounter in our daily professional lives – sports became a crucial part of my daily routine later in life. It was not until I signed up to run the 2014 New York City Marathon that I truly became/felt like a “[runner](#)” (See Video: [Runner’s World – I’m A Runner](#)). I was always someone who exercised to stay fit, but only after I began fully training did I see the sport as an experience, not just a means to an end.

My experience and the qualities that stood out to me during my first marathon training (and in subsequent races) are true for many other women in the workplace and their careers. One of my most important takeaways is that sports can make a significant difference in the professional world by building and strengthening key characteristics like hard work, leadership, perseverance, ambition and confidence. And in a competitive world, they can increasingly help a candidate stand out.

Statistics Don’t Lie

In a recent EY Women Athletes Business Network and espnW report, “[Making the connection: women, sport and leadership](#),” a global online survey of 400 women executives found 94% of the respondents participated in sports. Of those surveyed, nearly two-thirds (61%) said that having previous experience in sports contributed to their career success and that this background has had a positive influence on their own hiring decisions, with more than two-thirds (67%) highlighting an athletic background as a positive influence on a decision to hire a candidate.

These statistics become even more impressive when you look at the top levels of leadership. The majority (52%) of C-suite women played sports at the university level and just 3% of C-suite women had not played any sport. Furthermore, C-suite women are more likely than average to say that a candidate’s background in sport influences their hiring decision, putting “a particular premium on the discipline it requires compared to other respondents.”

The Skills You Gain

Particularly when training for marathons – but also when practicing any other sport – one must face your weaknesses and come to terms with your limitations and your strengths. At the same time, you must push yourself to do your best and embrace the competitive spirit without letting it interfere with training or “get inside your head,” making you complacent. This competitiveness can be a crucial factor for women’s success in the workplace, as can the ability to simultaneously focus on your own success and “path” – both for your running or athletics, and career track.

Sport also teaches you to prepare for the unexpected and to be flexible: Sometimes practice will not go well – for runners, it might rain unexpectedly, or the path you planned may be closed. The same is true in professional life. Being able to adapt and make the best of situation while staying committed to what you do/know best is crucial for an employee whether working as an intern, a CEO or as an entrepreneur starting your own company.

Training for the Future

As someone who travels constantly – I have been fortunate enough to visit [nearly 70 countries](#), often to three or four countries in the same week – ensuring that I have time to myself in the morning to run/train is an important part of my daily routine. During that time I can clear my head and collect my thoughts before the hustle of the day. This allows me to approach the daily tasks of my professional life with more clarity and enhances my ability to consistently think strategically.

Training for marathons also instills durability and endurance – not just for the day of the race – but in the face of the challenges in the workplace. Whether it is jetlag, back-to-back board meetings, writing a book or dealing with a crisis, the same commitment and hard work that allows me to train in 90-degree humidity in New York City and push through that last 0.2 miles of the 26.2 mile race, keeps me focused and on track in my meetings and my overall career.

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