



Transitions

■ JOHN SHUFELDT, MD, JD, MBA, FACEP

I participated in my first triathlon in 18 years last weekend in a town named for a card game. Show Low sits at 6,412 feet at the base of the White Mountains in northern Arizona.

Remember the first scene in *Chariots of Fire*, where a group of men are running barefoot, effortlessly through the crashing waves on a beautiful beach with the orchestra playing an inspiring melody in the background? It wasn't like that.

In complete contradistinction to *Chariots*, I staggered out of the water in the back of the pack. Once on the bike, I decided to pass everyone I could see who was ahead of me. I set my sights on a cyclist about 300 yards in front.

The words of the legendary multi-distance runner Steve "Pre" Prefontaine echoed in my mind: "A lot of people run a race to see who is fastest. I run to see who has the most guts, who can punish himself into exhausting pace, and then at the end, punish himself even more."

I peddled faster. Hunched on the aero bars, I looked up and knew that I could pass him. As I got closer, I realized something wasn't right. His bike looked different, he looked different, but I did not care; I was gaining on him and that was all that mattered.

I zoomed past him feeling pretty damn good about myself. It was then I noticed: he only had one leg. Instantly, I knew who had more guts.

A triathlete and close friend of mine once told me, "a little pain now, less pain later." The truth was, in my preparation, I hadn't endured enough pain. It showed.

There is one area, however, in which I was well prepared: transitions. Transitions are what occur between the swim and the bike and the bike and the run. In the broader sense, transitions are periods of change. Transitions are an inevitable, fun, and dynamic part of life.

Unfortunately, transitions are an area in which many individuals find themselves ill-prepared. I was lucky; my son

Michael is a superb triathlete and gave me lots of tips about how to prepare for the transitions. Here is what he taught me:

1. Collect all the necessary equipment.
2. Learn how to use it and how to fix it when it breaks.
3. Expertly organize your area.
4. Prepare for the unknown.
5. Keep moving.

Such preparation applies equally well to practicing medicine, running a business, or generally managing all the transitions that are part of life.

Collect All the Necessary Equipment

In triathlons, this means a wet suit, goggles which will stay on your head, glide stuff to prevent chafing and to make your wet-suit come off easier, a watch which measures your pace and speed, biking and running shoes, a bike with aero bars, a device to measure your pedal cadence, cool sunglasses, and a hat worn backwards (allegedly to be more aerodynamic).

In life, it's a bit more complicated. The "equipment" may be additional training, another degree, expertise in an area which few others possess. Simply stated, it is the knowledge, training, or devices which set you apart from the pack and ensure that during times of change you are better prepared than the next person.

For example, I know someone who worked at the same company for 25 years. He was in middle management and was fairly successful. Unfortunately, when the company experienced a downturn he was one of the first to be let go.

Never once in his 25 years did he think "what if?". Never once did he seek additional training or go back for an advanced degree. He simply existed, and when he was laid off, he had nothing to fall back upon. He did not stand out, nor was he viewed as action-oriented.

Basically, he was screwed, or as he says now, "Would you like fries with your meal?"

Now is the time to prepare. Assemble the tools, training, and tactics you will need to have when the chips are down and pray that you will never need to rely upon them. At the end of the day, this exercise alone will improve your game.

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CODING Q & A

for the professional services of the physician. Hospital-affiliated urgent care centers that bill separately on a UB-04 form for the facility may bill for supplies on the UB-04, even during the global period for a code billed on the CMS-1500. ■

Q. My question is which code we could use for urgent care centre while patient has chest pain and facility perform EKG?

— Name withheld

A. Yes, this is the actual question that was sent by e-mail. I get scores of similar questions from people—mostly workers in foreign nations—who are actively coding for urgent care centers in the U.S.

If you have outsourced your billing to a coder who is unaware of the correct code for an EKG, you can be sure that your center is losing thousands of dollars due to poor coding in many other areas. Be very careful. ■

HEALTH LAW

Learn How to Use the Equipment and Fix It When It Breaks

On one of my first rides, I stupidly made the comment, “I don’t believe in karma, I won’t get a flat tire.” Within about 30 minutes, I had *two* flat tires. Fortunately, the person with whom I was riding not only had the equipment, he knew how to use it and taught me how to quickly change a tire (twice).

It is simply not enough to have initials after your name. The pursuit of additional training or an advanced degree is not a means to an end. The value is in the knowledge base which comes with the degree or training. You have to understand how to apply what you have learned in the real world and how to use this knowledge when things break or do not go as planned.

Expertly Organize Your Area

I thought I was pretty organized until I watched Michael prepare all of his gear. There was clearly a rationale to his methodology. His race times and transition times were fractions of some of the other elite racers. He simply out-organized many of them.

Individuals who are organized seem to effortlessly accomplish more than their peer group. I work with an amazing woman who has every document and every necessary management detail at her fingertips. She is not obsessive-compulsive; she is simply very organized and accomplishes more than anyone else in a shorter time period because she is so prepared. She does not have to waste time looking for information because she makes the effort to organize prospectively, as opposed to haphazardly searching retrospectively.

Prepare for the Unknown

Extra socks, another set of goggles, an extra inner tube, etc., etc...all things to help you deal with potential impediments to finishing the race. (For me, an extra set of lungs, O₂ and blood doping may have helped.) Save for my lack of talent, thanks to Michael, I had it dialed in. The only thing I was unprepared for

was being eaten by Jaws or Nessie, neither of which made an appearance. (Although, at one point during the swim, I thought I saw a killer dolphin. Since I was in a lake in Arizona, it was probably simply a hypoxia-induced hallucination or a fat guy with a big nose in a wetsuit.)

No one expects to lose their job or suffer some untoward event. Those who are prepared in advance can weather the squall and emerge tougher, smarter, and ready for the next challenge. I simply look at this as the human version of a credit default swap; understand the risks and mitigate them by hedging your bet.

This preparation takes guts and determination. In other words, it takes your best. Others won’t understand why you need more training or education or why you seem to continually choose the harder road. Hopefully, they will never need to know.

Keep Moving

During this race, to keep moving was very challenging for me. After seeing the “killer dolphin” and beating the one-legged man, the run portion of the triathlon appeared the most daunting. Fortunately for me, Michael was off his personal record pace and decided to wait for me so that we could run together. He convinced me to just keep moving forward. It worked. I finished the race and, most importantly, learned where I was deficient for future races.

Nothing comes to those who wait for gifts to land on their doorstep. Simply stated, action equals results. Sometimes the actions are misguided and lead to negative results. Personally, I have learned more from missteps than I have ever learned from successes.

Just keep moving and the goal that was just over the horizon becomes achievable. Approach these challenges as gifts which test your resolve and watch them become achievable.

As Pre said, “To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.” ■