

## Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

### *Go Big in Triathloning Because Sweating is Part of the Program*

Were the unknown worries of an upcoming race ever as unforgiving as the worse possible outcome? Doubtful. Why does a person worry more about finishing a race that she's fully trained and prepped for than resting comfortably for her race warm-up to begin?

Run these nine tactics through your mental shrinking ray gun machine to convert self-perpetuating big worry problems to nothing but the small stuff not worthy of a sweat:



1. Refrain from hunkering down to let stuff overrun you. Retreat. Re-group. Step-up. Move-on. Never surrender.
2. Recognize that frustrations are the negative side of your **most** positive passions. Anything in between is small stuff.
3. Acknowledge familiarity of major disappointments and remember what you did to get out of them before.
4. Re-focus on your desired grand prize. Recognize there are interim milestones, mostly small stuff, to achieve before the big prize becomes attainable.
5. Stay true to behaviors that align within your guiding principles -- small stuff that comes naturally to you. Thinking outside of social norms to gain an advantage creates anxieties. Big stuff -- if something feels wrong, it probably is wrong.
6. Reconnect with your training and race plans to perform with purpose.
7. Engage with a new zeal to overcome big stuff set-backs.
8. Initiate forward movement while leaving the disappointments behind.
9. Acknowledge that it's acceptable to sweat for the big races. Smile. Move along your journey to success.

### ***"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." FDR at his First Inaugural Address***

A buddy talked me into going big and long in triathloning. At my first Ironman triathlon in Provo, Utah I pulled out two sets of white labels with words in black ink to coach us through the race. On each label but one there was a single word: "Eat", "Drink", "Breathe", "Relax", "Laugh", and on the other label it read: "Palm Trees Ahead". We stuck the labels on each of our bike's aero bars to serve as reminders for tomorrow's race. The single words were all tactics to follow for great results. "Palm Trees Ahead"

was our motivational goal to be a Kona qualifier. I expected the race to be the most challenging sporting event in my life.

I didn't sleep well the night before the race. Lying in bed thinking of tomorrow's race with the feature show in my imagination was me with a steady swim, an efficient bike, followed by a fast run to finish and earn Ironman status. But during the commercial breaks I experienced atychiphobia, more commonly known as a fear of failure.

Many athletes never think anything bad will happen to them in a race. Bad things will only happen to others. At times we tend to think we are indestructible. For other athletes, they imagine and experience some competition phobias. Not stuff that will kill or maim us but would definitively prevent us from a well-earned performance we trained hard, smart, and diligently for in a race. Some people get so obsessed with potential bad outcomes they fail to accept the positives of being prepared for a race. They visualize catastrophes instead of successes. They go to extremes to think of disastrous outcomes, to the point of exaggerating potential worst outcomes in terms of all or nothing results instead of fulfilling accomplishments.

These negative thoughts include getting flat tires and not being able to fix them quickly, getting crashed into by others and taking us out of the race or other equipment malfunctions such as broken chains, bent derailleurs, or a sheared off pedal. In Provo, I feared most of not being able to finish an Ironman distance triathlon as my natural comfort zone was an 800 meter race in a track meet.

Digressing a bit, as a freshman in college I gave a speech about phobias using Lucy from the Peanuts comic strip as inspiration. Here's what you may want to know: fear of water -- aquaphobia, of bikes -- cyclophobia, of running -- no word for "fear of running", however potamophobia is the fear of running water. No word for fear of competition but plenty of symptoms:

- inability to sleep
- stomach pains
- hyperactive bowels
- nausea
- shaking/trembling
- sweating excessively
- dizziness
- hyperventilation
- dry mouth
- freezing

- emotional lability
- fear of dying
- anxiety attacks
- incoherent speaking
- incoherent thinking

I didn't suffer from fear of sleeping (somnia) or from the fear of not sleeping. No, I suffered from (and this is just a bit of an understatement) anxiety, self-inflicted and over-inflated.

At 4:30am I thought, "I'm choosing to be a competitor instead of a spectator today. I'm committed to this race. The day is for racing, all day. This is what I'm doing today." Much better to be in the race instead of reading the results in my house 625 miles away.

I boarded a bus on the Brigham Young University campus at 5am for the ride to race start and the T1 transition area at Lake Utah. On the bus I wondered if I was going to return as an Ironman at the end of day. My stomach was queasy. While this was not war, I made it my own battle and related this must be how soldiers felt before going into battle: the uncertainty of achieving the day's objective, the uncertainty of returning intact or maimed, or even alive.

### ***The "main thing was not to be left behind." Gus Grissom***

To cope, I remembered a passage in *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe where he wrote about original Mercury astronaut Gus Grissom when flying combat missions in North Korea. When stationed in South Korea pilots who had not been shot at by North Korea's had to stand on the bus between the barracks and their fighter jets. Gus made sure he earned the right to sit on the bus for the next trip.

I chose to earn the right to be called an Ironman by keeping focused on being a competitor instead of a spectator. While I didn't have to stand, I didn't want to be left behind the peer group I chose to belong to pending a bona fide qualification. The race turned out to be small stuff compared to combat.

Write a list of everything that caused you to worry in the last 12 months. Write beside each one how much worry time you spent on each event. Now with the luxury of seeing how the events turned out, classify each one as a small stuff item or a big stuff item. Your small stuff pile will be so much bigger than your big stuff pile. Learn to categorize before future events. Be biased to lean towards more for small classification and think big for success.