



Learning to swim

Richard Branson



Put your hand up if you can't swim?

This time last year I would be waving at you right now. Some how I managed to make it to 25 without learning to swim! So how do you resolve a rather embarrassing situation like this? The answer is, you tell all your

friends you're going to swim 750m in the Thames!

What ever it is that you think you can't do, whether you have a full blow fear or it's just something you never got around to doing or leaning, the only way to over come it is simply to 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. By setting a clear goal you will always be working towards it, so set it high and then even if you miss you may surprise yourself of what you did attain.

For me it was swimming. I had always managed to avoid the subject. Looking back, my excuses where things like eczema and asthma. In the early stages I made some negative associations between 'going swimming' and 'physical pain', Getting into a heavily chlorinated swimming pool, with a broken layer of epidermis over much of my body caused by the eczema, not to mention the uncomfortable feeling of shortness of breath from the chlorine vapors, the swallowing of water and stinging eyes, which I'm sure is common place. All in all there was not a lot to enjoy about the whole experience.

However having said all that, as a child I still managed to pick up some of the basics of front crawl, the downside was this left me tired after only one length due to the

irregularity of my breathing. The part I enjoyed most was sitting on the bottom of the pool and collecting objects as I could hold my breath longer than most (this is something many asthmatics have in common, as they will regularly avoid breathing until it is absolutely necessary).

Years passed where I would spend as little time in a pool environment as possible, to avoid the embarrassment of not being able to perform more than a length or 2 at best.

Then in January 2006, when I started my personal development, I registered for the London Triathlon. Being an accomplished cyclist and runner gave me significant confidence of performing, well as long as I managed to get to my bike without drowning in the Thames!

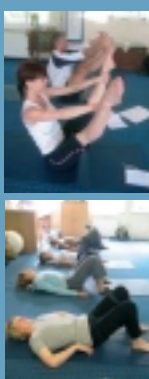
So great, I'm registered everything is fine now! But it wasn't really! I now realized I had to take action to accomplish my goal. I left it seven and half months, making excuses as to why I couldn't get in the pool and practice.

Two weeks, before I was scheduled to stand on the edge of the Thames, jump in and swim the 750m, I woke up and thought I must pull out... "I'm going to drown, I've not swam 750m in my life!" Then I remembered I had been taught never to quit, so I got my trunks and towel, borrowed some goggles from my partner and boldly went to the local pool. I did this for 14 days straight, for at least 2 hours a day and to cut a long story short, completed the event (swim, cycle, run) in 1 hour 24 minutes and 47 seconds, and I wasn't even the last out of the Thames!

I can't describe the fantastic feeling of relief and accomplishment, but my message to you all is "What can you achieve this year?"

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