



## HEALTH AND FITNESS

By Robert Racek

### The Best Gift to Give Yourself.

There are times in everyone's life when you are faced with obstacles that seem overwhelming. When this happens for me, I try to recall moments when I was distressed and emerged as a winner. There's nothing like that mental motivation to change your point of view and make you feel strong enough to face any obstacle.

I have a favorite experience that always strengthens my resolve. I was racing in the Olympic distance triathlon in Connecticut a few years ago. I had comfortable swim, the water was clear and the sun was out. After exiting the water, I put on my biking gear and raced to the transition area. I felt strong and confident on the bike and knew that I could make the top 3 spot in my age group.

More than half way into the race, I noticed that my rear tire was leaking air. After only a few minutes more, it was completely deflated! To save weight, I had no spare tire kit under my seat. Deep down, I assumed that if I did get flat tire, there would be no way to finish and I would simply quit. But I found I couldn't. I had made a choice. I would not miss what I trained for and I was determined to finish this race. So I kept riding with a flat tire, slowing me down like an anchor.

I was so fired up and motivated to keep going, I yelled out to other riders who were passing me to see if they had any parts I needed - inner tube, tire levers and pump. It took some time but I was able to find two people who gave me all those things. Frustration did come, as I watched so many people passing me as I repaired my bike. Again, I made a choice. I ditched the frustration and decided that with this unplanned rest, I had the strength to catch my competitors.

As I finished my bike leg I stormed into the run and I just kept going.

I finished the race placing 3rd in my age group after all! With a smile and the medal in my hands, I knew "what my mind can conceive, it can achieve." This would be an achievement that I would remember for a long time.

For me, physical activity has been the one constant that has helped me to deal with what life brings my way. Daily, it's kept me motivated and energized and allows me to meet people with whom I can share my passion for sports and that endurance high. But overall, it has taught me to respect myself and others and to remain humble. I don't take my physical abilities for granted. I am very grateful every day for what I am able to do!

Everyone should have their own "victory" story. Maybe you were able to overcome a bad habit, or create a very inspiring new one. Maybe you took a leap of personal faith or challenged yourself to something new and unknown. We all have the ability to overcome what life throws at us. We just need to know inside that we are strong enough. Sometimes it takes practice with smaller achievements to be able to take on the bigger ones.

If you don't have your own "victory" story, make 2009 the year that you get one! The pride and reward I felt from giving it all I've got, has taken me a long way. Give yourself that one gift this year. It will be the gift that gives back many times over.

Robert Racek is a new part of the personal training team at Cornerstone. His love of challenge has led him to complete more than 60 triathlons, 35 open water swimming events and more than 20 running races. He has trained with many celebrity personalities while working in Manhattan and brings a unique expertise to Cornerstone. [www.cornerstoneclubs.com](http://www.cornerstoneclubs.com)