

Life After Alpha

Hardly a day goes by in my professional life as a certified public accountant when I don't use the grammar tools learned in Sister Mary Grace's English class the multiplication tables memorized in Sister Mathias' Math class. I have never been penalized for reading directions thoroughly, doing homework, and being prepared. Although a great deal of my day-to-day activities involve the three R's, and the fundamentals of studying, all of which are stressed strongly at Alpha, it was a gym teacher who left a special lasting impression.

I have never had anything more than average athletic ability and I have never been even close to the fastest, strongest, or the most skilled at anything, but I have always tried to improve on activities in which I participate. My seventh grade gym teacher, Mr. James LaVere, taught me a valuable lesson about putting forth your best effort that stays with me to this day.

Much to the surprise of most of the class, Mr. LaVere gave only one "M" in each of his classes for a particular marking period ("marked" progress was the highest grade a student could achieve). Those who did the most push-ups, ran the fastest sprints, ran the most laps, and were able to climb the rope were surprised when they received an E ("expected" progress). In the first class after report cards were handed out, Mr. LaVere felt it was important to explain his reasoning for giving out the top grade to only one student. He explained that those possessing natural athletic ability were expected to perform better than others. This meant that simply coming in first or second didn't necessarily mean a student put forth his or her best effort. It also meant that natural athletic talent did not ensure anyone of the top grade in his class. This didn't mean the best athletes couldn't earn an M, but simply those who were not as gifted could, and those who didn't try enough would not.

As I progressed through college and into adulthood, I realized the importance of always putting forth the best effort and never giving up on anything. I once tried to get out a high school Algebra class because I thought it was too hard. Luckily the teacher did not allow this because she knew I wasn't putting forth my best effort. But it is in the field of athletics where my Alpha experience has had a lasting effect. One activity I took up after college, which I still enjoy, is distance running. Anyone who has ever taken up running as a hobby or for physical fitness understands how difficult it can be to stay motivated. This is especially true when life's other obligations often interfere with certain activities.

I didn't consciously think about Mr. LaVere's lesson very often until I decided to enter the New York Marathon. There were many times during training when I felt my physical limitations or minor injuries would keep me from participating in the event. Each time I thought of giving up on the idea, I would think of the importance of putting forth the best effort. These thoughts always gave me the motivation needed to continue. Ultimately, I made it to the starting line, ran the marathon, and received a finisher's medal. I also ran the marathon two years later and improved significantly, all the while remembering the importance of trying harder.

To this day, I am fortunate to be healthy enough to continue running as a hobby. Each time I find myself wanting to skip a workout or shortcut a route, I sense Mr. LaVere looking over my shoulder.

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