



By Megan Jantos

Every year I challenge myself to complete at least one major task that takes me wildly outside my comfort zone. One of the first years I took part in this tradition, I unexpectedly qualified for the Obstacle Course World Championship after placing in the top ten finishers during a Warrior Dash Race. As I contemplated competing in the 15k, 50-obstacle race, I didn't know it would inspire an annual challenge.

Believe it or not, I didn't-and still don't-enjoy running. Not to mention, I hated the cold weather and the race was scheduled to take place during winter months in Canada. I knew I

couldn't win against seasoned OCR racers. Despite wanting to find any excuse to avoid the race, I compelled myself to compete because I knew I would always wonder what might have been had I not gone.

I couldn't hide behind the normal high optempo of my unit since I was enjoying "the best year of my life" at the Command and General Staff College. The predictable course schedule gave me plenty of time to prepare and participate. So, I created a 90-day program that included running, Crossfit, and yoga to keep me strong and limber for the rough trail ahead. I even bought a high-tech watch to track my progress.

Like a well-trained officer, I researched Canada's weather history in detail. Rain and freezing temperatures were likely. Typical obstacle course races include some sort of water hurdle that ensures participants will end up soaked throughout a race, and the idea of sopping wet clothes in the sub-freezing Canadian climate did not appeal to me. To assuage my concerns, I researched the clothing that would help me weather the cold.

Other than a quick day trip with friends across the Michigan border, I'd never been to Canada on my own before. I knew that visiting a new place would create unneeded angst before the big day. So, I took care in planning every minute from departing my house up until race time. I strategically packed one carry on to avoid lost baggage; booked lodging within walking distance of the starting line; and map scouted all routes from the airport to my destination on a map.

To my surprise, everything leading up to the race went off without a hitch. Unlike my last experience when Canada felt more like France, this time I could hardly tell that I'd left America. Despite some light rain the day prior, the weather was amazing and my accommodations were more than convenient. I had a hearty dinner and went to bed early. I woke up, ate a quick bite, and began a short warm up run. Man, was I ready.

I made my way slowly to the start line. About 45 women from around the world huddled

under the starting banner. Finally, the announcer said some opening words. Then, BANG! The crack of the gun spurred us to action. We sprinted through the mud and muck on our way to the first 10-foot wall. Normally, traversing this obstacle wouldn't be an issue. However, the mud made it almost impossible to gain a footing.

With the thought of 40 some women all vying to unsuccessfully crawl over the same not-so-broad wall, I decided to try a new strategy. I bi-passed the wall and took a four-minute time penalty in hopes of making up for it on the back end.

As I rounded the wooden wall, I instantly hit a mental one. The angle of the snow-free ski slope in front of me smacked me in the face. I wasn't even a half mile into the race and all I could think about was why the hell did I travel more than 1,000 miles to run in a race that I wouldn't win on a mountain better suited for skiing than running.

At the time, I shoved the thought away long enough to tackle the 49 obstacles left in front of me for an anti-climatic finish. The question of why I should run would stick with me much longer. After months of reflection, what I came to realize was that my decision to race held no purpose in my mind at the time. I merely thought I *should* run.

Finally, while reading one of Simon Sinek's books it dawned me. He wrote, "our actions should start with why, not what." So, *why* was I running this race? Well, it turns out I developed a training plan for life without realizing it. I wanted to get comfortable feeling uncomfortable.

See, life is hard, and it's harder when you're stupid. But, what happens when you have the basics figured out and you don't experience too many hardships anymore? You get emotionally and physically comfortable. Deep down I knew that life would only stay comfortable for so long, especially in the Army. Sooner or later, a grandparent or family pet will die—something terrible will happen.

I didn't want to wait for the next emotionally challenging situation to figure out if I was mentally ready. Now I take it upon myself to pick at least one event that will push me well outside the limits of my comfort zone. At least this year, I'll know why I'm suffering through something scary and painful.

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