



by Dave Leach

“Do you want to continue?” the paramedic asked.

I was just over three miles from the finish of the [Ironman](#) Florida 70.3 race and I was struggling. The 1.2 miles of swimming, 56 miles of cycling, and the 9 ½ miles of running in the heat had taken its toll on me - mentally and physically. Sitting in the back of the air-conditioned ambulance, the thought of accepting the intravenous fluids and being done was enticing.

Contemplating the end of *my* race, I envisioned the letters “DNF” next to my name. I

mentally began crafting my explanations on why I “Did Not Finish”...the heat, the hills, the wind. Buried further was the knowledge I hadn’t prepared enough and, even more terrifying, the realization that I was thinking about quitting.

“Do you want to continue?” he asked again. I had a choice - stay in the air conditioning, get fluids, and stop moving *or* open the door and get back on the course.

The race was full of choices. In the water for the swim, my goggles filled with water, I was kicked and swam over - not an unusual experience in a triathlon, but unnerving, nonetheless. I became hurried, feeling the tension and stress building as I worried about the goggles, getting kicked, how much time I was taking, etc. I had a choice - succumb to the stress and the challenge and get out of the water...or keep swimming.

The bike and run provided the same opportunity - race or quit. Yes, it was hot, windy, and hilly. No, I didn’t take in enough nutrition or hydration on the bike to sustain a suitable pace *or* set myself up for a successful run. And while these things were circumstances that I could have controlled (my preparation) or couldn’t (the weather and elevation) - I didn’t want them to be the reason I didn’t make it to the finish line.

Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of [*Man’s Search for Meaning*](#) asks: “Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors - be that of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?”

Frankl’s context is extreme. He is writing about the ability to maintain a “vestige of spiritual freedom” and the “independence of mind” in the most inhumane conditions. He goes on to state that “everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

How incredibly powerful is that?

Viktor Frankl, a resident of the most notorious concentration camps in the history of WWII, believed in the power of our individual choices and our ability to determine whether we would become a victim of our circumstances.

If he believed this, can we, in the relative comfort of our own lives, believe this as well? I find incredible strength in his words as he describes his camp mates whose behavior bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom was not lost as they endured their suffering.

Every day we are faced with situations ranging from seemingly inconsequential to life-changing significance that demand a response. And each day we have the ability and freedom to choose our response to these situations. By living a life of conviction, striving to do our very best, and taking the time to see ourselves, we are better equipped to choose our own way.

I don't possess any unique abilities and am certainly not an accomplished athlete, but would like to believe I will always push on. And while I was ill-prepared for the race; with the weather hotter, the course hillier and the winds higher than expected - I knew I had the ability to choose my attitude and, in turn, my actions.

The heat was a stark contrast to the air conditioning as I stepped out of the ambulance and back on to the racecourse. I barely noticed as I crossed the finish line a few miles later.

Colonel (Retired) Dave Leach is a Vice-President of Learning and Leader Development with Bank of America / Merrill Lynch. Prior to joining BoA, Dave completed an exciting 32-year Army career that spanned both enlisted and officer experiences here in the States, overseas in Europe, and while deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

In retirement, he volunteers as the Chief Operating Officer for the national non-profit [wear blue: run to remember](#), is a mentor for the Jacksonville Veteran Court program, and is working on his endurance athleticism by staying physically active in his local community. He and his wife Shannon live in Jacksonville Beach, Florida.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)