

RUNNER'S WORLD

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I've been a runner for the past five years. If you met me, you'd probably say I'm bubbly. I like talking to people. I like trying new things. I have pretty high energy levels, and I get *very* into things—such as running, for instance—to the point of being annoying.

This goes along with another part of my personality: I can be a “pusher.” Yes, I'm channeling Tina Fey in *Mean Girls* and please don't burn book ^[1] me for dated movie references.

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It used to be when I got excited about something I was doing, I ended up pushing my friends, family, and even coworkers to join me. I've gotten much better about refraining from this habit, but the truth is I used to bug people to work out with me. All. The. Time.

It can be easy, as a runner, to love the sport so much that you figure it must be exactly what everyone needs to feel better about their lives. It would be crazy *not* to run. But the truth is, by obsessing over my own runner's high ^[3], I was unintentionally missing things that were right in front of me. Maybe this has happened to you, too.

Just recently, my grandmother passed away. She was the beloved matriarch of our family—the quiet constant around whom all of our family dinners and vacations revolved. After we found out Grandma had cancer, the person who primarily cared for her—almost 24 hours a day for the last eight months—was my mother.

We were all in mourning after my Grandma died, but I knew my mom was especially sad. After all, she had lost her mother. I worried about her. My worry showed up in a perhaps not surprising way: I found the website to a local beginner 5K ^[4] running group, bookmarked the link, and then texted her and tried to get her to join so she could train for a 5K that spring.

My own journey from couch to 5K ^[5] to 10-miler ^[6], to marathon ^[7], to November Project regular felt like a steep and heady love story, one I want everyone around me to experience. Becoming a runner has made me feel good about my body in a way I hadn't before—solid and conscious of it—aware of how I could push it and how I could come up against limits and surpass them. And every time I drag my butt out of bed to run at sunrise, I'm grateful.

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So, for a while, there wasn't a person I met whom I didn't *beg* to do a Zombie 5K—that was my first thing. Then I wanted everyone I knew to train up for a 10-miler—it's easy, I promise! You just add a couple miles each week! After that phase was over, I began pressuring all my

friends to wake up early for a 6:25 a.m. November Project ^[9] workout. “You’ll feel like a badass for the rest of the day,” I’d say. “Once you get there it will feel *totally* worth it.”

Here’s the thing: I still do think it’s totally worth it.

But I’ve also made a realization: a lot of my pushing of others comes from the assumption that what’s good for me will also be good for everyone else, and also from my need to try to regulate or dictate other people’s lives. Those are not the best impulses, and I’m trying to combat them.

Good-intentioned prodding can be wonderful if someone has shown an interest, or is actively looking for help in the early stages of a running commitment. Then, it’s worth sharing your passion as much as possible.

The buddy system can work miracles when used the right way: it can give people the feeling of obligation they need to keep getting out there, can make workouts better and more fun, and promote lovely gooey feelings of community and camaraderie.

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But when you bug people to run who just don’t *want* to run, it only serves to alienate them.

I’ve realized that this type of pushing is self-serving, too, because all I’m really doing is obsessing over my own current goals and achievements, instead of helping my friends or family members find new things on their own—or being supportive of the activities they already enjoy and do, which I am ignoring by fixating on getting them running.

I’ve slowly been digesting this, as I attempt to mature out of my go-go-go self and into a (somewhat) more laid-back version of me, who does not think I have all the answers to every question in the universe.

My mom didn’t answer my text about me signing her up for the run group. She said she would think about it—her typical, kindly mom way of saying there’s no way in hell she’s going to do it without wanting to burst my bubble.

I knew she was busy that day: a friend was visiting her, and they were working hard, lifting and rearranging couches and tables to incorporate a pretty blue furniture set that had been my Grandmother’s, as well as hanging up some of her vibrant oil paintings. My mom talked about all this, telling me how the paintings would go perfectly across from the windows in our living room, with Grandma’s small wooden table now situated next to the sliding door.

And that’s when it hit me: My mom was sad about my Grandma, but she was also happy: she was enthusiastically spring cleaning and redecorating the house, which was no small task, carefully preserving her mother’s things, spending time with her sisters and friends she had known since high school.

She didn’t *need* a kick of adrenaline from running outside, a 5K bib, or shiny new run friends to find happiness in a time of grief, despite the fact that that might have been what I needed. So she did her spring cleaning, and I signed up for a 10-miler this spring.

I texted “never mind :)” to her and finally deleted the beginner 5K groups’s page from my bookmarked links.

If my mom was interested in running someday, she would tell me. Until then, it’s time to stop cajoling, and to start noticing and appreciating all the beautiful things in this world that already make the people around me happy.

On that note, Mom: The living room looks incredible.

Tags: Runners’ Stories ^[11] Motivation ^[12]

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