

2017 DHAM: Possibilities Lessons

Overcoming Disabilities

Becoming Extraordinary

Michael Phelps (ADHD)



On August 14th at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games at the age of 31 Michael Phelps won his 23rd Olympic gold, in what looks like being his final Games, in the men's 4x100m medley relay. His unbelievable success in swimming for the United States has made him the most decorated Olympian of all time, with a total of 23 Olympic medals spanning over three Olympic Games.

As early as kindergarten, Phelps had trouble with inattention. A teacher told his mother, herself a teacher, "Your son will never be able to focus on anything."

Phelps was a mischief-maker who liked being the center of attention. In science class, he turned on all the natural gas burners so that the smell would bug his classmates. He signed up to juggle at a school talent show, knowing full well he didn't know how.

"I simply couldn't sit still, because it was difficult for me to focus on one thing at a time," Phelps recalls in *Beneath the Surface*. "I had to be in the middle of everything." His teachers and parents were becoming frustrated with his inability to focus or sit still.

Then he discovered swimming.

With practice, Phelps found his comfort zone: "Once I figured out how to swim, I felt so free." He recalls, "I could go fast in the pool, it turned out, in part because being in the pool slowed down my mind. In the water, I felt, for the first time, in control."

Phelps was diagnosed with ADHD in sixth grade. But while he couldn't sit through class without fidgeting, he could swim for up to three hours at the pool after school. By age 10, Phelps was a nationally ranked swimmer.

"My coach was very frank about my talents, my attitude, my inconsistent focus, and my dueling moments of indifference and determination. He also said that I had a realistic opportunity other kids didn't have," said Phelps.

Phelps went on to defy all the expectations both Bowman and his family held for him. He swam in the 2000 Olympics, at age 15, and has medaled at every summer Olympic event since.

Out of the pool, he's dedicated to promoting water safety and healthy living to youth through swimming programs. The Michael Phelps Foundation has introduced swimming to more than 15,000 children through the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Special Olympics.

For Phelps, the pool has been many things. It's been a refuge, an outlet and a place where his strength and passion have propelled him to greatness. Now, through his foundation, Phelps hopes the pool can be "that place" for thousands of kids with ADHD and learning issues.

2017 DHAM: Possibilities Lessons

Overcoming Disabilities

Becoming Extraordinary

Marla Runyan (Legally Blind)



One of the women representing the United States in the 1500 meter track event at the 2000 Olympics was Marla Runyan. The American runner finished seventh in her preliminary heat and rose to sixth in the semifinals to qualify for the finals. During the final race, Marla lost track of the major competitors. She finished in eighth position, 3.20 seconds behind the gold medal winner.

In 1996, Marla set several track and field records at the Paralympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Following that success, Marla wanted to compete in the 2000

Olympics in Sydney -- **even though she is legally blind.** The 31-year-old runner has been diagnosed with Stargardt disease. This is a condition that leaves her with a limited ability to see what is in front of her. In Sydney, Marla became the first legally blind athlete to compete in an Olympics. In 2001 she published her autobiography, *No Finish Line: My Life as I See It*.



Runyan began having vision problems in fourth grade. After about a year of visiting specialists and misdiagnoses, she learned that she had Stargardt disease, a juvenile form of macular degeneration that causes progressive vision loss (vision loss over time). "My response was like, 'Oh, it's not a big deal,'" said Runyan. "I was telling my parents, 'I can do it, I can do it!' At that point I didn't really have a concept of what vision I'd lost. It just happened so slowly, or I was adapting and I was figuring out other ways to get by, so I just kept saying, 'It's not a big deal.'"

Runyan had been doing sports since she was about 3 years old, so continuing with those sports, despite the diagnosis, seemed natural to her. She did gymnastics, swam, and played soccer. When she could no longer see the soccer ball, she gave up soccer and began her track career. "I kind of believed that if I worked hard enough, I could overcome anything. There was always this concept that if I just had the right tools and time, I was going to figure anything out and I would be able to overcome it," said Runyan.

For Runyan, the hardest thing about racing on the track was not being able to see the clock or the lap counter. "I had no idea what my pace was," she said. "I often would listen to the announcer announcing the race to the crowd and I would listen for my split from the announcer, because otherwise I didn't know."



While she usually had enough visual cues to avoid getting tangled up with her competitors, Runyan couldn't always tell who she was racing against, which can make a difference when choosing a race strategy. "I'd know there was a runner in front of me, I'd know there was a runner on my left or my right, or I could hear someone behind me, but I couldn't tell you who they [were]," she said.

2017 DHAM: Possibilities Lessons

Overcoming Disabilities

Becoming Extraordinary

Danny Glover | Epilepsy & Dyslexia



Danny Glover is probably best known as the actor who played opposite Mel Gibson in the famous Lethal Weapon films. **But most people don't know that he was diagnosed with epilepsy at the age of 15. For Glover, who had also been diagnosed with dyslexia in elementary school, respect was hard to come by.**

- Epilepsy is a chronic disorder unprovoked seizures. The occur at any time, and in some deadly.



which causes seizures can cases they can be

- Dyslexia is a learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words

“I was a decent athlete, but once I was diagnosed with epilepsy I could no longer play sports ... I worked little jobs when I was in high school . . . in some sense, I was building a little place for myself. . . I felt that I could accomplish something. Despite the fact that I had epilepsy, I felt that I could win - that I was winning on some level.”

With all of the lines he has to memorize and deliver as a famous actor, no one would suspect that a guidance counselor once described Danny Glover as “retarded” in school.

Back in the 1950's, there wasn't a real discussion of dyslexia and other learning differences so Glover, an undiagnosed dyslexic at the time, wasn't able to get the assistance he needed. Luckily, he was able to make it to college where the world of education became less frustrating for him as he was able to meet different people with different perspectives.

Glover was able to get into acting and developed strategies in order to memorize his lines. Now, he is speaking out to both children with learning differences and their parents to create an open dialogue about life, the world, and how to become a better citizen. He shares his experiences of living with dyslexia as well as his thoughts on education and the arts.



2017 DHAM: **PossABILITIES** Lessons
Overcoming Disabilities
Becoming Extraordinary

Sue Austin TED TALK:

When Sue Austin got a power wheelchair, she felt a tremendous sense of freedom -- yet others looked at her as though she had lost something. In her art, she conveys the spirit of wonder she feels wheeling through the world. Includes thrilling footage of an underwater wheelchair that lets her explore ocean beds, drifting through schools of fish, floating free in 360 degrees.



2017 DHAM: **PossABILITIES** Lessons
Overcoming Disabilities
Becoming Extraordinary



Rosie King TED Talk:

“People are so afraid of variety that they try to fit everything into a tiny little box with a specific label,” says 16-year-old Rosie King, who is bold, brash and autistic. She wants to know: Why is everyone so worried about being normal? She sounds a clarion call for every kid, parent, teacher and person to celebrate uniqueness. It’s a soaring testament to the potential of human diversity.

2017 DHAM: **PossABILITIES** Lessons
Overcoming Disabilities
Becoming Extraordinary

Bonus Station (if you finish early): Temple
Grandin

Temple Grandin, diagnosed with autism as a child, talks about how her mind works -- sharing her ability to "think in pictures," which helps her solve problems that neurotypical brains might miss. She makes the case that the world needs people on the autism spectrum: visual thinkers, pattern thinkers, verbal thinkers, and all kinds of smart geeky kids.

