

SPARTAN UP!

You'll Know at the Finish Line

By Joe DeSena
with Jeff O'Connell

Submitted by: Marc Gerald

The Agency Group

212-581-3100

marcgerald@theagencygroup.com

The day the U.S. Olympic wrestling team touched down at the airport after a five-hour flight, I made sure that they were confronted with the unexpected. They were not told why they were coming to see me, and they didn't know what they would be experiencing upon arrival. Their coach had arranged the trip, but some of the best wrestlers in the world were in the dark about the venture and what kind of training they would encounter.

I wanted to give them a proper introduction to the Spartan lifestyle. I made certain that when they arrived, no one was there to greet them. Their destination, an organic farm in the mountains of Vermont, was a 10-mile uphill hike away. Dumbfounded, these wrestlers stood holding suitcases, dressed for a business meeting rather than a mountain hike. Without a vehicle, they had to walk the entire distance carrying their gear. I had made sure they had no alternative. So off they trudged to train for the weekend under my tutelage.

I know nothing about wrestling, but my team and I are experts at turning someone's world upside down. To the team members, this seemed like madness. Yet, there was a method at work. I needed to see how these men would react when their mettle was tested in such crazy fashion. The answer would determine if they were indeed Olympic quality athletes. After all, there is only one gold medal.

I had met the wrestling team's coach, Noel Thompson, months earlier at an obstacle race I organized. The course required a stretch of kayaking, and at one point, you had to drag the kayak 20 yards through waist-deep mud. All the other teams made it through, but Noel got stuck. Not in the mud, mind you; his mind vapor-locked, preventing him from wading in with his kayak like the other racers had. I instinctively grabbed him and his kayak and pulled them both through the mud. On the other side, I was able to push them downriver.

Later, after the race, the wrestling coach approached me. "Can I talk to you?"

"Sure," I said. "What's up?"

He said, "How did you learn to do that?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "You just get in the mud and go." I hadn't thought twice. That's how I always tackle life. Because I've been through so much already, I push through when others would stop, even this coach who trained world-

class athletes. How could he freeze in the mud? In my mind, you just commit to something and then get it done, no matter what. He had let self-doubt creep in—the number-one mistake people make.

You won't get stuck in mud during a wrestling match, at least not during Olympic wrestling, but you might get stuck in a crazy hold or some other predicament. Wrestling is among the most fluid of sports. A match has a beginning and ending, but how it will unfold during those five minutes is anybody's guess. There's no telling how much energy you'll need to expend, no telling what you'll encounter. Wrestling isn't linear like a marathon. Your opponent may be wholly unpredictable, continuously trying to place you in unexpected holds from which you can't escape.

So Noel sent his wrestlers to me because he knew that I could teach them how to prepare for the unexpected. I could show these elite athletes that if they endured enough off the mat, they could crush any challenge on the mat. I wasn't preparing them to win, because they wouldn't know what that required until their match got underway. I was preparing them for the unknown.

THE SPARTAN CHALLENGE

My name is Joe DeSena. I'm the founder of Spartan Race, a global lifestyle company whose life-changing outdoor adventures have taken the endurance world by storm. You may not know what the Spartan Race is, but a million hardcore fanatics define their world around the rules that we have created for them, and many more participate. I'm these people's biggest supporter and their worst nightmare—both at the same time.

My partners and I have staged races in front of tens of thousands of people in far away places like Slovakia and cool stadiums, including Citi Field and Fenway Park, in the shadow of the Green Monster. Three hundred thousand people a day follow daily workouts that we post on spartanrace.com and blast out across our social media platforms. We put a free e-book on our site, and to date it's been downloaded more than half a million times. After mixed martial arts, obstacle racing

is the world's fastest-growing sport. Only people don't watch these races; they participate in them.

Obstacle races present unique pitfalls designed to exploit your weaknesses and leave you face down in the mud. The stump jump ambushes your balance, monkey bars target your grip, and hill climbs set traps for your stamina. This requires total athleticism, absolute discipline and mental toughness. You'll encounter things you can't control or understand or perhaps even imagine, so you need to be at your best. Like the original Spartans, I built my philosophy on a blend of hardcore modern science and obscure philosophical teachings, all given my own unique spin. To me it all boils down to one thing: to reach full potential, you need to UNLEARN every important thing modern society has taught you.

Spartan Race developed out of a series of events my friends and I called Death Races, long-distance events that made marathons look like child's play. The race waiver read, "You might die," and on more than one occasion, we nearly did. Death races gauged our strengths, our weaknesses and our commitment to finish what we started.

I didn't know it but these extreme adventures had historical precedent in the Spartan warriors of ancient Greece. They might train for 30 years before entering battle. They developed a concept that would take science another 2,500-plus years to prove—that success is a byproduct of delayed gratification. This was confirmed scientifically in 1972 when Walter Mischel, then a Stanford researcher, gave child subjects their preferred treat—a marshmallow, cookie, or pretzel—as well as a choice: They could eat the treat right away or wait 15 minutes, at which point they could receive two. The researchers found that those kids who were willing to postpone gratification became more successful adults than those kids who couldn't wait.

Unfortunately, instant gratification guides so much of modern-day life. The individual lacking self-control wants things from others now, but they themselves couldn't be bothered to put in the work and get shit done. So they shortchange themselves and our society time and time again with disastrous long-term results.

Our self-control pales next to the Spartans. I'm convinced they would have looked at us with disgust and disbelief.

Having thankfully developed a Spartan will myself, as a way of transcending a pretty crappy childhood, I wondered how I could pass along this transcendent feeling to colleagues, my friends, my kids and others. I didn't want to lecture them; I wanted to inspire them. The idea I hit upon was to organize races for them, initially as a way to evaluate prospective employees for my business. I was working a high-powered job on Wall Street back then. On the surface, everyone who came to see me seemed Type A, but when things got tough, I needed to know: Who would survive? Who would drop out? These races would weed out the exceptional from the merely good, the average or the poor. The first official Spartan Race took place in 2005. A phenomenon was born.

Spartan races are less intense than Death Races but no less transformational. We attract bodybuilder and fitness types, CrossFitters, trail runners, weekend warriors, ex-military, cops, firefighters, men, women, professionals, students, young, old, individuals and companies in search of team-building events. They enter races that come in four distances, ranging from the 3-mile "Sprint," with 15 military-style obstacles, to the 26-mile "Ultra Beast," with 50-plus obstacles. Sometimes the obstacles I set up for racers have meanings only I understand. Sometimes I set them up just to fuck with people. But the obstacles teach resourcefulness and develop true mental grit. It's hard for anyone to complete a Spartan Race, given their difficulty, but seeing someone cross the finish line five hours after everyone else gets me every time.

Contrast this with a 10K or marathon. I'm not knocking them—those are great accomplishments, I've run them myself, and there's a lot of crossover between those races and our events. But no matter the distance, the runners are all focused on moving in linear fashion toward a finish line. I'd say the same of triathlons, despite the added elements. Those races punish you, but they don't help you solve problems, don't change the way you think. You don't parent differently or rethink your work process because you ran a 10K or completed an Ironman last weekend.

Spartan Races are proving every day, as crazy as it sounds, that the principles

that underpin obstacle racing can cure much of what ails America the most. Anybody can be a Spartan, you just need to commit to the way of life the founder of Sparta did. When people succeed where they thought they could not, positive attitudes are cultivated and strengthened. As Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher king portrayed in *The Gladiator*, noted: "Fire feeds on obstacles...and inversely dies without them."

Although this isn't an exercise book, my hope is that readers will want to put their newfound confidence and capabilities to the ultimate test. You won't win every race you enter or crush every obstacle but each experience of success or failure can be a profound learning experience. You become faster, stronger, more resilient. Why do a competitive race? Because you might be just dogging it through life. How will you know if you are reaching your full potential? How will you know how you compare to others similar to you?

THE SPARTAN BOOK

Spartan Up!, spells trouble for your comfort zone, just like it did for those Olympic wrestlers. It may, initially, feel more like a combat zone as your eyes scan the pages. For so long you've had a very clear sense of what you could and couldn't do in life. Maybe the "could dos" were very limited, or maybe they were more expansive, but there have been boundaries you wouldn't cross, obstacles you wouldn't confront. By the time you finish my book, you'll be motivated to tackle challenges with passion and eagerness, just like a Spartan racer keeps going toward the next hurdle, exhausted but constantly refueled by his or her newfound capabilities.

Spartan Up! is based on a series of concepts, but three of them trump everything: Question your Assumptions, Less is More, Discipline is Everything. In the races, we offer you no map. What you think is the finish line may just be the beginning. So you need to develop what those of us in the Spartan world call obstacle immunity, a skill you will learn to master in this book.

With obstacle immunity, nothing fazes you. Develop it and Olympics-level wrestling won't seem so daunting. If you're in Special Ops—whose members also come to train with us—those missions will seem more manageable. Business deals

will be less stressful. Screaming kids will put a smile on your face. This goes a long way toward explaining why elite groups now come to Vermont to train with us, and why many people map their year around these races.

You'll know these aren't the musings of some detached self-help guru as I relate my own adventures, extreme enough to make me a legend in adventure racing circles. At one point I completed the 135-mile Badwater Ultra-marathon, raced the 140.6 miles of Lake Placid Ironman, and finished a 100-mile trail run in Vermont—all within a week. I was out of my mind and, at times, out of my body. Whether I was running toward or from something, I willingly put myself through hell, forcing myself into situations where water, shelter and food became my only concerns. At those moments, everything else that I thought was important in life, all the things I had stressed over, vanished. I became at home with danger and deprivation.

But I will relate my tales in service to a higher cause—helping others. My determination to push my body to the edge has seen a parallel effort to understand what drives folks like me. I've read voraciously and interviewed experts around the country on what it takes to redefine one's boundaries and life. This book will blend modern science with old school philosophy.

Spartan Up! Will comprise 10 chapters, designed to teach you to systematically apply the Spartan way to every aspect of your life: food/diet, working out, health, business or work, education, relationships, parenting. Chapters will be structured around the following:

1. A visceral description of an obstacle from Spartan races that symbolizes the greater life challenges. Whether it's mud or ice water or greased walls, the rationale behind creating each obstacle will shed light on the lessons to be learned from it. By the time the reader reaches the end of **Spartan Up!** they'll feel like they've run an entire race and have that same sense of accomplishment and empowerment.
2. Guidance and advice on applying the lessons of the obstacle to their own life. The limits of brute strength and force; when to seek help and when to

go it alone; how to overcome your weakest link—these are dilemmas that all of us face in everyday life. By the time you finish this book, you'll have a much more finely honed sense of how to navigate everyday life, much as you navigated one of our gauntlets.

3. Examples from my own history in adventure racing and business that illustrate the points being made in the chapter. My own unique voice and life experience will shine through at every turn, and while some may initially see me as a life coach from hell, they'll come to realize that I have a heart of gold (albeit a well-conditioned one). I simply want them to experience the same breakthroughs I have.
4. Examples from those who have already undertaken the Spartan challenges. The stories of these people will place readers on the edge of their seat, because they see so much of themselves in the tales. Many of these people were leading unsatisfactory lives and filled with self-doubt before entering a Spartan Race. But doing such extreme racing in short periods of time merged their work and their play, allowing one to bring meaning to the other.

SPARTAN SUCCESS STORIES

Other events breed sheep. Spartan Race breeds wolves. The lifeblood of **Spartan Up!** will be the inspiring tales of these individuals who have used our races to change their life for the better, for good. For example:

Brett Blanchard is a high school principal who saw something lacking in the kids passing through his classrooms. He took his own experience with Spartan racing and used it to influence kids in his school. "I see obstacle racing as an opportunity to really transform fitness for kids so they can live productive, healthy lives," he says. "We can achieve the same benefits as other nations by getting our kids outside and active as well. Once they get started, they'll make it their own."

Then there was Johanne di Cori, who decided to run a Spartan Race after watching her daughter compete in two of them. "I absolutely wanted to give it my best shot and prove to myself that, despite my age, I could complete the racecourse

and all its challenges,” she says. “I thought, ‘After all, age is just a number!’ If a person feels they are capable, that they have the strength, the endurance, and the will, why not just go for it?”

Jason J., now a fixture in the Spartan community, came to Spartan racing after being handed my passport in a freak mix-up. (We had both lost our passports on flights.) After a different kind of expedition to return my passport to me, Jason set out on a new journey. He recalls: “On February 1, 2011, I strapped on snowshoes for the first time. On March 6, I snowshoed 100 miles and was escorted, delirious and tattered, to the finish line by Joe himself. There was a no-limits attitude to everything that Joe and the Spartans did, and this was made manifest in the daily intensity we put into building a sport where there was no preconceived limit.”

By the time Tony Reyes, a comedian, turned 23, he weighed 400 pounds. “There were times when I could barely breathe anymore,” he says. “I thought I would die at any moment.” In desperation he applied to be a contestant on *The Biggest Loser*, but those odds are lottery slim. Anyone can do a Spartan race, though, so Tony set his sights there. He lost 100 pounds simply by training for his first race, which he completed. Now he knows how powerful a breakthrough can make you.

Steve Meyers was an avid runner before a car accident nearly took his life and left him with broken bones, a punctured lung, lacerated spleen, brain bleeds and a foot so mangled doctors thought they’d need to amputate. During his rehab, he watched his wife finish her first Spartan race, and his guiding image became joining his wife in crossing the finish line of his very first Spartan race.

Then there’s Michael, who has been paralyzed from the waist down since age 16 from a collision with a drunk driver. Michael had already racked up a series of achievements as an adventure and endurance athlete, but he still avoided certain challenges in life because of his injury. If you find the prospect of navigating mud swamps, hill climbs and walls to be daunting, imagine tackling them from the confines of a wheelchair. Yet Michael became the first paralyzed individual to ever finish a Spartan race.

Talk about encountering unexpected obstacles in the middle of your life. Andi Hardy never expected the economy to crash, never saw her employer going under.

She didn't expect to lose her social support system and then have to burn through her savings and 401K. She couldn't even find purpose in motherhood, as her only child was college bound. Yet she mustered enough motivation to enter a Spartan race, and, at 42 she's completed several. "I'm feeling fitter, strong and healthier than ever," she says.

Each of these individuals and thousands more achieved something great because they didn't take the ultimate shortcut: instant gratification. The Spartan races demonstrate what people can accomplish after making self-discipline a daily habit, rather than an isolated act or a New Year's Resolution. Participants don't need to finish in first place or beat a particular time in order to triumph. Simply finishing is a great accomplishment. Having run a Spartan race, you'll go back to your job or family and solve problems differently because you'll see the path ahead differently. This new way of living is the difference between struggling and then dying unfulfilled, and leading an epic life.

THE SPARTAN BUSINESS

Spartan Race is a global lifestyle brand built on obstacle races. We will produce 61 of them in seven countries this year, hosting more than 500,000 athletes and spectators worldwide. We orchestrate these heart-pounding events in the nation's largest sports stadiums, ski resorts and elsewhere. After mixed martial arts, obstacle racing is the world's fastest-growing sport, one that generated \$250 million in revenue in 2012.

The events are just the culmination of vast enterprise. Three hundred thousand people a day follow daily workouts that we post on spartanrace.com and blast out across our social media platforms. With more than 2.7 million Facebook followers, 61,000 twitter followers, over 1.4 million unique visitors to our website, and 650,000 names on our email list, Spartan Race is a viable experiential and multi-media platform through which partners can advertise, create and share content, and build brand awareness. Reebok has made a multi-year investment as our title sponsor and official apparel of the Reebok Spartan Race.

Spartan Race also creates 50,000 to 75,000 digital images and videos at every race. This content is shared directly with our athletes and Spartan community online, ensuring millions of viral impressions through social media. Our racers are our best advertisers. We don't have customers; we have disciples, many of whom proudly tattoo their bodies with the Spartan logo. These people help define their life through our races.

We have been featured on 60 Minutes Sports and in the Wall Street Journal. We've been in numerous fitness and sporting magazines and on Sports Center. We were named Outside magazine's Best Obstacle Race in 2012.

The average Spartan racer is a college-educated 32-year-old with a household income of \$75,000 a year. We're 70 percent male, 30 percent female. Eighty-four percent of people have heard of us through word of mouth.

There's something incredibly organic that's making our new sport thrive—I can't even fully explain the response myself—but by the same token, my current staff of MBAs (with required endurance backgrounds) know how to turn something like this into big business. We are not content to rely solely on word of mouth, even if it's spreading exponentially. We're also doing multi six-figure ad buys monthly through every medium, totaling millions in annual advertising spend.

Coming this fall, we're launching not one but two reality television shows: Spartan Race on NBC and Unbreakable on Syfy. I'll be on camera ripping millions on the couch as "Spartan" becomes a household name like CrossFit.

THE SPARTAN CHAPTERS

SECTION I: LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Chapter 1: Charging through Mud

Since the beginning of humankind, men and women have been forced to deal with mud. It sticks to us, slowing us down, trying to pull us under. Mud delayed Napoleon at Waterloo, crippled the Nazi invasion of Russia, and turned the Ho Chi Minh Trail into an obstacle course for insurgents in Vietnam. That mixture of earth and water

that gets caked on your shoes has changed history. I'm guessing it's slowed you down a few times as well.

This chapter opens with the anecdote that kicked off this proposal: the U.S. Olympic wrestling team coming to Vermont to train with me and my associates, based on my earlier encounter with their coach, Noel Thompson, in the mud swamp.

Mud is one of the most primal Spartan Race obstacles, and it will be a theme of this opening chapter. We subject people to mud puddles and swamps on purpose. When you're already fatigued and struggling, the addition of mud can make for a toxic mix, exacerbating the desire to surrender. So every course has at least one mud trap somewhere along the way. It wouldn't be a Spartan Race without one.

Life is much the same way. I came up hard in Queens, New York, dealing with all sorts of struggle and strife – I wasn't always a Spartan. Such an upbringing can harden your resolve or kill it young. Either you got shit done or you got out of the way. I was lucky in that my mother was ahead of her time and drilled important lessons into my head. Chief among them was that life was not worth living unless you were going to live it fully.

This opening chapter takes my own story up from when I cleaned pools to getting a job on Wall Street and then eventually retiring to an organic farm in Vermont. Some retirement. I'll explain how my perseverance hardened during races that others would call insane. I'll elaborate on the circumstances that drove me to place my body in inhuman conditions in the first place. Once I began doing obstacle and adventure races, I wasn't turning back.

Chapter 2: Confronting The Greatest Obstacle—Your Will

Why do I and others like me run these incredibly demanding races, voluntarily taking on courses that could destroy us, and, at a minimum, will make us feel helpless at times? Didn't we invent cars, air conditioning and elevators precisely so we wouldn't have to endure such fates? Now we seek it out voluntarily?

Your brain has been programmed to think this way. A running proverb states, "You run the first half with your legs, the second half with your mind." Generally speaking, you can make it eight days after you think, "I can't take

another step.” This book is really about the second half of the race, when your mind can quit on you or will you forward. I had plenty of time to figure this out while trekking 350 miles across Alaska on snowshoes in 30-degrees-below weather without a tent as part of the Iditarod race, one of the many epic adventures I’ll describe in **Spartan Up!**

The most primitive cave drawings show feats of great skill and stamina. I would go so far as to say that the roots of obstacle racing wind all the way through the history of Western Civilization. The Greeks used obstacle races to train soldiers for combat in the eighth century B.C., for example. This chapter will encapsulate that history, tracing it from ancient Greece to the first versions of the modern-day triathlon, the steeplechase, the emergence of adventure races in the 1960s, and the present-day Ironman.

I’ll explain why we’ve built our business around this specific type of racing, and why it’s the best test of our human potential. My health-and-fitness vision grew even as my lifestyle became simpler. When I started reading about the Spartans, it struck a chord. This chapter will outline their approach, as well as how it both reflected and shaped my own.

Chapter 3: Climbing the Greased Wall

So you’ve slogged through the mud and you’ve lifted yourself out. Great. Ready for a pat on the back? Wait, there’s a 12-foot wall in front of you. And you have to climb it. Only it’s been greased, so that just when you reach the top, you’ll fall backward 11½ feet and land on your ass. So that you have to try it again, and again, and again, each failure reinforcing the one before until you finally make it over the top. Sound a little like your career climb or relationship history?

At some point during a Spartan race, you’ll encounter a wall that must be climbed. This makes it different from any marathon or even triathlon. You have to shift gears from the endurance part of the event and rely on upper body strength to pull yourself up and over. To make things more difficult, we typically grease the wall, so that you may have to make multiple attempts. Much as in the rest of life you’ll need perseverance and stick-to-it-iveness or you’ll never make it over.

After settling in Vermont with my family, I became a family man working the land using organic gardening methods. I yearned for simplicity, and I had time to focus on what lay ahead. This chapter will explain the development of the Spartan Race concept, and all the preparations leading up to our first one. We dove in, figuring we'd figure it out as we went—kind of like the very race we were designing. I'll offer a unique behind the scenes look at what went right and what went wrong in preparation. Along the way, you'll meet many of the characters that form the backbone of the Spartan movement today.

Chapter 4: Passing Through Barbed Wire

This obstacle requires you to crawl on your hands and knees or roll along between the metal spikes. This obstacle isn't about strength but about efficiency.

The first Spartan Race will be described in great detail. We all learned something about ourselves during and after this first race. When extreme events become your "new normal," you develop something greater than endurance, and you learn about more than mere survival. You develop an uncanny ability to make clear judgments even during unclear circumstances. I'm talking about moments when "Which way should I go?" becomes a life-and-death question. Surely you can think clearly and make rational decisions, especially when it comes to decisions that are made at the grocery store checkout or in how one organizes his day or what one prioritizes at work.

From that initial race in Vermont, the growth came fast. This chapter will offer a behind-the-scenes, rung-by-rung look at the speedy growth of Spartan races through the eyes of my and many participants. It's a case study worthy of Harvard Business School, as we used a grassroots approach augmented by national media hits where needed. Our grip could have loosened at any moment, but we held on and kept going. Our best marketing was word-of-mouth based. Not to use religious terms, but our converts spread the word for us.

This is what happens when work becomes your passion. People always tell me to relax, but people get to relax because of the people that are getting shit done. Being productive is necessary to be vital and relevant. I started Spartan Race as a

way to help find amazing people—I believe such greatness lies within all of us, albeit hidden, too often, behind perfume, escalators, and parfait.

In the Spartan world, we don't "Stop and smell the roses," because that's wasting our precious time. If I was lucky enough to be healthy, think clearly and capable of being productive, it just never felt right to sit still unless I had worked myself to a point of exhaustion. Only then could I justify it. I was finally beginning to reap the rewards of these efforts.

SECTION II: UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

Chapter 5: Getting a Grip on Your Physical Fitness

When you're swinging along a long set of monkey bars, you not only need strong arms and back muscles, but overall muscular endurance as well. It may feel like you're back on the playground in elementary school, but for many racers this is one of the toughest obstacles to overcome.

That's the thing about Spartan racing: Your beach muscles and six-pack may not have prepared you as well as you think for this sort of hours-long fitness blitz. Your muscles may fade and your lungs may feel on the verge of collapse, but the obstacles and the mud keep looming before you. You can pass on one—but that'll cost you 30 burpees, further sapping your muscles' energy supply. Spartan races require that you train for skill, speed, strength and agility. Your weakest link will be mercilessly exposed at some point.

Our physical training is rooted in a military-style discipline. The Greek philosopher Aristotle knew that mastering self-discipline was the key to success. If freedom is what you are after, it comes not *from* discipline, but *through* discipline. The Spartan plan for living a full life uses principles that have existed since man's time began on this planet. With our accelerating desire for everything faster, easier, cheaper—we have lost sight of these ancient tenets. Once we embrace them, our mind, body and spirit become one. At that point, anything is possible.

The fitness world, like so many aspects of our culture, is littered with too many machines, gadgets and apparatus. You can sell that array of stuff, which you can't do with burpees or running around the block a few times. Our philosophy is

that all you need to be fit is intestinal fortitude and a will, and that equipment shouldn't be the difference maker.

Most training nowadays is too specific and specialized. We've all seen the cyclist with skinny arms who looks like a quad monster from the waist down. We've seen the bodybuilder with perfectly proportioned musculature who couldn't run around the block to save his life. Neither would fare well in a Spartan race.

This chapter will offer an overview of how to train like a Spartan, as well as a rundown on my perfect day of health and fitness.

Chapter 6: Fuel the Fire, Fuel Your Body

At some point during an obstacle race, your body's cells' desire for fuel is going to be the biggest obstacle of all. Even our shortest race can create a huge caloric deficit in a short period of time. Try to run these races on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and you'll hit the wall before you even get to the wall. Yeah, it's that hard.

You need enough fuel. What's more, your internal systems need to be functioning well enough to use it properly. I used to run a pool cleaning business, and to me a swimming pool is the closest thing to a human body. It's got a pump, it's got a filter, it's got water, and it's got a liner. If I took a swimming pool and I dumped coffee in it every day, it wouldn't take long to contaminate the pool. And that pool might hold 20,000 gallons. The human body is a lot less. You have to eat healthy and less, drink healthy and less, get your sleep, exercise, be committed, have a great attitude.

Spartan nutrition is all about being disciplined and planning ahead. How much "fun" are you really having when you are underprepared? Underfunded? Out of shape? It all ties into the idea of taking a few extra steps each day to be productive and prepare for tomorrow. After sitting around all day, swilling coffee and beer, do you really feel that great?

How many hours a day does someone waste? Most people don't prepare at night for the next day. Most people don't set their alarms for 5 o'clock in the morning to get a head start on the next day. Most people don't make lists of things that need to get done to be more efficient. Most people waste much of their days

simply by not being organized and planning ahead. They take their cookies now all day long by not focusing on being productive.

Chapter 7: Withstanding Shocks To Your System

Hill climbs are an integral part of any Spartan obstacle course. Even seasoned athletes will hit them hard, then be walking, and then be stopped, out of gas.

We all get stuck on hills in life. When I applied to college, my grades weren't good enough and I didn't get into Cornell. I was stunned, but failures like that are important. They humble us. They teach us valuable lessons. Without that failure, I wouldn't have worked my ass for the next two years doing whatever I had to for Cornell to accept me. Failure can be your greatest asset if you use it to move forward and keep progressing.

Imagine quitting a race—it might feel great when you slow down and step off the course, crawl into bed and finally relax. But that failure will sting for years to come. Learn to enjoy life by *doing*, and then you'll be able to not only seize every day, but also be happy and productive while doing so.

Failure can be your greatest asset if you use it to move forward and keep progressing. Failures like that are important, since they can humble us, and also teach us valuable lessons. Let's say you prepared insanely well, but you could never have anticipated what would come your way. How do you make it through? Attitude in life is everything—it's the foundation of all movements. With the right attitude, mountains can be moved, or at least climbed. Can attitude be taught? I believe it can. The way to create great attitudes is to push through adversity. Once you have seen the dark side, everything looks brighter.

SECTION III: Mastering the Future

Chapter 8: From Here to Eternity: Making Your Limits Vanish

Spartan races are run over long distances, or what seem like long distances to most people. That distance itself becomes an obstacle.

Distance events force you to focus your mind. In contrast, our society likes to stay distracted, always chasing the next shiny object. We train to keep our minds

busy, and our minds are willing accomplices. Soon we have no choice: We are slaves to our anxious, darting minds and the constant stream of useless mental chitchat. This sort of mental chatter isn't really thinking, it's just neurological white noise driving you to distraction from what really matters.

This conventional lifestyle of comfort and leisure is out of sync with our DNA. By fighting our natural disposition for action, we're short-circuiting our genetics. In the replace of real action we feed our bodies a diet of caffeine, booze, unhealthy food, drugs and technology. Spartan races, training, lifestyle is an antidote, one that can get people out from behind their desks and off the sofa.

I'll teach you how to silence yourself so that you can figure out what's going on inside your head. As we recapture control of our mind, we become able to focus for longer periods of time. Once we have removed negative distractions, our psychology can begin to support our physiology. At that point, anything is possible.

Chapter 9: Feat of Feet—Entering Your First Race

Sometimes in life, you just have to dive in, and such is the case with Spartan racing. The ice water that will be hitting your body will make you feel alive and compel you to new heights out on the course.

I believe we all need to be tested; otherwise, how do we learn what we're made of? Signing up for a competitive event commits you to crushing your known limits. Without that self-imposed pressure, it can be hard for people to stay on track. The event holds you accountable to meeting your goals.

It's not easy. But after 45 years on the planet, I am absolutely convinced that some discomfort and suffering is needed daily to improve our daily lives and make the world a better place. It's discipline of a sort I learned at a young age. I gauge my life as a success, but every day it's still important to exercise self-control. I've managed to do this in many aspects of life: business, farming, diet, personal relationships, parenting, and of course, in the creation of the Spartan Races.

Total mind-body-spirit fitness is the Spartan ideal. History's elite warriors have known that to win on the real battlefield, you must first win on the battlefield of your mind. This requires mastering your emotions and letting your intellect

decide what's important in unbiased fashion. It becomes essential that you learn how to prioritize. How can you achieve greatness if you are constantly sidetracked by trivial pursuits? You must develop a mind strong enough to resist distractions and temptations. Greatness doesn't come from obsessing over the trivial events of the day and checking your Facebook account 20 times an hour.

The rewards are substantial. "If it weren't for this Spartan event, I might have always thought the big guys were stronger than me," wrote Spartan competitor Vanessa Runs in a blog post. "Above all, I learned to not be intimidated. To be confident in my fitness. And that in the end, maybe the life awards don't go to the biggest guys. Maybe it's better to be tiny. To slip easily under every obstacle."

Chapter 10: Putting It Together, Becoming a Modern-Day Spartan

The last obstacle you must surmount is the array of preconceived notions jammed into your psyche. All too often we spend our waking hours trying to find and stay comfortable in our own lives. We look for short cuts, gadgets, and processes to make things easier, seeking what we consider personal fulfillment. We believe that there are things we *can* do and things that we *can't*, and we become conditioned to that distinction. It creates our everyday reality and it makes us feel secure, because we think we know what to expect of the world and what to expect of ourselves.

The ninth Eco Challenge in Fiji was when I realized once and for all that the body can do so much more than we ever thought possible. As insanely hard as that race was, I didn't miss the comforts of back home even during periods of mind-bending exhaustion and deprivation. I wanted food, water and shelter. That's all I cared about. Period. This more primitive mental state was refreshing, liberating and empowering. With the artifice of civilization stripped away, I truly came alive.

I was also struck by how the Fijian people we encountered during the race were happy, healthy, strong, self-sufficient, and generous, living rich lives without any of the things we are told we need every day: cars, plastic, toys—none of it. Understanding this changed my life. This chapter will conclude with guidance on how to fully integrate the "less is more" philosophy into your life.

THE SPARTAN AUTHORS

Joseph DeSena

I'm the driving force behind and the living embodiment of the Spartan Race, the sports and fitness juggernaut described in this proposal. I built a number of successful businesses, starting in fireworks at 13, moving onto pool cleaning, and eventually landing on Wall Street. I also became a legend in endurance and adventure racing circles based on accomplishments I've already outlined. Spartan Race merges those two obsessions of my life. To learn more about me, my races and the amazing people who have been transformed by them, check out spartanrace.com and spartanrace.tv.

Jeff O'Connell

I am editor-in-chief at Bodybuilding.com, the Internet's largest fitness site. I was formerly editor-in-chief at *Muscle & Fitness* and executive writer at *Men's Health*. My feature writing has been cited in both the *Best American Sports Writing* and *Best American Science and Nature Writing* anthologies. I have coauthored four books, including *LL Cool J's Platinum Workout*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller, and *Formula 50*, with 50 Cent. Hyperion Books published my first solo work, *Sugar Nation*, in July 2011.