

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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The Invisible, Impossible Barrier

Think of something that's never been done before. A cure for cancer. A manned flight to Mars. Back-to-back no-hitters. A #11-seed winning the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament.

The "experts" say these things are impossible. We listen to the popular view of the situation, and decide they're right. We create limits for ourselves and consider it impossible to go beyond those limits.

A 25-year-old medical student named Roger decided to work on breaking down a barrier that had existed since man had been walking erect. And he did it.

Roger went to Oxford to study medicine, and in his free time he became a middle distance runner. In 1954, it was widely assumed that no human being could run a mile in under four minutes. But Roger believed it was possible.

He used his knowledge as a physician to research the mechanics of running, and developed a special scientific training regimen to prepare him for the challenge. He also used two of his friends as "rabbits", one to run just in front of him for the first half-mile, and the other to take over at the halfway mark and run the second half-mile with him.

He passed the first quarter-mile in 57.5 seconds, and the halfway mark in 1:58. The second runner came in, and Roger hit the three-quarter mark at just under 3:01.

"I had a moment of mixed joy and anguish when my mind took over," Roger described later, as quoted in his book, *The First Four Minutes*. "My mind was racing well ahead of my body, and it drew me compellingly forward. I felt that the moment of a lifetime had come. There was no pain, only a great unity of movement and aim. The world seemed to stand still, or did not exist."

At 200 yards to go, the only reality for Roger was the track under his feet. "I felt at that moment, it was my chance to do one thing supremely well. I drove on, compelled by a combination of fear and pride."

With 50 yards to go, he heard the Oxford crowd cheering him on, a thousand strong, giving him the encouragement he desperately needed. His body had long since exhausted, but it went on running.

"With just five yards to go, the tape seemed almost to recede. Would I ever reach it?"

"Those last few seconds seemed never-ending. The faint line of the finishing tape stood ahead as of a haven of peace, after the struggle. The arms of the world were waiting to receive me if only I reached the tape without slackening my speed.

"I leapt at the tape like a man taking his last spring to save himself from the chasm that threatens to engulf him. My effort was over and I collapsed almost unconscious, with an arm on either side of me. It was only then that real pain overtook me.

“I felt like an exploded flashlight with no will to live; I just went on existing in the most passive physical state without being quite unconscious. Blood surged from my muscles and seemed to fell me. It was as if all my limbs were caught in an ever-tightening vise. I knew that I had done it before I even heard the time.”

Roger Bannister had broken the four-minute mile barrier by six-tenths of a second.

More importantly than the physical record, however, a psychological wall had been shattered. Just 46 days after Bannister’s incredible accomplishment, Australian runner John Landy broke Bannister’s record with a time of 3:57.9 in Finland. By the end of 1957, 16 runners had achieved times under 4 minutes.

In the 50+ years since Roger Bannister’s feat, over 950 runners have run sub-four minute miles, and have done it an unbelievable 4800 times.

What invisible walls are holding you back from accomplishing what it is you want?

Are there negative thoughts you’re harboring, like “I’m not good enough,” “I don’t have a degree,” or “I just wasn’t born with the right set of tools”?

Have there been people in your life that have been holding you back? Saying things that have beat you down? Stealing your dreams with their negative energy?

Decide today that those walls don’t exist any more. Replace the negative thoughts with a positive outlook. Remove the poisonous people and situations from your life that are holding you down, and find others that are supportive of you and who you are.

And take encouragement from Shakespeare:

*Our doubts are traitors
And make us lose the good we oft might win
By failing to attempt.*

Roger Bannister took a barrier that was thought impossible by many and shattered it.

Can you do the same?

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