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Lessons from the Games.

I love the Olympic Games. Every four years we are afforded the opportunity to watch the best of the best; and every four years we are rewarded with stories of the triumph of the human spirit.

What do the Olympics have to do with Human Resources? Let us view them as an opportunity to be reminded of the enormity of potential when it comes to human capital.

So what can we learn?

At 6ft 5ins (1m 95), Usain Bolt should not be able to run that fast. He should not be able to accelerate at the speed he does. His physical size means that the majority of the energy he creates in a race is used to offset the drag of air resistance, and not to propel him towards the finish line. He touches the ground less than anyone else, but still gets where he is going faster.

The facts, the figures, the statistics all say that Usain Bolt should not be able to run that fast. Seems like nobody told Bolt, or if they did... he is not listening. This is the power and potential of human beings. This is why we need to invest in our human capital.

The mindset matters: Bolt talks about how in the past he has worried about his start, but was able to overcome this by focusing on his strength the second half of the race.

In our organisations, we need to ensure that we get to know the strengths of our people, and leverage those strengths. Research and writing by the Gallup Organisation, Donald. O. Clifton and Marcus Buckingham developed a psychometric measure and organisational approach called the Strengths Revolution. The basic premise is simple: The great organisation must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different, *it must capitalise on these differences.*

I have run several groups through a workshop based on this research and these principles, and we have seen positive improvement in employee engagement, productivity and team cohesion.

The training matters: Bolt trains for 11 months of the year, six days a week, twice a day.

The unglamorous work is what leads to success. Moreover, understanding the link between the training and development and the “big days” is what matters. As HR practitioners, we need to ensure that training always has a purpose and a focus, and that this is communicated to delegates clearly.

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The coaching matters: Bolt credits his mentor and coach, Glen Mills, as an integral part of his success, quoting him: “Everybody on the circuit, everybody at the Championships are talented athletes already. It’s the work you put in that makes you a champion, or better than the other talented person”.

Coaching is considered an essential part of the sports arena and we are able to see the results of good coaches. We need to replicate this model in the workplace. In South Africa we are beginning to build momentum in this space. Those in leadership positions in business need to be equipped to deliver effective on the job training, as well as being trained on how to coach for improved performance.

Incidentally, Bolt started out as a 200m runner and only started running the 100m to avoid running the 400m (the distance recommended by his coach). His self-admitted “laziness” is the reason that the world has its 100m darling and South Africa can have our 400m pride in Wayde van Niekerk.

Kind Regards

Robyn Evans
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- *How does Usain Bolt run so fast? - David Rhodes (BBC News)*
- *Science behind the fastest man alive: Usain Bolt. Ishan Daftardar (Science ABC.com)*
- *Usain Bolt opens up about training, diet and the mental side of preparing to race. - Melissa Hoyer (news.com.au)*
- *The secret of Usain Bolt's success. - Stephen Wang (Bridges and Tangents)*
- *What you did not know about the world's fastest man. - Jai Bednall (news.com.au)*

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