



New Year, New Challenge

A different approach to starting the year off right

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

Many of you are excited and prepared for the New Year and have already decided on what big goal you would like to accomplish. You have hopefully picked an event, received a nice new pair of kicks and running kit as a holiday gift, and are ready to get out there and get after it. I am a very big advocate of setting goals, writing them down, making them have a higher level of significance and creating a plan of action.

But what about the rest of us? There are plenty of people who aren't quite ready to make a big commitment, truly don't have the time or are not fully prepared to make the investment in the training and sacrifices that come with achieving a significant goal. If that's you, I'll suggest a different approach.

THE CHALLENGE

My wife Shayne mentioned to me rather casually a few months ago that she was embarking on something she called "challenge training." It was a term I had not heard of before in regards to run training, and she explained she was tired of getting slower and slower and basically feeling worse and worse from lack of any form of training stimulus. So she created a simple goal of running five miles in 35 minutes after one month of training. It was a straightforward challenge, but she knew she had to train to get there.

No slouch, my wife was a two-time Olympian and bronze medalist in the indoor world championships and has personal bests far better than many of our male readers. She is more proud, how-

ever, of being a mother to our four boys, which is the primary reason her running has been limited to two to five miles per day for three to five days per week. No workouts, no pickups, no fartlek, no tempo runs, just easy running.

Any running mother can attest to wanting to run for reasons other than trying to get faster. Sometimes it's all about a little peace and quiet to maintain some semblance of sanity. Some days have included running out for about a mile and turning around and walking home simply from not feeling into running that day.

Simply put, Shayne wanted to get back to where she felt more fit and could run with a good snap in her legs. She knew if she didn't increase her workout stimulus in some fashion and instead continued to run the same short, slow runs, she'd gradually become less fit. She needed some motivation to get out of her comfort zone.

CHALLENGE PRINCIPLES

The challenge is a great way to give your running purpose, without the added stress or burden of a high-level commitment to a significant goal, like running a marathon. Setting a relatively simple, short-term goal is a manageable way to add a little more pizzazz to your training routine.

The first thing to consider is what a good challenge goal is for you. Here a few suggestions:

- Five miles at a pace that is 20 percent quicker than your current daily pace. (i.e. If you run nine-minute mile pace daily then five miles in 7:15 pace per mile)
- One mile run on the track within 60 to 75 seconds of your lifetime best
- 10 miles at a your marathon PR pace

The next step is to design a challenge training plan for period long enough to reach your challenge goal, but not so long you lose interest or focus. I would suggest four to eight weeks. The challenge training should include a few harder efforts each week and a slight increase in mileage. You don't have to add more days of running but rather just a few more

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miles to each run. Every couple of weeks, do a test and run your challenge goal to see how you fare and monitor your progression. (My wife did her challenge goal each week on Wednesday to measure her improvement and to break up the week. She eventually did reach her challenge goal.)

Choose one of the following workouts below to include in your weekly plan.

- After warming up, run one minute at a hard effort, followed by a two-minute jogging recovery period. Follow that up with two minutes hard and a two-minute jogging recovery, three minutes hard with a 2:30 jogging recovery and finally two minutes hard with a two-minute jogging recovery.
- Five to eight reps of alternating from one minute "on" and 90 seconds "off"
- Four to six reps of three minutes "on," two minutes "off"
- A three to five-mile up-tempo run

Preparing for and accomplishing a significant goal is always a worthy investment, but if it is not currently an option or you just don't have the desire or motivation, that's OK. Think about creating a challenge for yourself, not a goal, not something to add more stress or burden but simply a reason to run with a little more purpose. Create something that is just hard enough and will give you the satisfaction of knowing you worked toward a worthy challenge to start the year off right.



Two-time U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper helps runners of all abilities through www.culpeppercoaching.com

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