

**12@12**  
**Keeping Clear View of the Finish Line**  
**February 5, 2015**

You are all probably aware of the healthy snow storm that hit the northeast 10 days ago or so. In some places it dumped a good couple feet of snow, and Boston was one the hardest hit cities. Of, course, the streets and sidewalks were covered deep with snow and efforts had to be made not just by city employees but by shopkeepers and homeowners as well to clear the snow aside. One of the businesses that had to dig itself out from the storm was the Back Bay Social Club, a restaurant and bar located on Boylston Street just down from the Boston Marathon finish line. One of the employees for the restaurant is a bartender named Chris Laudani. Chris is a native of Boston and has long loved running. He has run in the Boston Marathon a number of times and has encouraged family and friends to do the same. So once he had finished shoveling his place of work, he walked down the street and shoveled the finish line of the Boston Marathon. Here are a couple of [pictures](#).

These pictures were not taken by a friend. In fact, he did not expect anyone to take notice, but a couple people in the area recognized what he was doing and quickly tweeted their photos. For a few days, no one knew who the mystery shoveler was until Chris' boss let the cat out the bag. In an instant Chris became a celebrity and had his phone ringing for interview after interview. In his interview with ESPN, he said this:

"The marathon means a lot to me. I'm a big fan of the marathon, and I run the marathon every year. It's a really special place for me. I love the Boston Marathon finish line and everything it represents. And it didn't deserve to be covered by snow, so I shoveled it off.<sup>1</sup>

Now, I don't know what your response to this scene is. If you are softie for stories like this, you might find it rather heartwarming that Laudani would make the effort to shovel off the finish line. Others of you, who perhaps don't have a lot of natural sentimentality or don't care much about running, might say, "What's the big deal? The guy is shoveling off the snow. He probably should have been at work."

In either case, I think that his shoveling of the finish line provides a rather good illustration for us. It provides an illustration of how important it is to keep in mind the finish line, the finish line of anything we might be involved in.

When we set out in a career, start up a new business, consider beginning a family, or decide to compete in some new endeavor, we do so with the hope of reaching some kind of finish line. Perhaps we want to reach a certain financial goal that will allow us certain opportunities. Maybe we dream of a working environment that brings out the very best of us and others. Perhaps we envision making the world a better place or something closer to home like taking kids to baseball games and seeing them hit their first homerun. Whatever the case, we don't usually commit ourselves a task that absorbs much time and effort unless we have some hope of where we want it to end up, even if that hope is unspoken or not overly defined.

But then somewhere along the line, we lose sight of the finish line. And we usually lose sight of it for one of two reasons. First, because chaos happens. How many times have you said a task was easier than you expected? It happens once in a while, but not very often. It seems that in just about every endeavor unforeseen complications arise--personal conflicts, technical glitches, a changing market place. Then add to general chaos our tendency to become overly focused on some element of the task. We've all done it. We bury our head in some detail and when we are finally satisfied with what we've done, we realize that how we've spent our time doesn't really help us getting any closer to where we were headed in the first place.

I have been reading a good bit lately about the importance of discerning in each situation the one thing that is most important to achieving one's goals. In any given situation, there are lots of ways we can spend our time, and probably lots of voices telling us just how to spend it. But if we take a step back and assess those actions which actually contribute to our success, we are likely to see that only a very few things are really make or break activities. And if we press further, there is generally one thing that emerges at any given time as the most important next step towards success.

But it seems to me that choosing the one thing becomes nearly impossible if we do not keep the finish line in mind. Gary Keller, co-founder and chairman of the board for Keller Williams Realty (the largest real estate franchise in the country), puts it this way: in order to know the one thing that is most important to accomplish today, we must know the one thing that is most important to accomplish this week. And if we want to know the most important thing to do this week, we need to have an idea of the most important thing we need to do this month. And if we want to know the most important thing to do this month, we need to have an idea of the most important thing we do this year. You see where this is going. Ultimately, we must have a clear view of the finish line.<sup>2</sup>

Now, let's apply this thinking to a couple of scenarios.

Let's suppose you are part of company (maybe you own it) that has as its aim the production of a particular product at a value-oriented price. You are not necessarily trying to produce the very best of something, but a good product at a very competitive price that most anyone can afford. Then along the way, a few customers complain about this or that. And someone in your company says that what is most important at this juncture is customer service, and that if the company focused first and foremost on customer service it would solve all its problems. But this is precisely the point where we have to remind ourselves of the finish line, because if you are a Target and try to provide the service of a Nordstrom's, you will quickly lose your way. And you will lose your way because you will have lost sight of the finish line, in this case producing products at a value-oriented price.

Or let's bring this kind of thinking into our personal lives. When most of us think of a positive personal life, it usually is not one that is spent in solitude. It is usually one that is spent in positive ways with others, whether those others be family or friends. But how many of us have spent much time thinking about the one thing we might need to do in this day or this week to move us towards that kind of positive personal life? I like the story that I shared with you last fall. It is the story of the father who realized he only had a few more years with his daughter in the house, so he took a jar and filled it with marbles. Each marble represented one week until she went to college, and each week he would take out one marble. You see, he wanted to keep his eye on the

finish line. Because if he did not keep his mind on the finish line, he wouldn't make the choices he needed to make today in order to enjoy a good relationship with his daughter in the years going forward.

So what is the finish line for you that must be shoveled off as Laudani shoveled the Boston marathon finish line? What vision of the future has gotten covered up by the chaos and demands that keep coming at you from every direction? If you are like me you probably have more than one finish line. You may have one for your career, one for your personal life, or one for your spiritual life, as the case might be. This is not to suggest that these areas of your life don't intersect because they do, but it is to say that each one deserves the honor of stopping what you're doing, walking down the street, and making sure the finish line is kept in clear view.

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<sup>1</sup> "Bartender ID'd as 'Boston Shoveler,'" [ESPNBoston.com](http://ESPNBoston.com)

<sup>2</sup> Gary Keller and Jay Papasan, *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results* (Bard Press, 2013), 146-152.