

THE BIG IDEAS

Glee + Determination

= The secret sauce.

Two Goddesses

Wisdom + Wealth.

The Beast

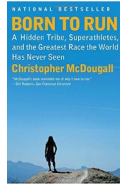
Learning to love it.

Run

This is how.

Welcome to Leadville

Two steps to greatness.



Born to Run

A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen

BY CHRISTOPHER MCDUGALL · VINTAGE © 2011 · 304 PAGES

“That was the secret of the Tarahumara: they’d never forgotten what it felt like to love running. They remembered that running was mankind’s first fine art, our original act of inspired creation. Way before we were scratching pictures on caves or beating rhythms on hollow trees, we were perfecting the art of combining our breath and mind and muscles into fluid self-propulsion over wild terrain. And when our ancestors finally did make their first cave paintings, what were the first designs? A downward slash, lightning bolts through the bottom and middle—behold, the Running Man.

Distance running was revered because it was indispensable; it was the way we survived and thrived and spread across the planet. You ran to eat and to avoid being eaten; you ran to find a mate and impress her, and with her you ran off to start a new life together. You had to love running, or you wouldn’t live to love anything else. And like everything else we love—everything we sentimentally call our ‘passions’ and ‘desires’—it’s really an encoded ancestral necessity. We were born to run; we were born *because* we run. We’re all Running People, as the Tarahumara have always known.”

~ Christopher McDougall from *Born to Run*

Christopher McDougall is an extraordinary writer and this is a fascinating book.

We covered his more recent book [Natural Born Heroes](#) in which he profiles World War II Cretan resistance fighters and their amazing physical feats.

In this book, Christopher takes us on an incredible journey to meet a hidden tribe that can run forever (well, almost!) and an eclectic group of iconoclastic superathletes who meet them in the Copper Canyons of Mexico to run the greatest race the world has never seen.

If you enjoy running, you’ve probably already read this. If not, get on it. If you even remotely enjoy running or sports or heroes stories or human potential, etc. I think you’ll dig this one. (Get the book [here](#).)

Although it’s more of a story than a self-help book per se, there are a bunch of great Big Ideas. I’m excited to share some of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

GLEE + DETERMINATION = SECRET SAUCE

“‘Such a sense of joy!’ marveled Coach Vigil, who’d never seen anything like it, either. ‘It was quite remarkable.’ Glee and determination are usually antagonistic emotions, yet the Tarahumara were brimming with both at once, as if running to the death made them feel more alive. ...

“Poetry, music, forests, oceans, solitude—they were what developed enormous spiritual strength. I came to realize that spirit, as much or more than physical conditioning, had to be stored up before a race.”

~ Herb Elliott, Olympic champion and world-record holder in the mile who trained in bare feet, wrote poetry, and retired undefeated

"I kept thinking about Eric's advice- 'If it feels like work, you're working too hard.'"

~ Christopher McDougall

Over the previous few years, Vigil had become convinced that the next leap forward in human endurance would come from a dimension he dreaded getting into: character. Not the 'character' other coaches were always rah-rah-ing about; Vigil wasn't talking about 'grit' or 'hunger' or 'the size of the fight in the dog.' In fact, he meant the exact opposite. Vigil's notion of character wasn't toughness. It was compassion. Kindness. Love.

That's right: love."

Let's start with the Tarahumara (pronounced "Tara-oo-mara").

A hidden tribe from the Copper Canyons that can run a very, very, very long time.

We've talked about them a few times now. In her great book [Mindfulness](#), Harvard professor Ellen Langer uses them as the #1 example to prove the point that our upper potential is *unknowable* (not *unlimited* per se, but **unknowable**—and certainly much more expansive than most of us give ourselves the opportunity to believe!).

Langer says: "Research like these vision studies highlights the dangers of setting limits for ourselves. For instance, I've asked my students: What is the greatest distance it is humanly possible to run in one spurt? Because they know the marathon is twenty-six miles, they use that number to start and then guess that we probably haven't reached the limit, so they answer around thirty-two miles. The Tarahumara, of Copper Canyon in Mexico, can run up to two hundred miles. If we are mindful, we don't assume limits from past experience have to determine present experience."

So, the Tarahumara are pretty awesome.

Their secret fuel?

Love.

They LOVE to run.

Which reminds me of Steven Kotler's great wisdom from [The Rise of Superman](#) where he tells us similarly shocking stories of extreme athletes pushing unfathomable boundaries.

What drove them?

Same thing. Love.

Here's how he puts it: "When doing what we most love transforms us into the best possible version of ourselves and that version hints at even greater future possibilities, the urge to explore those possibilities becomes feverish compulsion. Intrinsic motivation goes through the roof. Thus flow becomes an alternative path to mastery, sans the misery. Forget 10,000 hours of delayed gratification. Flow junkies turn instant gratification into their North Star—putting in far more hours of 'practice time' by gleefully harnessing their hedonic impulse. In other words, when it comes to time perspectives, flow allows Presents to achieve Futures' results.

On the other side of the coin, flow pulls Futures into the present. Because there is no time in the zone, there's no way to worry about tomorrow. There's literally no tomorrow. Flow provides Futures with blissful release from all that endless striving. And since the release is autotelic, Futures who find themselves in flow don't need to find new ways to slog toward the future. The state is intrinsically motivating so the slogging takes care of itself."

Check out those Notes for more.

For now, what do YOU love?

Are you doing it?

P.S. Check out [Are You Fully Charged?](#) and [Born for This](#) (and [Purpose 101](#)) for more on all this.

THE GODDESSES OF WISDOM + WEALTH

"To move into the lead means making an act requiring fierceness and confidence," Roger Bannister once noted. 'But fear must play some part ... no relaxation is possible, and all discretion is thrown to the wind.'"

~ Christopher McDougall

"Vigil could smell the apocalypse coming, and he'd tried hard to warn his runners. 'There are two goddesses in your heart,' he told them. 'The Goddess of Wisdom and the Goddess of Wealth. Everyone thinks they need to get wealth first, and wisdom will come. So they concern themselves with chasing money. But they have it backwards. You have to give your heart to the Goddess of Wisdom, give her all your love and attention, and the Goddess of Wealth will become jealous, and follow you.' Ask nothing of your running, in other words, and you'll get more than you ever imagined."

Deepak Chopra shares nearly the exact same wisdom in [Creating Affluence](#). Here's how he puts it: *"And the spiritual master replied, 'There are two Goddesses that reside in the heart of every human being. Everybody is deeply in love with these supreme beings. But there is a certain secret that you need to know, and I will tell you what it is.*

Although you love both Goddesses, you must pay more attention to one of them. She is the Goddess of Knowledge, and her name is Sarasvati. Pursue her, love her, and give her your attention. The other Goddess, whose name is Lakshmi, is the Goddess of Wealth.

When you pay more attention to Sarasvati, Lakshmi will become extremely jealous and pay more attention to you. The more you seek the Goddess of Knowledge, the more the Goddess of Wealth will seek you. She will follow you wherever you go and never leave you. And the wealth you desire will be yours forever.'"

Which Goddess are you chasing?

Go for Wisdom.

Let Wealth pursue you.

P.S. Carol Dweck echoes this wisdom in [Mindset](#) where she says: *"The growth-minded athletes, CEOs, musicians, or scientists all loved what they did, whereas many of the fixed-minded ones did not.*

Many growth-minded people didn't even plan to go to the top. They got there as a result of doing what they love. It's ironic: The top is where the fixed-mindset people hunger to be, but it's where many growth-minded people arrive as a by-product of their enthusiasm for what they do.

This point is also crucial. In the fixed-mindset, everything is about the outcome. If you fail—or if you're not the best—it's all been wasted. The growth mindset allows people to value what they're doing regardless of the outcome."

LEARNING TO LOVE THE BEAST

"Strictly by accident, Scott stumbled upon the most advanced weapon in the ultrarunner's arsenal: instead of cringing from fatigue, you embrace it. You refuse to let it go. You get to know it so well, you're not afraid of it anymore. Lisa Smith-Batchen, the amazingly sunny and pixie-tailed ultrarunner from Idaho who trained through blizzards to win a six-day race in the Sahara, talks about exhaustion as if it's a playful pet. 'I love the Beast,' she says. 'I actually look forward to the Beast showing up, because every time he does, I handle him better. I get him more under control.' Once the Beast arrives, Lisa knows what she has to deal with and can get down to work. And isn't that the reason she's running through the desert in the first place—to put her training to work? To have a friendly little tussle with the Beast and show it who's boss? You can't hate the Beast and expect to beat it; the only way to truly conquer something, as every great philosopher and geneticist will tell you, is to love it."

The Beast.

"Make friends with pain and you will never be alone."

~ Ken Chlouber,
Colorado miner and creator of the
Leadville Trail 100

Yours may not come in the form of extreme fatigue at the end of a crazy-long run, but we all have our form of discomfort.

How do you respond to it?

Do you flinch/avoid/withdrawal/resist?

Or do you accept the pain, befriend it, and gently lean in?

It doesn't matter whether we're training for a race or getting ready to launch our business, start a new relationship or whatever—we need to practice getting comfortable being uncomfortable.

When we're at our edge and testing our limits, it's helpful to remember that a) it's SUPPOSED to be uncomfortable and b) as Steven Kotler said in our interview: *"No pressure no diamonds."*

If we aren't willing to embrace the pain, we're NEVER going to see what we're capable of. As we've discussed many times, this is why [The Tools](#) guys tell us we need to *reverse* our desire—rather than try to avoid pain, we need to say: *"Bring it on!! I love pain!! Pain sets me free!!!"*

Our infinite potential?

It's on the other side of our pet named the Beast.

Let's learn to love it.

P.S. Dean Karnazes echoes this wisdom in [The Road to Sparta](#) where he coaches us on how to play the pain game: *"Does it hurt?" ... 'It used to, but the pain's gone away.'*

Over the years I'd developed a means for overcoming pain. Instead of attempting to suppress the pain or trying to cast my mind elsewhere, I delve into it headlong and focus with all my concentration on the point of pain, trying to decipher the origins of the sensation at its core. Pain is ephemeral and fleeting, and the more I focus on the impulse at its roots, the more it dissipates and dissolves away. ...

People think of pain purely in terms of a physical sensation, but there is also a very deep emotional connection to pain. Pain makes people uncomfortable. It hurts and is therefore viewed as a negative thing, as something that must be mitigated and cured. I've shifted that viewpoint and instead assigned positive feelings to the sensation of pain. Pain is good. I welcome pain, because it makes me feel alive. I like feeling alive, though I can't lay claim to being the first to play the pain game. After all, Odysseus's name in ancient Greek means 'man of pain.'

PROPER RUNNING FORM

"Eric had a foolproof system for teaching the same style.

'Imagine your kid is running into the street and you have to sprint after her in bare feet,' Eric told me... 'You'll automatically lock into perfect form—you'll be up on your forefeet, with your back erect, head steady, arms high, elbows driving, and feet touching down quickly on the forefoot and kicking back toward your butt.'

Then, to embed that light, whispery foot strike into my muscle memory, Eric began programming workouts for me with lots of hill repeats. 'You can't run uphill powerfully with poor biomechanics,' Eric explained. 'Just doesn't work. If you try landing on your heel with a straight leg, you'll tip over backward.'

Now, I'm not a running biomechanic expert and walking you through all the lessons Chris shares in the book is outside the scope of the book, but here are a few things worth considering:

First, don't land on your heel when you run—that's a great way to get injured. The only reason you can even get away with that heel strike is because you're wearing overly protective shoes.

"And the cost of those injuries? Fatal disease in epidemic proportions. 'Humans really are obligatorily required to do aerobic exercise in order to stay healthy, and I think that has deep roots in our evolutionary history,' Dr. Lieberman said. 'If there's any magic bullet to make human beings healthy, it's to run.'"

~ Christopher McDougall

Get this: "What surprised Dr. Marti, as he pointed out in *The American Journal of Sports Medicine* in 1989, was the fact that the most common variable among the casualties wasn't training surface, running speed, weekly mileage, or 'competitive training motivation.' It wasn't even body weight, or a history of previous injury: it was the price of the shoe. Runners in shoes that cost more than \$95 were more than twice as likely to get hurt as runners in shoes that cost less than \$40. ... What a cruel joke: for double the price, you get double the pain."

Fascinating.

God Bless Phil Knight and Nike ([check out our Notes on Shoe Dog](#)) but Christopher shines a very compelling light on the escalation of injuries that went with "better" shoes.

Fact is, our feet are perfectly designed to run on natural surfaces. All that walking on perfectly flat surfaces in super padded shoes creates problems. Of course, we can't just go straight to bare feet or minimal shoes—we need to be smart about it.

For now, quit landing on your heel. Get your feet out on varied terrain (like hills!) and think "quick and light" with your stride.

P.S. This book helped kick off the whole minimal-shoe running phenomenon. For curious souls, I hike/run in [these Vivobarefoot shoes](#). Our family *loves* [Vivobarefoot](#). Emerson has a couple pairs and so does mom. We also dig [Skora](#).)

P.P.S. Katy Bowman has some good wisdom on all this as well.

WELCOME TO LEADVILLE

"Ken had never even run a marathon himself, but if some California hippie could go one hundred miles, how hard could it be? Besides, a normal race wouldn't cut it; if Leadville was going to survive, it needed an event with serious holy-shit power, something to set it apart from all the identical, ho-hum, done-one-done-'em-all 26.2-milers out there.

So instead of a marathon, Ken created a monster.

To get a sense of what he came up with, try running the Boston Marathon two times in a row with a sock stuffed in your mouth and then hike to the top of Pikes Peak.

Done?

Great. Now do it all again, this time with your eyes closed. That's pretty much what the Leadville Trail 100 boils down to: nearly four full marathons, half of them in the dark, with twin twenty-six-hundred-foot climbs smack in the middle. Leadville's starting line is twice as high as the altitude where planes pressurize their cabins, and from there you only go up."

Welcome to Leadville—home of one of the most intense races in the world.

How about some wisdom from Travis Macy, the guy who won the Leadman, which is: "a sort of six-week Grand Prix of Ultra Endurance that starts with a 26.2-mile trail marathon, followed by a 50-mile mountain-bike race, and then—in the course of seven days—a 100-mile mountain-bike ride, a 10k foot race the next day, and, in the grand finale the following weekend, the famed Leadville, Colorado, 100-mile ultramarathon. All of these events in the Leadman are contested at altitudes between 10,200 and 13,186 feet. The fastest overall combined time wins—which I managed to do in the summer of 2013 when I set a new Leadman record of 36 hours, 20 minutes."

Travis wrote a little book called [The Ultra Mindset](#) where he walks us through how he thinks.

Here are two of my favorite gems from that book.

First: "Simply put, the choice to quit has been categorically removed as an option, so all I have to do is keep on going until I finish."

"Ultra god Scott Jurek summed up the Young Guns' unofficial creed with a quote from William James he stuck on the end of every e-mail he sent: 'Beyond the very extreme of fatigue and distress, we may find amounts of ease and power we never dreamed ourselves to own; sources of strength never taxed at all because we never pushed through the obstruction.'"

~ Christopher McDougall

Second: "People often quit endeavors in which they really should persevere because they're afraid of the enormity of what lies ahead. If you want to achieve a goal, and you are ready to commit, break the process into manageable steps."

So, think of something that stretches you that you'd *really* like to make happen.

Got it? Willing to commit? You sure? Have you identified the price you're going to need to pay and decided you'll pay it? (No stress if you're not willing to pay it but get real about what it will take!)

If you're ready, let's commit.

The secret sauce? CATEGORICALLY REMOVE THE OPTION TO QUIT. Period.

Then break it down into the smallest little chunks you can and go rock it day in and day out until you finish.

Travis quotes Leadman creator Ken Chlouber who tells us: "We started these events in Leadville based on two principles. The first is, 'don't quit.' That same principle applies to your work and your family and those brutal races and whatever else you do in life. The second is 'do more.' I've said, 'You're better than you think you are, you can do more than you think you can.'"

Again, we don't need to go out and run 100 miles.

But, we do want to remember that we're better than we think we are and we can do more than we think.

Let's optimize and actualize, my friend!

Oh, and remember: We're born to run. :)

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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you'll probably like...

[Natural Born Heroes](#)

[The Rise of Superman](#)

[Spartan Up!](#)

[Spartan Fit](#)

[Movement Matters](#)

[Move Your DNA](#)

[No Sweat](#)

[The Road to Sparta](#)

About the Author of "Born to Run"

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Christopher McDougall is the author of *Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen*. He began his career as an overseas correspondent for the Associated Press, covering wars in Rwanda and Angola. He now lives and writes (and runs, swims, climbs, and bear-crawls) among the Amish farms around his home in rural Pennsylvania. Connect: chrismcdougall.com.

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.