

face. He then admitted he had not heard, but thought I showed a lot of gumption and knew I had now learned a valuable lesson. The lesson I learned was not only to own up to my mistake but also never let efficiency impact the quality of my work.

My obsession with efficiency continued into early adulthood in both work and play. I loved to play sports. I loved to compete even though I was never great at anything I played. I would try any sport if you gave me a challenge. This happened one Sunday at church when I was challenged by one of our members to run the Monroe 5K. He was a local running enthusiast who you would see out running every day. Rain, sleet, or snow. He was out there. Ethan Busby was a runner before running became cool. Ethan had about 30 years on me and was considered by most eccentric for his peculiar obsession.

The race was a couple of months away, and I figured I had two months to train and put this old man in his place. I intended to show him running was no sport for men - it was for all those that couldn't do anything else.

I started training at the track behind my alma mater, Crowley's Ridge Academy. I would drive my big old powder blue 1979 Ford F150 back behind the building right up to the track and start running. Occasionally I would invite my wife Stacie and my son Jared to come watch and marvel at my progress. Over the course of a couple of months training I had finally trained myself to complete 12 laps without stopping. I figured I was ready. No 50 year old man was going to top that.

Race day came and I was ready. Like a true rookie, I moved to the front at the start line. I only wanted Ethan to see my backside, and I would wait on him at the finish line. The gun went off and I took off as if I was running the 100 yard dash. Before we even got to the first mile marker, I knew I had started too fast. But not to worry, I would slow, recoup, and still whip his butt. But as I slowed, I heard this awful breathing sound that was trademark to Ethan and watched him pass me with little to no effort. I took off after him and thought I'll wear him down. No 50 year old can be stronger than a 30 year old. I was wrong. Ethan finished the race so far ahead of me that he crossed the finish line, got water, and then ran back to meet me and finish with me. Humiliating, to be sure, but I was hooked. How can a man this much my elder be more efficient at covering 3.1 miles faster than me? I was stronger, younger, better built and yet I was not only beaten but humiliated.

I soon became a student of running. I read everything I could about running and training. I practiced every trick I could find. I trained with Ethan every weekend and would quiz him for tips on training, nutrition, and strategy. We were soon swapping articles and training tips. We went to weekend races together and became running partners. He was my Mr. Miyagi and I, his Daniel-san.

We continued this relationship, and he kept honing my skills and increasing my distance for which I could compete. At first it was 5k's, until I owned every local 5k running shirt. He then stretched me to do 10k's and expanded our geographical coverage. We had expanded our weekend running crew to include Daren Toler and Chris Cone. This was now getting fun. We would swap running stories and plan our next race together. Ethan enjoyed the company even though he rarely talked during the runs (something I should have picked up on). He would always say at the beginning of the run, "If someone wants to talk, I will be glad to listen." We were somewhat odd bedfellows, but it was fun. This satisfied me. For now.

I knew Ethan ran marathons, but I sorta just blocked that notion out of my head. Those were for crazy people. When he would run with me on the weekends, he was doing his “short run” and would reserve the other weekend day for his long training run in preparation for his next marathon. He would always invite me to run with him, but though intrigued, I would politely decline. He would always challenge me to just come run as far as you can and then you can cut off at any point and head home.

These invitations went on for the better part of a year before I finally agreed to at least come *start* the run with him. We started out at a modest pace and I did okay. I was actually proud of what I could do. He was scheduled to run 15 miles, and I made it to about mile 8 before I stopped. We continued this arrangement for several more months. What Ethan didn't know is that he had me hooked. I wanted to do a marathon, but I needed to be asked. I needed help. This efficiency thing about running had me hooked. It seemed to somewhat level the playing field of age and genetics. The order of finishers didn't come in by the youngest and best looking.

After months of doing training runs, Ethan finally invited me to run a marathon with himself and some of his elite running friends. I was excited, but scared. I acted unsure at first. I didn't want to look desperate. I told him I needed help and support. He agreed to help and proceeded to give me several articles and a book on running. I scoured the information and began applying as much of it as I knew how.

After months of training and studying, it was finally time. On December 5, 1992 we all headed to Memphis for the 1st Tennessee Memphis Marathon. The race was on Sunday, December 6th. The weather was supposed to start out at a cool 43 degrees, warm a little, and then a rainy cold front. For the elite finishers, this would be no problem. For the three hour plus guys, it could be an issue. Ethan finished in 3 hours and some change while I got to enjoy another 37 minutes beyond that in a driving cold rain. I was still hooked.