Revising the Rules for Marathon Training

Dawn L. Riddle
Institute of Human Performance, Decision-Making & Cybernetics

Lori Foster Thompson
East Carolina University

If you had told us a year ago that achievement in the field of I-O psychology had anything to do with marathons and bulldogs, we’d have thought you were, well, one typo short of getting a SAS program to run, so to speak. Nevertheless, this edition of our column addresses the true importance of bulldogs, marathons, and a few other critical early career variables to boot. In keeping with our usual tradition, we began this issue’s investigation in search of a successful professional who could help academicians and practitioners navigate through the initial days of their new careers. Naturally, our compass pointed to Dr. Michael Campion of Purdue University and Campion Services, Inc., who is The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist featured in this column. After studying Dr. Campion’s professional feats in sufficient detail, we were left with two simple questions: what kind of a guy lives behind the name that adorns all of those publications and awards, and how did he get so darned successful? Determined to get some answers, we caught up with Dr. Campion and asked him our usual (occasionally unconventional) interview questions. The following pages provide an account of Dr. Michael A. Campion, the professional, followed by a personal glimpse of Mike Campion, all-around adventuresome guy. We then offer some handy Career Gear, which is designed to facilitate the identification and completion of the kinds of projects that will boost your professional impact.

The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist

Dr. Michael A. Campion: The Professional

Education

PhD, I-O psychology, North Carolina State University, 1982
MA, I-O psychology, University of Akron, 1978
BA, psychology, University of Minnesota, 1975
Professional Work Experience

Dr. Michael Campion is currently professor of management at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. Prior to his acceptance of a faculty position at Purdue, he worked for several years at IBM and Weyerhaeuser. Dr. Campion is also founder and president of Campion Services, Inc., which offers consulting services in human resource management, organizational development, and I-O psychology, as well as recruiting services in the fields of I-O psychology and organizational development.

Research and Consulting Fields of Specialization

Dr. Campion’s research and consulting interests center on three areas: (a) human resource management—selection and staffing, job analysis, equal employment opportunity, performance evaluation, training and development, promotion and turnover, compensation, auditing and benchmarking, records management, and general personnel research; (b) organizational development—organizational consulting, diagnosis, attitude surveys, morale management, facilitation and negotiation, and the design of jobs, work teams, and organizational structures; and (c) interdisciplinary research—human factors, ergonomics, and industrial engineering.

Publications, Presentations, and Awards

Dr. Campion has published at least 65 articles in refereed journals, and he’s given more than 80 presentations on a range of I-O psychology topics. He recently received a certificate of appreciation from the U.S. Department of State. The Personnel/Human Resources Division of the Academy of Management has also formally recognized his work. In 1988, he was awarded the Best Paper of the Personnel/Human Resources Division of the Academy of Management, and in 1987 and 1989 his work was cited among the eight best papers! Purdue presented him with the Jay N. Ross Young Faculty Scholar Award in 1987; 5 years earlier he had won SIOP’s S. Rains Wallace Dissertation Award.

Memberships and Editorial Activities

Dr. Campion is past president of SIOP, as well as a Fellow of SIOP, APA, and APS. He has served on or chaired a variety of committees for professional associations such as SIOP, the Academy of Management, and APA. In addition, he is the past editor of Personnel Psychology and is currently on the editorial boards of Personnel Psychology and the Journal of Applied Psychology. He has also served on the editorial board of the Journal of Management.

Mike Campion: The Person

After reading about his professional productivity and all those highfalutin’ awards, who’da believed that Dr. Michael A. Campion, successful academic
and consultant, is also a self-proclaimed Steve Irwin wannabe! (You know him, right? Steve Irwin…the Crocodile Hunter on the Discovery Channel’s Animal Planet…the one described as a cross between Jim Fowler, Indiana Jones, and Tarzan.1) It’s true! Understandably, it took us a few days to catch up with Mike for an interview. Though he might have been trekking through the Australian outback in search of extraordinary reptiles or scouring the globe for the eight deadliest snakes on the planet or heading to the Galapagos islands for a look at 400-pound tortoises, when we finally caught Mike, he was traveling along highway 65 en route to Chicago, which presented adventure and intrigue enough for the two of us! Out in the wild and in fear of losing his cell-phone signal, Mike kindly took the time to answer our questions.

**What do you do to relieve stress?** “Exercise every day,” Mike promptly responded. “Whether I’m home or on the road, I work out using whatever is available. If necessary, I’ll even use my briefcase or phone books as dumbbells!” Mike’s been jogging daily since 1977. Not only does this habit afford the opportunity for exercise and stress relief, it also yields great anecdotes to share with nosey *TIP* columnists! He recounted a handful of stories related to jogging while abroad. A favorite of ours occurred in a rainforest in Surinam. While running one morning, Mike came upon “frogs the size of puppies…with eyes as big as the end of my finger.”2 This is when we discovered Mike Champion’s kinship with the Australian crocodile hunter. Mike freely admitted the urge to pick up the colossal creatures and check them out. He went to pick up the frog, and…before we could learn of the oversized amphibian’s fate, Mike quickly switched gears (literally and figuratively). “Oops, my gas light says I need [to] stop.” After giving him time to refuel on high-octane gasoline and a caffeine-laden soft drink, we continued with our next question.

**What do you do during your time off?** Mike responded that life’s essentials consist of three things: work, rest, and play. On the weekends his “play” is constrained only by everyone’s favorite maxim: “Unless I’m getting paid for it, I don’t think, I don’t shave, and I don’t wear underwear.” Okay, we’re not certain that hordes of people espouse this principle, but we’re just here to report what we heard! On weekends, he can generally be found at his lake cabin in Indiana, where he spends his time boating, hunting, and fishing. It’s been rumored that he’ll soon be tooling around on his new ATV (all-terrain vehicle). Having been raised in Minnesota, Mike explained, his idea of a good time focuses on spending time outdoors.

Delving further, we soon learned that in the great outdoors, although Mike may be known to whisper, “take a look at that, what a beauty!”, he’s less likely to be referring to some toxic tarantula and more likely referring

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1 Special thanks to Ashley Riddle, our resident Animal Planet and Steve Irwin expert, for lending her insights to the column!

2 We thought we heard him say something along the lines of “by crickey, the bugger nearly bit me,” but don’t quote us on that.
to an outboard, a jet motor, or perhaps his latest acquisition, a Go-Devil. For the reader uninformed as to the subtleties of motorboat engines, Mike likened a Go-Devil to a lawn mower engine on a stick blender—great for maneuvering through the muck! In case playing in the mud sounds like an unusual pastime for someone in his late forties, we should tell you that Mike is really just a kid at heart. “I may be getting up there in years, but I’m immature,” he admitted unabashedly. “I’m 48 with the maturity of an 18-year-old. So, on average I suppose I’m in my 30s.”

**Do you have a routine that you like to follow?** Just as Mike plays hard, he works hard, too. His weekly work routine consists of 12-hour days, 5 days a week. He exercises about an hour a day, works 12 hours, and sleeps around 7 hours. Throw in an hour or two for eating and showering, and you’ve got a pretty full day! Very rarely does he take days off during the week. When he does, he much prefers a long weekend to a week’s vacation. Mike notes that he maintains his schedule not only because he’s become “captured by success” and finds it difficult to let nonbillable hours pass by during the week, but also because it “just feels so good, you can’t stop!”

**Describe a “dark professional hour” in your early career. What did you do to get through it?** We rephrased this standard question in terms with which we thought Mike would be more likely to identify: “Describe a time when a croc caught you in a death roll, metaphorically speaking of course.” He responded with a story he says he’s told a million times. His grades weren’t very competitive for graduate school, and he didn’t exactly have people beating down his door in hopes that he would seek training in their I-O programs. He was kicked out of the doctoral program at Akron; told to get his master’s and leave. Moping around for 6 months in a “downward death spiral,” Mike finally finished his master’s and got a job. He found what he really needed at Weyerhaeuser—data and someone to believe in him. He started publishing and found he was “pretty good” at it! This improved his self-esteem not to mention his vitae, and it made him extremely competitive for doctoral programs. He completed his PhD, and 4 years later returned to academics in a faculty position at prestigious Purdue University. As Steve Irwin would say, “Wohoooo!”

**What factor(s) contributed significantly to your success?** Mike was really ready for this one—it’s probably a question he’s been answering for years! He passed along a number of lessons learned (which he subtitled “dogmatic stuff that makes my son’s eyes roll”) that have contributed to his success. Above all, “you have to have a good sense of humor and a positive attitude.” Beyond that, Mike cited four things that he’s found useful over the years: (a) a marathon mentality, (b) an increment-a-day approach to task accomplishment, (c) working an extra hour per day, and (d) the willingness to “go bulldog” (no, not bullfrog, bulldog!) in order to wrap up big projects. In fact, Mike believes that these four things can contribute to anyone’s suc-
cess—not just his. He therefore suggested that we elaborate on them in the Career Gear section of the column.

**Career Gear**

Our interview with Dr. Campion indicated that a marathon mentality can be very useful when striving to become a successful I-O psychologist. Most of us are accustomed to completing the day-to-day tasks that keep us in business (the sprint), but fewer folks focus on long-term goals outside of their daily work requirements. Viewing your daily work as part of a larger career-related goal (the marathon) can keep various work options in perspective, allowing you to complete those big projects that really count.

But, just how does one develop a marathon mentality to endure the pursuit of success? If you’re anything like two early-career I-O psychologists we know, you’re sweating, panting, and gasping for air after the first 5K of the professional race. The marathon hardly seems feasible, especially when it involves independent, long-term projects such as writing journal articles or grant proposals. Who has time for that on top of teaching, consulting, directing projects, participating on departmental committees—heck, just plain working?

This segment is intended to advance one’s progress in the marathon. Dr. Campion’s insights into his own success set the stage for this issue’s Career Gear, which concentrates on: (a) identifying the work that really counts; and (b) focusing your energy there, not elsewhere.

**Identify the Work That Really Counts**

A recent book by Richard Koch (1999) highlights something called the 80/20 rule (or the Pareto Principle), which asserts that a pattern of predictable imbalance appears repeatedly in life. In business, for instance, 80% of revenues are accounted for by 20% of the customers. Similarly, 80% of sales and profits are derived from 20% of the products—get it, the 80/20 rule? So, what does the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto’s principle, proposed more than 100 years ago, have to do with you and your career? Well, think of work as offering two kinds of opportunities, those within the job description (i.e., the requisite day-to-day tasks) and those related to broader career goals (i.e., the work that adds to one’s professional value). The Pareto Principle suggests that 80% of our opportunities involve the requisite job description-type tasks, but this work produces only 20% of our results. Conversely, 20% of our possibilities are related to broader goal-related stuff, and these projects account for the bulk of one’s success.

From a career development standpoint, all of this simply means that some areas of your work count more than others. Once you identify the parts that really matter, you can devote appropriate amounts of attention to them. According to Dr. Campion, you should ask yourself a straightforward question every morning: “Of all the things I have to do today, what would make
the biggest impact in terms of my career?” Although the specific response to this question will vary from one I-O psychologist to the next, the high-impact item, Dr. Campion explained, “…is NOT reading your e-mail. It’s the major project, dissertation, or article,” which tends to reside in the file labeled “I’d Have Finished This By Now If I Just Had More Time.” In short, devoting all of your energy to routine minutia is shortsighted. It’s like running the same sprint from day to day. In many cases, the articles, grants, and bigger projects are the real career boosters. Hence, a marathon mentality is required. One needs to take a broad view, effectively tackling the projects and stretch assignments that will facilitate career advancement in the long run.

**Focus Your Energy There…**

Once you’ve identified the marathon project that really counts, it’s time to consciously focus efforts on it. According to the experts, there are lots of different ways to do this without forsaking your personal life. Dr. Campion suggests working one extra hour per day—one hour more than the next guy. He’s convinced that this approach gave him the JND (just-noticeable difference) he needed while working at Weyerhaeuser. “I’d get out at 6 rather than 5. After a year, that was a whole paper!” he said.

An “increment-a-day approach to task accomplishment” is also recommended. Early on, Dr. Campion observed that people are often good at accomplishing small tasks, but find larger projects extremely difficult because they get hung up on the size of them. He therefore adopted the increment-a-day approach to task accomplishment, which he and classmate Bruce Avolio developed during their graduate school years at Akron. By accomplishing some increment per day, no matter how small, larger projects seem more manageable and get accomplished. “It’s like goal setting, but not as grandiose as ‘finish dissertation by September 12th.’ Rather, it simply dictates that every day you have to get some increment (toward your project) done,” Dr. Campion explained. He is not kidding about this every day thing. He means every single day, with no exceptions. “There is no such thing as a day that you skip. You can’t go home at night until you do at least one constructive thing on your project…one paragraph, one table, no matter what at least one thing per day before you go home. If it’s 6:30 p.m. and you have to stay until 9:30 p.m. to finish your increment, then you quickly learn to tackle your increment earlier in the day.”

Indeed, priority setting is essential if you want to complete those big projects. Most people fail to make conscious decisions about the order in which they approach their tasks. Instead, they let daily demand determine their priorities. As questions, calls, memos, or visitors vie for attention, they respond to whatever task someone else hands them (Berryman-Fink & Fink, 1996). While attempting to focus energy on your marathon project, it’s important to take control of your day. Understand your circadian rhythms
and schedule accordingly. Each of us has hours when we’re at our best and hours when we’re only fit for the most mundane tasks (Taylor & Martin, 1987). Dr. Campion emphasized this point when we spoke to him, noting that he chooses chunks of time when he’s at his best and uses those times to work on the things that can impact his career. Thus, it is important to consciously schedule your day so that your best hours are saved for the marathon work. Use the other times (e.g., commute times or just periods when you tend to feel mentally sluggish) to complete the less important tasks.3

Finally, you must be willing to do what it takes to wrap up those big projects. Dr. Campion notes that knowing when to “go bulldog” offers a leg up in terms of success. Specifically, he recommends that you seek to identify those projects that are “closest to the door” (90% finished but were just creeping along). To get that final 10% done, “go bulldog.” In other words, don’t let go for anything! “Devote all of your effort to that project,” Dr. Campion advised. “Forsake all other things until it’s completed.” Of course, it’s equally important to reserve your bulldog for the important projects. Don’t squander your energy on insignificant tasks and obligations, lest your bulldog grow weary. No one can go at a bulldog’s pace all the time, and the pooch must be up to snuff when you beckon.

...Not Elsewhere

You know what they say about the best-laid plans. Even when you attempt to reserve premium chunks of time for high-impact work, there are a surprising number of things that can stand in between you and the completion of your marathon project. Telephone interruptions, drop-in visitors, ineffective delegation, the inability to say no, meetings, and poor communication are just a few example items (Mackenzie, 1997). So, how do you prevent low-impact tasks and assignments from sucking up all of your energy and attention? Go to the time management section of any bookstore, and you’ll find enough recommendations to make your head swim. From a practical standpoint, it may be better to identify and incorporate one or two time management strategies, rather than revamping your whole lifestyle during the course of a single week. Here are a couple of suggestions to get you started. The first few involve preventing interruptions when you’re working on your marathon projects, and the final tip addresses the manner in which meetings are scheduled.

First, consider the way most people receive telephone calls—intermittently and at the caller’s convenience. Telephone interruptions can shatter concentration and thwart progress on your project (Mackenzie, 1997). To prevent this problem from occurring, let the voicemail receive your calls. Then, set aside a time each day when you can return a batch of calls at your

3 Hey, wait a second! Wasn’t Dr. Campion talking to us during his commute? In all seriousness, we were pretty excited that he put us on his calendar at all. He’s running quite a few marathons these days!
convenience. Furthermore, think about how much time most of us spend on
e-mail these days. If you leave your e-mail account open all day long, it’s
quite tempting to respond to (or at least peruse) each new message as it
arrives. The phone technique described above can be adapted to e-mail…
Keep that e-mail account closed and set aside a designated “e-mail time”
during which you can read and respond to your electronic messages.

Other priority-time-protecting techniques can be accomplished with a
notepad and a writing utensil. Before succumbing to the interruptions that
darken your door, be sure to jot down a note to remind you of your thoughts
or indicate where you were. This will minimize the time to get back into
your project. You can also reduce interruptions by keeping a Key Person
Page. As it has been said, when you think it, ink it! That is, write down
issues, comments, and questions to be addressed with key coworkers, and
cover them all at once rather than repeatedly interrupting your work and
your associate’s work during the course of the day.

Finally, you may want to try deliberately bunching your meetings and
appointments together. This way, earlier meetings will have to yield to later
ones. Such a tactic prevents meetings from expanding unnecessarily (Tay-
lor & Martin, 1987).

Summary and Conclusion

In sum, many early-career professionals spend too much time worrying
about short-term tasks; consequently, we don’t spend enough time on expan-
sive projects, which tend to pay off the most from a career development
standpoint. The completion of big important projects doesn’t require an extra
20 hours at the office per week, as long as we explicitly recognize the rela-
tive importance of our many possibilities and consciously focus our energy
on the stuff that counts.

As always, your questions, comments, criticisms, and kudos are wel-
come at EC headquarters, where we’re busily trying to continue the
marathon despite the occasional stumble. Be sure to stay tuned for the next
issue of Early Careers. Featuring Dr. Rich Klimoski from George Mason
University, it just might provide the fuel you need to stay in the race!

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