

## Run Towards Or Run Away? | Allan Besselink

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There are really only two choices in life. You can run towards something, or you can run away from something. I guess you could just stand still and let the world revolve around you (or leave you in its dust), but I like to think we're always moving.

In the running world, athletes are always focused on their training efforts. Are they getting all the workouts they need to optimize their performance and be successful? As a coach and physiotherapist, I get asked these questions routinely. They're not so difficult to answer based on what the sport sciences have provided us over the past 30 or 40 years.

Mapping out an effective run training strategy is something that is fairly consistent in principles, regardless of training level or experience. This premise forms the foundation for my 2008 book "RunSmart: A Comprehensive Approach to Injury Free Running".

So when an athlete says that they feel like they aren't doing enough, it sends up a yellow flag. A small one, but a yellow one nonetheless. Caution. Something isn't aligned. It is the first indicator of a disconnect between my thinking and the athlete's perceptions. I've found that runners will be doing one of two things at the root of all of this: they are either running towards something, or running away from something. The answer to this question defines the path moving forward.

If a runner (or any athlete, for that matter) is running towards something - for example, fitness or performance - then their training should be controllable and predictable. We should be able to accurately define the principles necessary, the benchmarks to expect, the rate of progression, the telltale signs of under-recovery, and how to monitor all of these aspects to enhance and optimize the training experience. In many ways, my goal is to teach an athlete to think like I

think - so they can adjust their plan 24/7. To the best of my understanding, that is the definition of “empowering the athlete”.

Sometimes, they may pause and wonder if they’re not doing enough, or that the plan isn’t extensive enough. Fair enough. However, after sifting through all of the elements, the athlete will often come to the conclusion that in order to run towards fitness and performance, they’re doing exactly what they need to do. They trust the process of fitness gains through good science and get on with the game plan.

There are times, however, when an athlete isn’t running toward something. They may repeatedly tell you that they have either added to their program on their own or subverted the plan completely - and gotten injured in the process. Regardless of the rationale and how logical the athlete is or has been, they take the plan and still do what they will.

They are running away from something.

What this means is that they are using their sport activity to run away from something else going on in their life. It could be stress. It could be a dysfunctional relationship. It could be self sabotage. It could be any number of things in life they are trying to avoid. So they bury themselves in training. It becomes a numbing agent, much like alcohol or drugs or any other means.

When this happens, it is time to ask if they are running from something and if they are using their activity as a tool to do so. More often than not, the question is met with resistance. However, this is fully expected. My task isn’t to enable their behavior; my task is to understand what drives it, and to look for the underlying mechanisms to promote growth and success.

Sadly, that’s oftentimes not what they are truly seeking.

I often wonder to what degree this happens with our patient population. How often are we not really hearing their true intentions buried in their words? How often do we hear a desire to get well and yet see no action consistent with that goal? How often do we experience lack of

adherence but not understand what drives the behavior in the first place?

Throughout our lives, we are running towards things and away from things. Let us all be cognizant of this and of those around us who may be running away from something. We need to make life about running towards the greatness we can be, and not running away from the part of our world telling us that we aren't good enough or aren't happy enough. Sometimes it takes a moment of sincere reflection, but it is a moment that can have impact on a lifetime.

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