

PR Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint

I recently finished training for my first full marathon. It's something I swore I would never do, but apparently, my two sisters can rope me into just about anything. (Chalk it up to middle-child syndrome). While I do love to run and have done several half-marathons, the full 26.2 was never a personal goal. That said, by the time you read this, I will either have the coveted "Finisher" hat permanently attached to my head ... or I will still be lying somewhere near mile marker 19, waiting for the paramedics to revive me.

Jokes aside, the physical and mental training process has been daunting, grueling, time-consuming and rewarding all at once. It has required a high level of dedication, strategy and intention. Now, in the reflection stage of my training journey, I realize that running a marathon in many ways mirrors a successful public relations endeavor.

The practice of PR is by no means a sprint. It's a marathon initiative that, while probably daunting or grueling at first, can help you to reach your most important practice and business development goals. Running the PR marathon requires the same kind of time, strategy, dedication and intention as running the physical marathon. What should this race entail?

Fuel for the runs. Without fuel, marathoners won't make it very far in their race. Similarly, PR professionals shouldn't launch a campaign or pitch project without the proper nutrients and fuel that come from research and thoughtful, strategic planning.

Define success. PR success looks different for everyone – what are your specific goals? Are you hoping to achieve more placements next year than this year? Are you trying to elevate awareness of a particular practice, attorney or firm initiative? Define your explicit goals and let every step in your PR run be dictated by reaching the finish line with those results.

Identify your targets. Who, specifically, are you trying to reach with your PR efforts and why? For runners, it may be the volunteer at the next water station. For PR professionals, your targets should be clearly identified in advance. What journalists and outlets would benefit from the information/source you have, and what is the best way to reach them? Are there other audiences or stakeholders you need to reach, **either internally** or externally?

Set your goal pace. Similar to runners who aim to run and finish their race at a certain pace, PR professionals should determine project and campaign timelines that spell out benchmarks and dates for deliverables. How often will you conduct follow-up? Are weekly or bi-weekly meetings necessary? Should a social media schedule be created?

Run a mile in the journalist's shoes. I recently attended a Law Firm Media Professionals (LFMP) event where two Securities and Exchange Commission reporters dished on their pitching preferences, gripes with PR professionals, deadlines, source expectations,



**Bethany (Early)
Chieffallo**

Vice President
Public Relations
724.944.2458
bchieffallo@jaffepr.com

internal demands and more. It served as a good reminder of the world in which journalists live: It's deadline-oriented and driven by fact-finding. The journalists' comments helped me figuratively run a mile in their shoes.

My strongest takeaways from the LFMP program include: Learn a reporter's specific beat; learn exactly what makes them tick; learn what that reporter is focusing on for the near future; learn the exact deadlines they're up against; learn how they handle embargos and off-the-record interviews; and, last but not least, don't offer a breaking news source who won't be immediately available for interviews.

Plan for obstacles. Sprained ankles, upset stomachs and torrential downpours are all possibilities during the course of a marathon. PR campaigns can experience similar obstacles. With so many varying factors in running and in PR, it's safe to assume that something will go wrong. There *will* be obstacles along the way. It's best to be prepared for any scenario and to have a plan of action for – and when – something goes awry. On a broader scale, it's always wise to have a clearly defined [crisis communications plan](#).

Be ready to sprint when necessary. A wise and seasoned marathoner recently told me that hill sprints are a runner's best friend during the training process. The same goes for PR professionals when it comes to breaking news. [When news breaks](#), you and your sources should be ready to sprint to capitalize on all opportunities. If possible, anticipate when and what news will break so you can do some advance pitching and planning. Reporters appreciate and will most readily respond to/quote sources who are available within the first hour of breaking news.

Stay the course. Finally, always keep in mind that there are no shortcuts in PR. It truly is a marathon-long endeavor. Media relationships develop over time. Fruitful media relationships require ongoing communication, trust and effort. Journalists need to have the opportunity to become acquainted with you and your potential sources, their knowledge base and how to leverage it fully. Stay the course, and maintain a realistic expectation of the time it can take to build momentum.

I would love to hear thoughts, questions and experiences from your own PR marathon. Feel free to reach out to me at bchiefallo@jaffepr.com any time ... even if just to make sure I survived my race!