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## PROFILE

### Beyond Achievement

Balance - The Key To Success



Joseph Maroon's curriculum vitae would probably impress even the most demanding overachiever. Among the highlights: neurosurgical training completed at Indiana University and Oxford University in England, professor of neurosurgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, team neurosurgeon for the Pittsburgh Steelers, medical consultant to the prince of Saudi Arabia. But there came a time—1980, in fact—when he realized that career and financial achievements only went so far.

"That was a crisis year for me," he says. "I had the kind of success that many people aspire to and I thought my life was in reasonable balance." That all changed the day Joe's father died of a heart attack, leaving behind a family business in disarray and one step ahead of the creditors. Within the space of a week, Joe went from performing brain surgery to pumping gas and grilling hamburgers at the family truck stop along Interstate 70 in Wheeling, West Virginia. The combined stress of losing his father and leaving his career in neurosurgery landed him in a severe

depression.

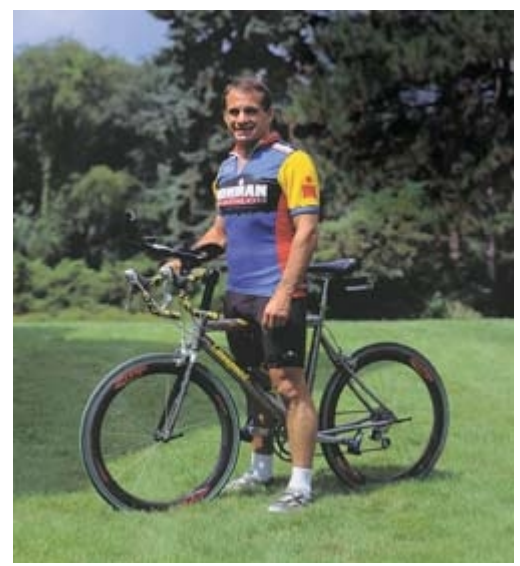
But one day when he was sorting through some of his father's belongings that had been stored away in the attic, he came across a leadership award that he had received in high school from the Danforth Foundation—the non-profit arm of the Ralston Purina Company. The award was a book called *I Dare You* and it challenged the reader to lead a "four-square life." Joe sat down and followed the instructions. "It asked you to draw your life as a square, with each side representing the amount of time you devote to your family/social life, your work, physical pursuits and spiritual," he explains. "If you're leading a well balanced life then you'd end up with a figure that is relatively square. But when I did it, I couldn't get my lines to meet. I had a single straight line that represented work and nothing else. It was just like a flat EKG in a dead patient."

Today, Joe remembers that sketch as one of the most valuable insights he's ever had into his own priorities. "I wasn't the smart, well balanced neurosurgeon that I had always thought I had been," he says. A few days later, things began to change. Joe accepted an offer from a business acquaintance to go for a run while they discussed work. That first day, Joe ran for about 25 minutes, maybe a total of two miles, and remembers sleeping through the night for the first time in months. The next day, he ran a little more, then a little more. He became so hooked that when he began feeling pain in his ankles and knees after a few weeks of increased running, he took up cross training, rather than abandon the idea of exercising. Biking and swimming became part of his regular exercise regimen—and before he knew it, he had added a second line to his life and was halfway to a square.

When Joe returned to his neurosurgery practice in Pittsburgh in 1981, he had a totally new outlook on life. Today his CV reflects that change. He now has a section on Athletic Achievements—and there are many. He has competed in about 40 Olympic-distance triathlons (that's a one mile swim, 25-mile bike ride, and 6.2-mile run). In 1993, he competed in the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii (Ironman events include a 2.2-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile run), coming in ninth in his age division, which was 50 to 55 at that time. Since then he has competed in Ironman events in Canada, Europe and New Zealand, continually placing in the top 15 contenders in his age group, which is now 60 to 65. He typically competes in one event a year, for which he trains rigorously in the six to eight months that precede it. When he isn't in full-training mode, he still swims, runs, and bikes—albeit for shorter distances—a total of six days a week.

But, exercise isn't the only ingredient to his "physical" side. He has also totally overhauled his diet. During training periods, Joe loads up on carbohydrates and protein and aims for a fat content of 10% to 20% of his overall caloric intake. Breakfast will typically be raw cereal, grains and fruits. Lunch might be salad and tuna fish, or a turkey sandwich, and his evening meal tends to be salmon, with plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Of course, vitamins and supplements play a huge role. Many years ago, he began taking a simple multivitamin and has consistently added to his daily list since then as he has read more on the subject and experienced his own results during his extensive training sessions. Joe makes sure to get plenty of antioxidants every day, such as vitamins C and E and CoQ10, and he takes a powerful multivitamin, which includes vitamin A, folic acid, and vitamins B6 and B12, as well as the trace element magnesium. He also ingests beta carotene and fish oil (EPA and DHA). To maintain prostate health, he turns to saw palmetto and nettle root, while glucosamine and MSM guard against joint and cartilage problems. "I think it's been very effective for me," he says referring to the latter group, which he started taking just a year ago. "I used to have knee and ankle pain."



Ginkgo biloba helps assure healthy brain activity, and he also now takes the hormone DHEA. During intensive periods of training, Joe turns to echinacea as a way to boost his immune system. "If you overtrain, you're susceptible to colds and the flu, so I use it as a prophylactic measure," he explains. He also uses creatine when training as a way to enhance his muscle endurance and strength.

Joe doesn't hesitate to share some of his alternative treatments with patients, among them members of the Pittsburgh Steelers professional football team for whom he continues to be team neurosurgeon. He's found that using glucosamine, in conjunction with a combination of the natural anti-inflammatories tumeric, boswellia, ginger and cayenne pepper, helps ease the various joint and pain problems among the athletes he sees, while avoiding the negative side effects (stomach ulceration, for one) that result from popular non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and aspirin. He takes the same natural concoction himself, both before and after his workouts.



And what of the family/social balance in Joe's life? "My two young daughters, Adara and Isabella, are my cheerleaders, along with my wife," he says. "They even ran across the finish line with me at the Iron Man Triathlon in Roth, Germany last summer." Joe's wife, Lynn, also shares his passion for exercise and the two enjoy working out together. With the work, physical and family/social lines now so firmly drawn for Joe, he's actually arrived at a new geometric representation of his life. "I've evolved to thinking of my life as a triangle with the spiritual aspect generating from the center," he says. "As I have gotten older, I think I've cultivated the spiritual aspect much more."

Certainly, the kind of work he does—taking care of people with serious illnesses, such as brain tumors, spinal and disc diseases—has had a profound impact on his respect for the spiritual component of life. "I've seen so many cases where people honestly shouldn't have gotten better, but somehow their [positive thinking] pulled them through. The corollary is also true—I've seen people die because they have a negative attitude about treatment and they simply give up."

A few years ago, Joe was invited to be a member of the Board of Directors of the American Youth Foundation, which is dedicated to encouraging leadership among young people. The foundation was created by William Danforth, the same man whose Danforth Foundation presented Joe with the high school award that started his life on a new course in 1980. Now Joe hopes to be a similar influence on the lives of others through his work with young people at American Youth Foundation summer camps in Michigan and New Hampshire. He'll be sure to spread his new definition of success: "For me, success is now a constant seeking of balance in one's life," he says. "I don't think you ever really arrive at it, but it's something that you work at on a daily basis." —Twig Mowatt

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