



A Running/Walking Event Becomes A Health Promotion

By Olympian Jeff Galloway

During my "walking warmup" recently, a runner saw me as he ran past and said, "My company and my family are really looking forward to the Kaiser Permanente 5K in September - we need your training program to jumpstart our fitness again."

He was referring to a 5K that I founded 39 years ago - with an 8-week gentle training program. The idea was born on July 5, 1980, the day after the 10th anniversary of the Peachtree Road Race, and I was running with friends from my Phidippides store. The topic of conversation centered on how companies were encouraging their employees to enter the big race on July 4th, but there were no awards for companies. One of my friends came over to me after the run and told me that I should start a new race that would focus on fitness and friendly competition among companies, non-profit and government organizations - and individuals. Since he was the CEO of one of Atlanta's most prominent companies, I took this seriously.

I began holding focus groups of executives and other decision makers from various organizations and discovered that there was real interest in such an event. Kaiser Permanente and other healthcare companies were into a major initiative to promote exercise and healthy eating for long term health.

Two years later I fired the starting gun for the first edition. From the beginning, we held health promotion clinics at worksites and at Phidippides. Over the years, hundreds of thousands have used the training schedule to get in shape.

There was one more serendipitous element that was recognized by company leaders: how training together bonds people and teams together. The same friend who recommended that I invent this 5K came by after the event with a revelation. He realized that our 8-week program and the race was the only event his company had joined in which just about every employee was either participating or supporting those who were involved. I've heard similar comments from thousands of company leaders.

The 8-week training gave those who didn't exercise a gentle plan of increase to the 5K distance without exhaustion or pain. Existing exercisers used our program to bring friends and co-workers into fitness. We had created a dynamic team building project around health promotion.

Over the years we have added a "virtual option" which allows those who are located in distant areas to work as a team toward the Kaiser Permanente 5K. Each person can select the 5K route and the day for his/her own 5K - while enjoying the teamwork of using the same training program. Each finisher receives the same medal and T shirt. A zoom event can be held at the end of the program to celebrate the accomplishment together.

Join today and bring back the team spirit of working toward the same goal while getting into shape!