

DARE TO BECOME WHO YOU ALREADY ARE

SOMETIMES THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO SUCCESS IS THE STORY WE HAVE BEEN TELLING OURSELVES.

By **Lida Johnson**

For years, I carried a belief that I wasn't athletic. I didn't consciously choose that belief. It was built slowly from experiences that seemed insignificant at the time. I was picked last for teams. I was laughed at for wanting to play basketball. I heard that I didn't look athletic enough. Then there was the annual Presidential Fitness Test, where I felt evaluated and compared to everyone around me. When I struggled, I believed I wasn't athletic. I'm not built for this. Fitness isn't for me.

Those words followed me into adulthood.

Movement, however, became a lifeline for me. Through sports, I discovered discipline, patience, resilience, and trust in myself. I became stronger, but the bigger transformation was happening internally. I was beginning to change the story I had been telling myself about who I was and what I was capable of.

That didn't happen overnight. Even as I became more active, I didn't always see myself as an athlete. I was short, stocky, and strong in a way that didn't match the image of an athlete I had absorbed from the world around me. I heard comments like, *"You can run?"* and *"You don't look like you could ride that far."* Those comments weren't necessarily intended to hurt me, but they reinforced the question I had been carrying for years: Do I really belong here?

Eventually, I stopped looking to other people for the answer and decided to define it for myself. I realized that being an athlete wasn't about how I looked, how fast I was, or whether I won. It was about being willing to start, to move, to practice, and to keep going when things became difficult. I had always been an athlete. I had simply stopped believing it.

That realization changed much more than my relationship with exercise. It changed my relationship with possibility.

I eventually completed Ironman-distance triathlons—an event that consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a 26.2-mile run, all within a 17-hour cutoff. The real accomplishment wasn't what happened on race day. It was everything that happened before I ever reached the starting line: the early mornings, the long training sessions, the setbacks, the discipline, and the days when I didn't feel like doing it but showed up anyway.

That's where confidence is built.

We often believe we need confidence before we take action. My experience has taught me that it works the other way around: confidence is the result of action. You take the first step, discover you can take another, encounter something uncomfortable, and realize you can keep going. Each experience becomes evidence that challenges the story you have been telling yourself.

And this isn't just about athletics.

Maybe you've been telling yourself you're not a leader. Maybe you aren't creative enough, experienced enough, young enough, strong enough, or capable enough to pursue something you want to. Maybe you've decided, That's just not who I am.

But where did that belief come from? Was it created by your own experience, or was it handed to you by someone else?

I know what it feels like to say, *"I should exercise. I know it's good for me,"* while feeling resistance underneath those words. I don't believe resistance is laziness. It comes from fear, past experiences, embarrassment, or simple stories we've told ourselves that aren't true.

So I learned to ask myself a different question. Instead of asking, *"Why should I do this?"* I ask, *"Why don't I want to?"*

That question changes the conversation. It replaces judgment with curiosity. It gives us an opportunity to understand what is really standing between us and the life we want. Often the obstacle isn't our ability. It's our belief about our ability.

I have finished races near the front, and I've finished last. Most of the time, I've been somewhere in between. But no one has ever cared about my finish time. What matters is that I showed up, committed to something difficult, and followed it through.

That lesson has stayed with me far beyond racing. Success isn't always about achieving the outcome we imagined. It's about discovering who we become while pursuing it.

So, what have you been putting off because you've already decided you can't? What possibility have you dismissed before giving yourself the chance to explore it?

You don't have to prove anything to anyone. You don't have to become someone else. You may simply need to stop letting an old story determine what happens next.

Dare to begin. Dare to try. Dare to step to the start line.

There will always be reasons not to. But there are also reasons to.

And sometimes, the most powerful place to begin is with three simple words:

Maybe I can.

See you at the start line.

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