



Three Things

It's July, the racing season is in now in full-swing, and it's time for a real nuts&bolts look at the sport. I often say, 'If you want to know what kind of a business person someone will be, look at how they raced their bike.' For the most part, I think that this is a good indicator. There are still enough cases to that exception to create debate. Riders who were able to win any race, yet upon joining the workplace they took on the '1,000 yard stare'. Inept at any job they were given. Sometimes pro riders, facing impending retirement, ask me for advice. "Paul, you're a business man. What should I do?" I went to one college class in my life. One, two hour class. I sat in on a UC Boulder business class because I wanted to hear what a man named Mo Siegel had to say. He started a tea company called Celestial Seasonings. They had funded cycling events over the years, and I thought I may as well go get my education, that day. There were at least 500 students in that class. Standing in front of my fellow students, he said, "I am going to tell you three things, today. They are the most important things that you will need to know to succeed in business. They are: Buy low, sell high, sell a lot." I was stunned. I had just been given the golden keys of success. Could I have been so lucky, to have gone to school on the one day that they were handing out all the education you needed in one class? Indeed I had, and I walked in there and got it for free. Because of my great fortune, I feel obligated to translate this and hand you these keys, myself. Business and bicycle racing really do mirror each other in a way. If you want to enjoy success in this sport, you need to know three things: Buy low, sell high, and sell a lot.

Buy low: Collect and save your energy. Just because you had a triple shot at the drive-through coffee hut on the way to the race doesn't mean you lose your mind in the first twenty miles. Lose your mind, lose your legs. Ride into the race. Follow attacks, but don't pull through at 100%. Drink, eat, take stock of what is happening. Feel great on early climbs? Don't show it. Buying low means using a poker face. Use your poker body, in fact. Feeling really good? Throw a hitch in your giddy-up. Make your opponents feel certain you're not going to have a good day. Drop a shoulder or an elbow, squint one eye, bare some teeth. Entertain yourself. When you can giggle inside, the miles will go by faster. Your opponents will gladly take a stronger turn on the front. Buying low takes on many forms and strategies. In Europe, I've seen this taken to extremes. I once passed Liege-Bastogne-Liege winner Dirk DeWolf as he dropped back through the pack in the early stages of a race in Belgium. Not only was he soaking wet, but his tongue was hanging out like a sled dog, panting like he was down to one lung, and, here's the kicker: his face and neck were green. Green. I don't know how he did that. I really doubt he was carrying face paint from the Army surplus. Now, I'd heard about this sort of thing before, and maybe there was something else happening, but damned if he didn't arrive at the finish line by himself, that day, ninety seconds ahead of 2nd place. Mo Siegel, he was a Colorado hippy. He used to hand-pick the herbs and berries for his teas himself, foraging through roadside bushes.

Sell high: When the time is right, start blowing it out. Remember that stock you had back in 1999? The one that split six times in three months on it's way to being an 18 bagger? If only.. oh the pain.. if only you'd sold it. You could have been a bike racer full time and payed yourself handsomely for at least a ten year career. Unless you are in a stage race and finishing with the group on a stage means 'buying low', do not, I repeat, do not cross that line holding unsold certificates. Selling high means givin' 'er when you need to. That's when there is no faking. Ten miles left, three riders thirty seconds ahead of your splintering group and you're only a mile from the summit of the last climb? Sell it, baby. All the moving and shaking you did during the first 70 miles of the race, all that foraging for energy, use it or you will regret it forever. When it comes time to sell high, the contorted face, the wheezing, the crook in your back, they're all real. There is no point in a poker face when you turn your cards over. Celestial Seasonings enjoyed tremendous margins on their products. Mo Siegel continued to learn better ways to improve his product.

Sell a lot: Go for the win. The difference between winning and losing is small, yet very large. When you already bought low and sold high to get yourself into position to win, you then need to sell everything you've got in order to actually win. We hear the saying 'Winning takes commitment' all the time. That's too broad. Of course it takes commitment. When you're in position, you need to 'Commit to win'. That group of three riders that you caught at the top of the final climb when you sold high? You still need to dispose of them. You are going to need to sell everything you've got in order to do it. This is the move that separates good riders from great riders. It's the move that makes the difference between a lemonade stand and Celestial Seasonings. Lots of racers can buy low and sell high, not everyone can sell a lot. The rider that decides that they are going to win expends everything they have in that finale. The rider with the sub-par sprint who launches in the last couple of kilometers and never even bothers to look back is selling a lot. They are committing. It's one of the most beautiful spectacles in bicycle racing. I once saw a rider selling so much that they either blacked out or forgot to look where they were going. With two turns to go in a criterium, this rider was charging ahead of us with about an 8 second lead, solo. He never made the turn. Rode straight into a metal fenced baseball field dugout, head down. Never stop committing yourself to those moves every chance you get. Mo Siegel was a Colorado hippy filling up buckets on hillsides. Now he flies to tea tastings in a Gulfstream G5.

You now hold the keys to success. What will you do with them? It's not everyday that someone provides you a college education in just a handful of paragraphs. Somehow, I went to school on the day it counted. Be careful who you share this information with. It's simply just that valuable. Full disclosure: I have made mistakes in business, bike racing, and even the stock market. Fortunately, I learned, improved, and live on to throw my hat in the ring, again. My hope is that you will take something with you from this experience. No matter what you do, may you always ride with the courage to buy low, sell high, and sell a lot.