Shawnigan Lake:

OLYMPIC VIDEO: (check version!)

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Does that make you excited for your upcoming Ski Week at Manning Park!!?!?!

How many of you **watched the 2010 Olympics**? (show of hands)

How many of you **watched that race…*my* race,…** and **cheered** for me?

I felt that support… I felt like everyone wanted *me* to win…so thank you!

What most people don’t realize, is that that was my **5th race run of the day**.

🡪A skicross race starts out with individual timed runs… so just one of us on the course, competing against the clock… to determine who qualifies for the actual head-to-head racing, like you just saw.

* And once you’ve qualified for the real racing, there is a round of 32 athletes, in 8 different heats (of 4),
  + then the quarter final,
  + semi final and then…
  + the big final, where we compete for the medals.

Does anyone know the difference between **alpine** and **skicross**?

-alpine is just the individual runs, and no jumps, berms, etc…

(just like the lovely \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, who introduced me.)

I’ll talk a bit about both.

SO…

Did what I did there… **did that race look *hard*?** Do you think you could go and race like that tomorrow? (haha.. noooo…)

How about *this*: Do you think you could do **something *like* that, *one day*?**

I didn't just decide that I wanted to win the Olympics in Skicross and go and do it the very next day.  **Now *that* would be hard.**

I like the saying "impossible is not a fact”, but that might actually be one of the things in this world that is truly impossible.

I’m here to **demystify** the process behind winning an Olympic medal.

..to ***normalize*** it.

I think you'll find that this **winning formula** is one that can be applied to many other goals in life.

It's one that's helped me **focus on the journey** instead of the end goal ... and helped me **stay motivated**.

There were times throughout my ski career when it was really **hard to not just quit**!

We need to realize that situations we find ourselves in through sports are really just **metaphors for real life situations**, so try to consider ways you could apply *my approach to success as a skier*, to *your* approach to succeeding in **whatever you may want to do.**

Have any of you ever had **lofty goals to work toward**?

(Hopefully all of you... )

     -even Ace-ing grade 12 **exams**!

you wouldn't just walk into a **physics 12 final** without taking the necessary steps to prepare for it, going to class, studying, doing a series of practice tests

     -you don't decide to apply for your **dream job** overnight...

-and you don’t go tryout for the **Vancouver Whitecaps** your first day playing soccer.

How many of you know your ***life* goals**?

Are there any athletes in the room?

Do any of you ***know* already**, that you want to

* represent your country in the Olympics?
  + Or play professionally?
  + Or could your goals be financial, or business-related?

Are your goals *so lofty* that they are more **like far-off dreams?**

When I found out we were **getting the Olympics**, at **home**, and then that skicross would make it’s Olympic **debut** here, the thought of *just participating* seemed like a far off dream.

And the **thought of winning gold** didn’t even cross my mind!

How many of you think you may actually realize your dreams from a career standpoint? Run big organizations? Become politicians? Leading policy makers?

I want you to TRY SOMETHING HERE:

**Picture yourself in my shoes**, an **Olympic champion**, standing here delivering some **insight** and **inspiration** to young people at a prestigious school.

What do you think I would have thought if someone told me, at the age of 15/16/17, that I would eventually **represent our country** in the Olympics, and **win gold**?

I would have thought they were crazy.

So I'm here to tell you, **this could be the beginning** of a story *you'll* go and share with high school **students** one day.  Or at **corporate** **functions** ...or **political** **campaigns**.

You never know, so you may as well **DREAM BIG.**

The **crazy thing** is… that…

I was **never one of those kids** who grew up thinking **I wanted to be an Olympian ...**

One of the questions I get asked a lot in the media, is

**“When was that moment…. That you knew you wanted to be an Olympian?”…**

I remember my first impression of the Olympics, and Olympians...

I was watching the **speedskating** on TV with my **grandparents**

I thought the athletes were **Superhuman,** to be held on the highest of **pedestals**...

I **couldn’t relate** to them… and The **thought of becoming** one of them seemed totally **out of the question**.

(So, back to the food for thought… the other side of the coin☺

**How many of you** have ***no idea*** what you want to accomplish in life?

Okay, well I'm living proof that you can still accomplish a lot!

I didn't even know I wanted to *participate* in the Olympics until I was 22!

So ….hopefully my message will **resonate** with *all* of you, whether you are into sports or not, and whether you know what you want to *'be'*,,….. *who* you want to 'be' when you grow up!

->This is about **always doing your best**, and continuously working toward **something**, **anything**, one step at a time.

->My life goal wasn't to win Olympic gold: that was just the byproduct of a series of manageable, day-to-day goals like: **just *getting* to the gym**, or the **ski hill**, ***challenging* myself**, being **observant** and **analytical** and **positive**,,,,.. and living in a way that **yields no regrets**.

->When I realized that *participating* in the Olympics wasn’t a big enough dream, only then did **Olympic gold** become my goal.

**And I already had the formula in place to succeed.**

So let’s talk more about that **step by step process**: (Manageable goals. )

Winning an Olympic medal would seem like a far off dream… an unrealistic one to most… but at some point, it became the **very next rung on the ladder** for me.

When it comes to **tackling goals** and **big dreams**, if you break it down into a step by step process, you'll see that *none* of those individual steps is actually *that* hard.

They are each just *a tiny bit* more challenging than the last... Each is a totally **manageable challenge**.

Isn't it amazing how easy *'challenges'* or *tests*, or *competitions* can feel, when you are **prepared**?

So you may *or may not* be surprised to hear that my ability to win that race **didn't just come to me overnight**.  ;)

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When I was your age, I was just like you.

(Although my story begins in Whistler).

Played all sorts of sports and activities

I, too, had a special high school experience. I was given the **opportunity to pursue** my sport while my teachers graciously accommodated my busy schedule ,,,…and enabled me to take care of my education by way of a very **flexible, independent learning system.**

(as long as I got good grades!)

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**I ski raced…** …and this was traditional alpine ski racing, where you go one at a time, as I’d mentioned …

but *not* to become a **World Cup racer.**

I got into my sport because it was **fun**, and I started competing… because that’s what parents get their kids to do!

At the **age of 12**, when ski racing became a bit more **serious**, I had to get **creative** to keep it fun.

I was **always skipping training** to race my buddies through gullies, off cliffs, jumps ...and other *Skicross-like* features

My favorite days were when I **had my coaches all to myself**.

Do any of you ever get opportunities to spend some time with a **teacher**, or a **coach**, or a team **captain** or other **mentor**, *one on one* or at least in a small group?

->I found that those experiences were **great opportunities for significant growth.**

The **best** was when we’d load the Whistler Village Gondola at 7:30am, ahead of the general public to get up there and get our training in early, only to find our training course buried under **20cms of new snow.**

->Well… as it turned out… most of my teammates were

**"Fair weather skiers".**

I had this **one coach** who would patiently wait as they dropped like flies…

They’d go down to the village… to shop?… or home to play video games.(?)

He’d **wait until there were only 2 or 3 of us left**, and then he’d show us all of his **secret powder stashes**. I still get **cool points** to this day, showing friends spots that they never knew existed. … spots that this coach showed me, so long ago.

I remember skiing down Whistler Peak, on to the top of a cliff called **the Waterfal**l. The FIRST time I found myself standing on the edge of it, it felt HUGE.

I was completely overcome by **fear**, and my brain's natural response was to **find a way around** the cliff without having to jump off it.

**So that's what I did.**

I needed to **work my way up** to being able to ski off that cliff.

To get my confidence up, my coach took me to a **tiny little cliff**…called …………………………. …maybe a 4 foot drop…

🡪the **FIRST STEP** was just having a look at it from below.

**THEN** I waited for a good opportunity to **set myself up for success**... a day where the snow was really **deep** and would provide a nice **soft landing**... And **THEN** I hit that cliff for the first time.

I still remember the butterflies in my stomach, and the mental strength required to avoid thinking the worst... To push thoughts of all the bad things that could possibly happen out of my head, and focus on visualizing the optimal turnout.

🡪 Because it was so little, that was **manageable**.

I pointed my skis downhill and **skied right off it**.

So over the following weeks, I went back and hit that cliff over and *over* and *over* again. **Until it was totally boring.**

It became so **simple** and **easy** for me, that my heart rate wouldn't even go up as I skied off it full speed, landing 4 times further down the mountain than I did that first time.

🡪I had **officially conquered that cliff**.

And I celebrated that small victory.

It wasn't until **then**, that **I stepped it up a little.** I found a cliff that was just a little bit bigger than that one at the top of Goat's Gully.

🡪I had those nerves flaring up all over again, and I waited until everything was in place to **set myself up for success again**) and then I jumped!

->And eventually, through repetition, that cliff became easy too.

THEN, I went over to the BIG one at the bottom of the Peak Chair...

The WATERFALL…

Even though that one *used* to look so huge that I wouldn't even consider jumping off it, *suddenly* it only looked **a little bit bigger** than the last one that I'd become so comfortable on.

🡪And so before I knew it, by **constantly pushing my limits** and tacking all of those manageable goals, one step at a time, I was hitting the a Waterfall at the age of 12. (All the other girls thought I was crazy!)

Little did I know, on top of becoming familiar with each of those cliffs, I was also becoming familiar with that **process**... That **formula**...

🡪Which would come in handy throughout my life **on the mountain**, and **off.**

 (All while pursuing my passion for the wild side of skiing and keeping ski racing fun… and *unknowingly* preparing myself to become a world class skicross racer!

So I *alpine* ski raced for a few more years...

I made **sacrifices**, and dealt with a lot of **injuries**. I **persevered**. I learned about **self-discipline**, as I had to do most of my schoolwork independently.

We were on the road racing *most* of the time.

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When I was 16, I **broke my leg** really badly.

Instead of being so **discouraged by the pain**, the tedious **rehabilitation**, and the fact that I’d have **fallen behind** my competition... instead of quitting skiing, I reframed it into an opportunity to pivot.

->To do more of the *kind of skiing that I* ***truly*** *loved*.

But I had to quit alpine ski racing to do that.

The thing i didn't realize was that quitting part of skiing.., the racing part ... made me feel like I’d given up on something.

I felt like I had put so much **time & energy** into **developing my skills** as an alpine ski racer, and it was all going to **go to waste** before I'd realized my full **potential**.

I have these cousins who **"should have played in the NHL"...** I've heard that story my whole life... They were good enough but they weren't focused enough. They got burnt outs because it stopped being fun, and that made it really hard to focus. At 18/19 years old, **I realized that that was going to be my story too.**

Fortunately, I got another chance, so some of the other experiences & lessons i'd like to share with you are from that next chance, when I was older and wiser and better able to make the most of every opportunity that presented itself.

**An opportunity presented itself.**

**SKICROSS.**

I got into Skicross thanks to *peer pressure*.

Sometimes your friends or family really do *genuinely* know what's best for you.

When I was **20 years old**,

I went in an X Games qualifier in the States, near **Lake Tahoe.**

**When I took my FIRST look** at the course, standing at the bottom outside the lodge, **it looked insane**.

I **couldn't see the top part**,

but the **bottom half was all huge jumps.**

I was **scared**.

But then I realized that all of my competitors were totally freaked out too!

I realized that **nerves were normal**.

Encouraged by that understanding, I came up with a **game plan**.

🡪I would spend the entire next day hitting the jumps in the terrain park **one step at a time, from easiest, to hardest**.

So I started with the tiny little jumps, marked with **green circles** on either side of the take-offs. I knew they were easy, but i needed to start with a confidence builder. Then, when they became completely boring**, blue squares**, **black diamonds**, and eventually **double black diamonds jumps.**

To my surprise, when I got into the race course to have a closer look at it the next day, the runway of jumps into the finish were actually NOTHING compared to the double black diamond jumps in the terrain park.

🡪I knew my preparation was going to allow me to attack that course with no fear, because it was actually easier than the last step I'd worked my way up to!

I won every heat, and qualified for the X Games, and

**that was the** **launch of my Skicross career.**

Now I'll fast forward a few years to the day it was announced that

**Skicross would be added to the Olympic program.**

I trained *hard*.

When I wasn't on snow…. getting up at 4am during summer training camps to finish our day by the time the snow got too soft… I was in the gym.

There were **good times** and there were **bad times**.

Throughout the years of racing skicross, it was **really hard not to quit**, *sometimes*.

But… what's surprising is that, for the most part, the training and prep didn't really feel that hard.. Not like I expected ***Olympic hard***to feel...

I mean there were some **fitness testing sessions** that couldn’t possibly have been any harder… where I pushed myself to the **absolute max**… and I got pretty used to doing all of my strength training to **failure**.

Do you know what that means?

You load the weight on **so heavily** that you *know* you will **FAIL** somewhere between 8-10 reps one week, and then, as you get stronger, you up the weight so that you will fail between 6-8 reps the next week, and then you put even more weight on, so that you cannot possibly do 4-6 reps.

🡪I ***r***emember ***just buckling*** on the last attempt at each.

🡪It was so much weight that I could not possibly lift it up the last time, so I’d be STUCK, in a HALF SQUAT position, *completely* **dependent** on whoever was helping me to RESCUE me by lifting some of the weight back up onto the squat rack.

***That* was crazy.**

There were **Injuries** to deal with, **sacrifices** **made**, etc…

Gym sessions were **5 days a week** and they typically lasted **4-5 hours**, with **a speed and agility session in the afternoon**.

But like I said… it didn’t ever feel *Olympic* *hard*. I guess it goes back to that same **formula**.

If each day is just a ***tiny bit harder* than the last,** it all just feels pretty *normal* at the time.

(I wish I’d known more Olympians back then, who could have told me not to stress myself out too much… that I only needed to train ***a little bit harder*** than the **ordinary** **people** I was competing against. )

You see… that’s the thing.

Being an Olympian doesn’t feel different.

Another question I get asked in the media a lot is

**“How has this medal changed your life?”** and I have to say…

I’m still me.

I don’t feel any different inside.

I still think of myself the same way you think of yourself…

I’m an ordinary person.

And *yet another* question that I get asked a lot:

**“What’s the best part of being an Olympic Champion?”** … and I have to say.. it’s all of the cool people I get to meet.

I’ve been at events with **other Olympic medallists**.

I still have trouble wrapping my head around that fact that ***I am one of them***.

It’s been so incredible to be able **to pick the brains** of the world’s *BEST* ATHLETES, time and time again.

I *love* **hearing their stories** and **learning** about *what made them successful…*

(They’re all quick to preach the typical core values like hard work, perseverance, dedication, etc…)

But what’s ***so*** **interesting** to me, is that

-they are all just **ordinary people**, who slip up here and there, and who have insecurities and struggles.

It’s made me realize that all of those other athletes that I was competing against are all just normal people too.

(**Ordinary people. )**

Marnie McBean (rower) made a comment once about **letting loose every once in a while**…even going out drinking with her teammates before days off in her Olympic lead-up… and you know what? That *really* helped me.

**-For one,** I was able to give myself **a pat on the back** for **not drinking** really at all.

(I didn’t proclaim a sober Olympic quest, but I had quickly come to terms with cause and affect of drinking and being completely useless in the gym….. even ***two days later***…)

-**the second reason Marnie’s comment helped me**…

**it *normalized* her.**

I sat there with her FOUR Olympic medals in my hand, (three of them GOLD) and saw her for what she was.

A real person.

***NOT*** *some Olympic robot superhero.*

She made me realize that it was okay to take it easy, every once in a while, if the goal of sacrificing EVERYTHING and missing out on ALL other aspects of life seemed **unmanageable**.

Sometimes, I **sooooo didn't feel like** going to the **gym...** maybe all my friends were going on a huge **mountain bike** ride, or even something relaxing like a **float down the river**...

I remember one day... it was a beautiful sunny day…it was almost 30°. All my friends were going up this **cool little lake** between Whistler and Squamish to float around and just **be together**…

**and I was supposed to go** spend the nicest part of the day inside, in a **gym**, sweating my butt off.

Or there were days when all of my friends were going **dirt biking too.**

I **worried** that skipping a gym session would mean **throwing my Olympic dreams out the window**.

I wanted to quit.

It was at times like these where I had to weigh the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of skipping workout to go have fun.

You sometimes will have to get **creative** to ensure you remain passionate. Think outside the box.

Thankfully I recognized the **value** in keeping things **fresh** and **exciting**, and I knew that even Olympic champions went and had fun sometimes.

II also knew that *a lot* of what i wanted to skip the by-the-book prep for was *actually* preparing me in a more **relevant** and **useful** way.

I was still working toward being a better Skicross racer while riding my mountain bike, and my dirt bike, I was just **approaching it from a different angle.**

**The goal of doing 95% of my scheduled workouts was much more manageable than 100%.**

And I always did my best to **make up for that last 5%**... if I skipped an upper body workout, I'd stay the next day, after my lower body workout and do it.  As long as I was continuously working in th right direction, each and every day.

🡪 I was on a mountain bike ride,

-I'd push that extra bit **harder** or

-go a little bit **further**

…to ensure that I got **a really good workout in.**

What I know now from my own experience, as well as all of the conversations I’ve had with other successful athletes, is that once you've developed that baseline strength...

(You are **strong enough** to *avoid injury*, and **fit enough** to *make it to the end of the race (or game*) without too much fatigue,

your time is better spent cross training and making sure you're **happy** and **having fun**.

It was a bit of a gamble, seeing as I had never been through an Olympic prep phase before…

And My biggest concern at that stage… was that my **confidence would be depleted** if I felt like I had cut corners *or slacked off*.

**I *needed* to go into the Olympics feeling like I was *more* *prepared* than any of the other athletes I would be competing against.**

**The nerves were the toughest part.**

There are about 15 races each season, on the world cup skicross circuit. I treated all of those like **stepping stones** too…

the pressure *gradually* increased,

but it was **never too big a jump to manage.**

(Based on my good results in the high pressure races that year before the Olympics, I was **named to the Olympic team before that 2009./2010 season even started.** All of **the media outlets wanted to talk to me**, because I was so likely to medal at the Olympics.

I remember my coach, Willy Raine, asking me why I was nervous in the start gate at a World cup in France.

🡪Haha… **wouldn’t you be?** **>> Talk about pressure!**

He said, “Ashleigh… all of these World Cup races are just **stepping stones** to **prepare** you for the big event… even *World Championships* are like practice for you…you just take them as they come, one step at a time, and treat them as training to set you up for the one that really matters.”

I **won that World Cup**, and then

I won the **World Championships**,

and the **X Games**,

and By the time I got to the Olympics,

I was **pretty used to** **being** **calm** in **high pressure situations.**

My flexible training regiment had officially been **proven** **sufficient**, and

**I was going into the Vancouver 2010 Olympics ranked #2 in the world.**

So don’t get me wrong, I'm *not trying to tell you that it won't be hard*, or thAt you can give a **half assed effort** and still accomplish your BIG goals.

………………… >. I'm just letting you know that **nobody's perfect**. It doesn't take a *by the book* **'perfect'** **journey** to come out on top.

The important thing was that ...

When the last day of training ended, I felt **prepared**.

We had **3 days** of training on the Olympic track.

And when that last day wrapped up**, I instantly relaxed.**

**(coolest feeling)**

I felt like I had done **everything in my power** to go into our HOME GAMES ready to **perform**.

I had no regrets about my Olympic prep…

I knew that there was ***nothing*** ***else*** I could *possibly* do to put myself in a **better position** to **go out there and represent our country well.**

RACE DAY:

I didn't wake up in the morning and think **"I'm going to try to win the Olympics today"**

I didn't need to think about that until it was a real possibility. All I needed to do was stick to the plan... Manageable goals... One step at a time... The only thing I needed to think about when I woke up was **eating a good breakfast**.

And I used my **creative** brain to think reframe anything that could have been perceived as negative, into a plus for me.

It was **sooooo stormy**, *but instead of being disappointe*d by that, like everyone else was, I thought **"this is great!** Everyone will be so disappointed by this, and I don't really mind the fog, slushy snow, and horrible visibility..." Of course it would affect me. But I was convinced it would affect me less than it would affect my competitors. (Grew up in whistler) (those storm days with my coaches came in handy)  I was **NOT** a **fairweather** **skier**!

**STEP 2: get to the hill with all my gear**

**STEP 3: training run… qualification run, etc.,..**

**STEPS 4/5 etc: round of 8, quarter finals, semis,**

**THEN: the FINAL:**

**Start gate:**

-I knew I that this was the culmination of so much preparation, both **deliberate** and **accidental**, and I kept telling myself

**“this event was made for you, you were made for this event… this is your chance to show everyone what you’ve been working toward represent!”**

-I knew I could just **trust my instinct**s and **go with the flow.**

--**butterflies**…but confidence from the previous rounds, the previous steps that I’d just **NAILED**!

I managed to **channel** the butterflies into a **positive energy**,

and convince myself that it was **good**…

it was my body **doing what it was supposed to do**…

it wasn’t a case of jittery nerves…

it was **my finely-tuned nervous system** doing was it was supposed to do to bring me **more energy** and **strength** and **focus**. I had never felt so **calm** and at **ease** in a high pressure situation.

When the gate dropped, I **sailed effortlessly** down the course, as if everything I’d ever done had led me to that and I was now just running on **autopilot**, watching as it all **unfolded** so *beautifully* before me.

The last question that I get asked a lot is

**“what did it feel like, when you knew you had won?**

**(relieved)**

**(so many people had put so much into …)**

So in summary, I want to reiterate that at your age **I was just like you.**

You can do *anything* you put your mind to you if you focus on doing something to work toward it each and every day, (even if it's from a **different angle**) and you avoid getting too hung up on that end result you are after…break it down into a step by step process…. “Manageable goals. “

   If you are always **pushing your limits**, challenging yourself, striving for excellence in everything you do, while maintaining a healthy balance of passion-fueling fun, you will be in a good position to **make the most of opportunities as they present themselves**.

Fun should always be the number one priority. Get creative with it to ensure that you love what you're doing by doing what you love.

*That's* when the good results follow.

I hope I have INSPIRED you to **dream big!**

I hope you feel EMPOWERED, knowing that nobody's perfect... **your BEST is good enough**...Olympians aren't *superheroes* to be placed on *pedestals*...

We are all just Ordinary people.

Winning races, getting elected, or accepted or hired is just about being better than the next ordinary person competing for that spot.

The fact is, with the right approach**, ordinary people can do extraordinary things.**

I wish I could come skiing with you next week!

It's so great, that your school has been doing this Ski Week for over 40 years.

Thanks so much for having me here… do a few turns for me!

Does anyone have any questions for me?