Be The Biggest Winner

"Sometimes it seems we need the rigidity of competition as a guide."

I'm going to make a rather embarrassing confession here: I love reality television. I love it in the way that I love candy—it's not for every day, but sometimes you just want to chew on something with corrosive properties.

I've been nursing a sports-related injury for the past two weeks, which has meant swapping out my regular gym time for sitting on the couch watching prime time programming. My latest reality indulgence has been a popular show on NBC called "The Biggest Loser."

For those of you who don't watch the show, it's basically an elimination-style competition show where overweight folks live sequestered on a sprawling complex (The Biggest Loser Ranch) and bid to lose the most weight. Trainers offer contestants healthy eating tips, fitness challenges, and then fill in the gaps with hour after hour of rigorous exercise.

Watching people exercise probably sounds like the most boring show ever. But the reason I am hooked on "The Biggest Loser" is because the work ethic of these contestants is incredibly inspiring. Many of them have—and always have had—the abilities and drive to accomplish their goals, but it just takes a little structure. The show affords them that opportunity, and their weekly weigh-ins provide motivation to lose enough weight to stay at the ranch. Many of them feel as though they just can't get the same results doing it on their own.

When it comes to the goals you've set for your plant, it seems as though setting your own pace can be a real problem, because oftentimes, personal goals just aren't quite enough. Sometimes, like these reality show contestants, you have to put yourself in a position where your goals become priorities that can't easily be

wriggled out of—since typical personal goals mean that if you do taper off, there are no real consequences. Just like an at-home struggle with weight loss: if you don't complete your allotted workout regimen for the week, what's the worst that can happen? It's not like it's televised…

Sometimes it seems we need the rigidity of competition as a guide. As you look towards this year and consider the ways in which you want to make your plants better, take it one step further—how are you going to hold yourselves accountable? I've spoken with plant managers in the past about some of their more ambitious initiatives— including applying for awards like Shingo or initiating Six Sigma—and it seems like, for many, it's the discipline that comes with these guided approaches that really does aid your overall improvement. One plant manager told me of his plant's Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award: "Some people can just do it on their own… but we needed a framework in which to do it, and the Baldrige process gave us that."

I'm not endorsing any one particular approach to quality or process improvement, however highlighting the fact that, should you need the framework, there are plenty of options available. My injury has made me realize how easy it is to get comfortable with doing just the bare minimum—hopefully enough episodes of "The Biggest Loser" will keep me adequately inspired to get back on the treadmill when I'm healed. If not, I guess I'll need to invest in a trainer.

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