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Strategies for a winning year from one of the world's top coaches
By Kay Wagner LMP
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Three years ago on December 30 we saw the whales here in Mukilteo. A lively splashing pod, their fins marking their magnificent journey. We called it a good omen for the new year. Certainly the most exciting New Year's Eve party I'd been to.

This year on December 30 I had another kind of life-changing experience. Chris MacDonald looked me in the eye and inspired me with his knowledge, enthusiasm and clarity. For 45 minutes he was my teacher, my guide, my guru. I began to understand how the Iron Woman under Macdonald's coaching won first place. The Danish women's cycling team that beat the German MEN'S team in the Copenhagen to Berlin Race, the many stages his team took in the Tour de France? With a man like Chris Macdonald in charge they HAD to win! Don't forget the RAAM. MacDonald completed the Race across America (Yes, coast to coast) in just ten days.

With stress levels rising in our culture I sought MacDonald out for guidance on coaching others to develop relaxation techniques. I asked, "How important is the need for deep relaxation on race day or when you are in a very stressful time?"

"I place it incredibly high on the list of importance. I think the biggest mistake I ever made is beginning to learn or implement the centering relaxation techniques in the final days up to the race. It's important learning to relax but extremely important that it's practiced on a daily basis. Practiced, because if it's not second nature to you, you'll be forcing it on race day. What you repeatedly do you become good at."

Whether you're preparing for a race, trying to drive to Seattle without losing your temper at the crazy drivers or wanting to stay calm when your kid shows up with a pink slip, you've got to have tools for keeping your cool.

"Having done 15 minutes of meditation every morning for a year I learned that the disciplined side of structured meditation makes the short, quick and dirty 'cool tools' much more powerful. Simple tools in the moment of crisis are only as good as they've been developed," MacDonald says.

Want to learn to relax? MacDonald suggests five factors for making change simple. "For people who want to get meditation into their life, factor #1 is Information. A CD is a great place to start. Factor #2 is Inspiration, a guide, a coach, role models, success stories. Get that dose of inspiration to start. Factor #3 is Strategies. What's the strategy to get this 5-10 minutes in? Get specific. What days? What times? Where? And then write it down.

"Factor #4 I describe as GHT. Good Habit Training. A lot of what we do is habits. Trying to break the old habits is really hard. Getting the new habits going is a lot easier. You've got to repeat it 21 times without having a set back. When you set back you've got to re-start. #5 on the list is Motivation. Motivation comes from within and builds on success and upon tools that are working for you."

How does MacDonald implement relaxation techniques? "I Listen to CD's or work with someone that knows about relaxation techniques. I don't think many people are very good at doing it by just closing their eyes and trying to relax. There's a reason it's called GUIDED meditation. You need a guide, a voice to carry you through, someone to help you take your mind and your body into a deeper level of relaxation. Other wise you start thinking about, 'Well maybe I should actually be on the ROAD to Seattle right now. Instead of trying to spend this ten minutes relaxing.'"

A common block to relaxing is, "I don't have time". MacDonald says, "Break down 24 hours for a

person. If you want to feel good in the next year, start in the R & R department. Rest and relaxation. Let's commit to using the relaxation and start with something simple, around five minutes. And don't cut it out of sleep time. Cut it out of TV time or a 10 minute break at work. And realize that it doesn't come easy to anyone."

MacDonald and I sipped green tea as the ferry went by, bright white in the rare December sunshine. Dazzling white Olympic Mountains matched the brilliant inspiration I had been blessed with in a few minutes with a man who grabs the best in life, develops it and then guides others to run with it.

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Stressed? Headaches? Insomnia?

Kay Wagner LMP has a special talent for helping people relax and improve their health. Kay offers "R &R" private sessions, coaching breathing, stretching and relaxation. She is a Licensed Massage Therapist and Certified Yoga and Pilates instructor. Learn to relax and rejuvenate in Kay's studio overlooking the mountains and water at 828 2nd St. Mukilteo WA 98275.

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