

THE POWER OF CHOICE

A journey to resilience

NIENKE VAN DIJK

The Power of Choice by Nienke Van Dijk

Copyright © 2017 by Nienke Van Dijk

The moral right of Nienke Van Dijk to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without prior written permission of the author, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN (ePub): 978-90-827782-1-2

ISBN/EAN: 978-90-827782-0-5

BONUS

CHAPTER TWELVE

The wind blew my hair off my shoulders as I stood in front the harbor gate in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. I was about to meet the sailing boat that we, my boyfriend and I, bought recently. I felt excited for the adventure that was coming.

We were going to sail this boat to the south of Portugal. *A small detail: I have never sailed on the sea before. I have to be even more straight with you: I am not even sure I can sail at all.* I was nervous about meeting the boat. *Is she as strong as we hope she is? Do I feel safe in her presence?*

My boyfriend, Ralph, had been preparing the boat

for some weeks already. I breathed the sea air and took a moment to look around.

This will be my life in the coming weeks. Harbours. Boats. Shorts. Hard work. Watching the sails. Sun. Wind. Water. My boyfriend and I on a 35-foot boat. Nothing else. Nobody else. Sailing the ocean to the mainland. And I have no idea what to expect, really. I have sailed the lakes in The Netherlands, but always with my father who knew what he was doing. I have no clue. What am I doing? What are we doing? This doesn't make sense. I should have paid more attention to my father when he wanted to teach me how to sail. Why was I so stubborn about learning to sail? It is a rhetorical question. A whole conversation went on in my head while I was stood in front of the harbor gate. The gateway to adventure.

I pulled out my cell phone and called him. “Ralph? I am in front of the gate.”

“I’ll pick you up. Give me 2 minutes.”

I took a picture with my camera of the harbor filled with boats. The sun was high at the blue sky. Masts as far as I could see.

It was high season so the harbor was packed. The wind blew through the rigging and halyards of the

boats. It was almost a concert with all the boats together, the ticking noise of their rigging. Not far from town but so quiet. Peaceful.

I saw Ralph in the distance. I recognized his silhouette. I started waving at him as if I was afraid he wouldn't see me. I hadn't seen him for weeks and I was excited. I'd missed him.

When he came closer my heartbeat rose. Working outside on the boat had given him a nice bronzing. He was even more handsome. He opened the gate with a charming smile and I knew immediately that he had missed me too. Hand in hand we walked to the boat. My stomach responded with each step closer to it. That nervous feeling increased.

The boat was not close to the entrance. We passed hundreds of boats. Big, small, plastic, wood, steel. All kinds. We turned the last corner and I immediately saw her. She stood out from all the other boats. She was little, but what a presence! Her name was BOSS and damn sure she was a boss. Ralph said nothing, but I could see he saw every emotion on my face. He entered the boat and invited me to do the same.

The boat was older than I was, but she didn't show

it at all. I instantly felt safe and enjoyed being in her presence. Her strength gave me peace of mind. All my sorrows concerning her were gone. She'd do all right. It would be Ralph and me who were the liabilities.

We used the next few days to clean the boat, buy provisions, and take her out for a first rehearsal sail.

Our first *real* trip would be ten days of sailing, more or less. Depending on the weather, the wind, and other circumstances. We had never done this before, but with the right plan, common sense, and taking it day by day, we would get there.

Finally it was time to go. With the rehearsal fresh in our minds, we set out to sea. The swells make us seasick. The first half day we were quiet, nauseous, and we took our time to get used to the movement of the boat. It was the middle of summer, but the weather was cloudy and rainy.

Near our destination, Fuerteventura, the wind increased. Beaufort wind force 7 up to 8. We'd been sailing for ten hours by this time, though, so we were used to the swells.

Ralph took the lead. I trusted the boat and I trusted Ralph. Ralph had only one day more of sea sailing

experience than I had, but at least he knew in theory what to do. At any rate, we managed to get to the harbor of Morro Jable in one piece after twelve hours of sailing. Entering the harbor and dock the boat was challenging. We had to find our routine to do this smoothly. We looked like amateurs at this point, which we were.

Our next stop would be Lanzarote. It would take about twenty hours to get there, which meant we'd have our first night at sea. And that night I will never forget.

The sea looked different at night. The beautiful blue ocean turned dodgy black. It was more difficult to estimate the height of the waves, but which I liked. Because I could not see the danger. I know that was a strange way to reassure myself, but it worked. It also helped that my eyes adjusted to the darkness quickly and we had land in sight the whole way. We could see city lights and airplanes. Ralph and I made up stories about where all those people in the airplanes were headed.

Just before midnight, I decided to go to sleep. One of us had to stay awake, so we split the night in shifts

of three hours. I wanted to stay outside and sleep in the fresh air, so I got my sleeping bag from inside and made myself comfortable in the cockpit. It was hard to fall asleep. My ears kept focusing on all the strange noises, and also the quietness.

After three hours Ralph was tired and wanted to sleep. I listened carefully to his instructions because I did not want to wake him unless there was an emergency. I was aware that I needed him to get to our destination safely and that he needed his rest. The boat was equipped with a GPS chart plotter, a navigation tool for boats that makes the boat sail automatically, according to the given information. I only needed to check if there were other boats in our neighborhood, where they were heading, and that our engine was not getting overheated.

The next morning around 8 o'clock we arrived at the harbor of Puerto Calero, Lanzarote. Tired from the shifts and our first-timer nerves, we fell asleep with all the lights on.

Our next stop would be Madeira. We needed some time to buy more provisions and repair things that had broken. The force of the ocean, the wind, was

strong. But overall we needed to regain our strength and energy. This adventure asked of us to be present all the time. We could not rely on our past experience. We could not rely on machines. We could use them, but there were so many factors that played an important role in this journey that we needed all of our senses to make no mistakes.

Mistakes could be fatal.

It would take about three days to get to Madeira, two nights at sea. We were used to the swells now and were no longer nauseous. We enjoyed our time sailing, reading, talking. When the wind was not changing, the boat could sail without adjustments for hours. We were one with everything around us. Each other, the wind, the water, the boat. Everything was connected.

But we also sailed close-hauled, which meant the sails were trimmed in tightly to generate maximum lift. It challenged the boat and its crew. The things we strapped tightly got loose anyway. Everything vibrated. The boat hit the waves hard. After one hit too many, the toilet tore out of its place and rolled around the boat. More things were broken by the forces of speed and pressure. But still, the boat was

strong and fierce. It was the crew that got weaker and weaker because of the lack of sleep. And because of all the dangers we envisioned.

The nights became my favorite moments. The silence, the darkness, the light of the moon, the clear sky, the bright stars. The glowing fishes in the ocean. Everywhere you looked there was water. No land, nothing else. You heard the waves, your own breathing, and nothing else. You and your thoughts. Mindful of being with yourself. Being in the moment. Not in the past, not in the present, but in that moment.

After three days of sailing, we saw land! Seeing land after days of only ocean was like discovering a new country. A new chapter. You got a bit of the feeling that a great discoverer like James Cook must have felt when he explored the world.

And the experience of entering a harbor, safe haven, is magic every time. We'd made it again.

The last bit of our journey was going to be our longest trip at sea—approximately five days sailing from the island Madeira to Lagos, south of Portugal. But the days flew by. The experience was amazing.

The connection to everything. Sailing is a metaphor for life. Everything is in motion all the time. You are in motion, the sea is in motion, the wind is in motion. The movements can be big or small, but it has to come together in harmony to move forward in the right direction.

On the fourth day, the wind increased at night. I was about to go to bed and I kissed Ralph goodnight. I brushed my teeth and took my clothes off and slid into my sleeping bag on one of the boat's berths. After only fifteen minutes or so, Ralph called me to put my clothes back on and come to sit in the cockpit. Without asking questions I get out of bed and put my clothes back on. I had noticed the change in wind by the movement of the boat. The squeaking and cracking were a lot louder than normal. The first thing I saw when I put my head outside was the height of the waves. And it was dark, so they were probably higher than I could see right now.

My stomach started to hurt. I could see the worry on Ralph's face.

"So, this is Beaufort force 6?" I asked.

"No Nien. This is force 8, with gusts of force 10."

I could only say, “Oh.”

I sat down in the cockpit and looked around. The sea was black, blacker than I had ever seen. The sky was dark black. Frightening black. Visibility was bad. And it was getting darker and darker minute by minute. The swells were getting bigger and higher. The wind was increasing in force. More and more. On the crest of the wave, you saw the whole ocean swirl. The sea was rolling. You could feel with every wave that this storm was picking up force. Brutal force.

The boat crashed down through one wave and back up to the crest. The bow took the impact as we rode through them. Ralph wanted to keep everybody, the boat, me, himself safe. He commanded me what to do. He did what he thought was right. No time for discussions. No time to doubt. Act.

Double-reefed mainsail and a small genoa on reach course. Ralph was not feeling comfortable with this.

Mainsail on one side, jib over the other side. This wasn't working well either.

The waves were crashing the boat sideways. Ralph was changing the sails and it only took a second before we were surprised by a crash jibe as the stern of the

boat unintentionally passed through the eye of the wind and the boom swung wildly to the other side.

The swing wasn't hard and nobody was hurt, but we needed to get the sail to the other side as soon as possible. Ralph tried and tried, but was not able to fix it. Finally he started the engine and was able to change the boat's direction.

We had no time to be happy because when we looked around we saw a big vessel coming straight at us. You could see that this boat was struggling with the weather as well.

Again Ralph started the engine and we made sure we were out of the way. But the boat came across the waves, which resulted in breakers. Waves crashed over the cockpit and us, taking away our breath, filling our mouths with salt water that we swallowed and choked on. It was overwhelming, literally. I needed a brief moment to get my act together after swallowing half the ocean and getting soaked from top to bottom. Soaked, cold, and overwhelmed.

I climbed down into the cabin to see...a battlefield. We were clearly not prepared for bad weather. The galley contents were everywhere, covering the walls

and floor with egg fluids, spaghetti, bulbs of garlic and onions. The table was not in place anymore. The dishes were not in the sink where we left them. One big mess.

I started cleaning, but the ride was still bumpy. I could not stay on my feet and after six bruises and a crushed finger, I gave up.

In the meantime, Ralph dropped the mainsail and tried to run away from the waves with a small genoa. It meant that we were sailing away from our destination to Morocco. But whatever was necessary for our own safety.

I couldn't sleep; the adrenaline was sky high. Inside the boat, the squeaking was hard, as if the boat could break into pieces at any moment. *This is okay, Nien*, I tried to reassure myself. *The boat has to be flexible to collect the flaps.*

Topside, I saw Ralph was still trying to keep himself and the boat together. But he was so tired that while he was steering the boat, his eyes fell down for a brief second. I knew he wanted to do this, though. And to be honest, he knew more what he was doing than I would, so even tired as he was, he was the best option.

I stayed with him in the cockpit, though.

We said nothing to each other. We were in survival mode. Watching the big waves. We were lost in the big waves for moments. The waves were black walls. The crests of the waves were white. Voluminous, dark waves with long white patches of foam. Incredible. A movie-worthy scene. On top of the waves, we had a magnificent view. Surreal. But by the water splashing in my face I knew it was real.

For some reason, we were not able to receive the weather forecasts. So I used the VHF marine radio-telephone to try to get a weather forecast from one of the bigger boats that must be out here in the same ocean.

“To all ships, to all ships, this is sailing yacht Boss. Does anyone have a recent weather forecast? Over.”

Wait. Nothing.

Again: “To all ships, to all ships, this is sailing yacht Boss. Does anyone have a recent weather forecast? Over.”

“Krrssshhhh... Sailing yacht Boss, this is vessel krssshssss, I will get back to you in a few minutes and check the weather forecast on Inmarsat for you, over.

Krsshhss...”

Yes! Someone heard me. Feels good to hear somebody else after five days at sea seeing no land, almost no other boats. Funny that you can be so happy with contact with a stranger.

“Krrssshhh... Sailing yacht Boss, I have the weather for you. The wind should be lying down in a few hours from now. As you get closer to Portugal the weather is better.”

“Thank you, sir! Thank you for your help!”

We were 200 miles away from the shore of Portugal, but this message gave us the strength to keep going, knowing it was going to be over soon.

Ralph stayed up all night, steering the boat over the dark ocean. I was amazingly calm. By early morning, Ralph was exhausted. He looked at me and he knew I would do okay. With confidence, he handed over the steering wheel to me, gave me some last instructions, and went to bed.

Have you ever been thrown into the deep end of a swimming pool? Have you ever taken a risk with confidence, not knowing what will come across your path but you take the leap anyway? Beaufort force 6,

waves of 3-4 meters. My trust in Boss grew only more with every bash and crash of the bow in the water. The view on top of the waves was magnificent. Visibility increased every hour. The sky became less dark. The wind decreased slowly. It was nothing compared to what Ralph did, but I felt like a real captain for a while there.

Twenty-four hours after the storm had begun, the ocean was smooth again. We had the most amazing sundowner, with almost no wind. That was a crazy twenty-four hours!

The next day we entered the harbor of Lagos. A luxurious harbor with everything you might need to recover from a storm. Twelve days sea sailing. Boss was definitely a boss.

I will never forget this boat trip and I will never forget my lessons learned. You can do more than you think you can do. Everything is connected and when everything comes together you can feel the power of nature. Don't forget your own power.

Also, people are built to survive and you will act when you need to. Sailing is a metaphor for life. Know your destination, but focus on the process. Make

THE POWER OF CHOICE

choices. As a human you're in motion, the wind is in motion, the sea is in motion. You have to find harmony with all these elements. Flow with them, which is different from blindly going with the flow. Enjoy being alone, in the moment.

This experience taught me to trust and act, and not to wait until you are ready. Everything you need is already within you. Plans never go as planned. Start and adjust to the circumstances with your destination in mind. Make decisions. Try. If it doesn't work out, try something else until you find something that works.

BONUS

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I have spent more hours in the gym practicing gymnastic routines than anything else except for school. But after a serious Achilles-tendon injury at the age of eight, I stopped doing sports for years. I skipped gym class at school as much as I could.

I lost that feeling of doing sports for a long time. I could not even remember what it was like. Then, in November 2011, I went with a friend to New York during the running of the NYC Marathon. That vibe! Runners high-fiving with strangers. The thousands of supporters along the route. Everybody cheering. Not only for the people they know but for everybody who

runs. It was one big party for the people running and for the supporters. This feeling, this experience was my motivation to start running as soon as I got back home. Not to run a marathon, but to feel what I saw on those faces of the runners. The joy, the fitness, the strength. It was contagious.

Two days after getting back from New York and still full of the energy I'd felt, I started to run. That was a big confrontation with myself and my condition. I was not able to run one kilometer without gasping for breath.

Wow, it had looked so easy!

In the park close to my home, I started running with an accompanying program on my iPod. From zero to five kilometers in ten weeks. I really enjoyed running, but it was hard at times. How to find the right speed so I could continue running without stopping?

Because of the experience in New York, I was really motivated to learn how to run. All those thousands of people with joy and the knowledge that they were able to run. In those ten weeks there was maybe one moment that I didn't feel like running. The

progression I made in those ten weeks was massive. In fact, I was able to run five kilometers straight without stopping.

I wanted more of this, so I continued with the second program, five to ten kilometers. Within two weeks I ran nine kilometers.

This was much faster than the program described, but my condition was ready for it. It was really easy. The power it gave me was huge. The sense of freedom. Being able to put on my shoes, walk out the door, and run for 50 minutes at any time was liberating. With this accomplishment in only twelve weeks I started to see new possibilities. *Why not go for fifteen kilometers?*

And this is how my confidence grew. How my belief grew. My belief in myself, in my body, in my will power. It was with a positive curiosity that I started exploring my capabilities. The goals I set for myself were challenging but achievable. At this moment I did not think about running a marathon. That was not why I started running. I just wanted to feel what I thought all those happy runners felt in New York. And I felt it while I was running. Freedom and strength.

Yes, the struggle in the beginning was real, but

when the number of kilometers grew, the struggle changed. At first the struggle was more physical. When the distances became longer, the struggle was more mental. Where the focus at first was mostly on myself, it changed when my confidence increased about my physical capabilities. Soon I'd often find myself in a trance state as I ran. *Is this what they call a runners high? I want more of this, this feels fantastic!*

And when I ran more kilometers I could sense a difference in what I was thinking about. I was not counting kilometers or thinking about speed. I was blank. I was not thinking about anything in particular.

Then an amazing thing happened. I started feeling much better after a run than before it. This wasn't only because of the exercise and the endorphins that run through my body but also because I often came home with answers to questions, solutions to problems and ideas. I hadn't consciously thought about this question or problem; these things just came to me. I know that sounds strange and, at first, it was strange to me.

Sometimes I didn't know I had a problem with a certain person or a situation, but after a run I knew

what I wanted to say to that person. Or an idea came in my head about a certain situation that had been bothering me unconsciously. I had heard about meditation and mindfulness, but I'd never researched what it actually was. When I read about meditation and mindfulness I realized that running was my meditation.

When I was able to run 20 kilometers, which was around six to seven months after I started running, I started to think about a full marathon. My progress was moving forward in a way that I'd begun to believe it was possible. I was not ready yet to commit myself to actually do it, but slowly in my mind the idea started to grow. And in two weeks I decided to go for it. I had nothing to lose.

And if I was going to do it, then it would be the marathon that got me running in the first place. New York.

With a schedule from a book, I planned my training until race day, November 4th. Everything went very smoothly. The training, my condition, my mental health. Every training session my confidence grew. Every kilometer was one step closer to run that

full marathon.

Two weeks before the full marathon, I decided last minute to run a half marathon. Just to get the feeling of a big organized event, to figure out a chaotic start with thousands of people, how I could best approach water stations, and other tactics. This half marathon went really well. My speed was better than I expected and my energy level was in balance the whole run. A perfect general rehearsal for my full marathon.

And then, just days before race day, Hurricane Sandy swept New York off her feet. The worst storm in New York since 1700.

The hurricane was followed by days of uncertainty and mixed emotions. All the news and all the images that came from New York were devastating. The flooded streets, the numbers of people who died, the people who were homeless, the streets without electricity and drinking water. It was heartbreaking.

And I also had my own disappointment. Which felt egocentric, because what was running a marathon compared to the tragedy they had to go through? But on the other hand, it was a goal which I had worked so hard for, been almost in my grasp, and then cruelly

yanked away.

Or not. Because there was no cancellation yet.

Wall Street was closed for two days. The airports were closed for a couple of days. But the attitude of New Yorkers shown by the media was *Nothing can beat us*. The communication around the marathon itself, however, was not clear. The flight I took to New York on Wednesday was one of the first flights that went after JFK Airport reopened. This was hopeful and I followed the news closely. First out of compassion with the people in New York, but second because of my own hopes and searching for clarity.

Do I need to forget about it or is there still a chance of running?

Friday mayor Bloomberg said that the New York marathon would inspire the city to move on. *This was hopeful.*

I was in New York and I had seen the damaged city, but I had also seen the resilience of the people to continue. But then, only hours after Bloomberg said, in my experience, the magic words, and with only forty hours until the race, the marathon was canceled by that same mayor Bloomberg. I overheard it in a

conversation in the bus.

I'd just come out of the financial district where there was still no electricity and firefighters were still pumping water away from the streets. The subway was not operating in this district. I had seen one of the worst affected neighborhoods and I was impressed by the damage, but also by the hard working people that didn't complain.

Still, I did not know if I'd heard correctly, so I asked the woman on the bus if there was actually news about the marathon. I saw the doubt in her face. She obviously did not want to tell me the bad news. She instantly knew by the look on my face I was a runner. And she said it very softly, but it was as if she yelled in my ear.

“Yes. The race is canceled.”

For a moment I said nothing. I could feel the adrenaline rushing through my veins. My throat squeezed, I couldn't breathe properly. I pressed the button to stop the bus. I needed to get out. *Out, out out...!* I needed fresh air. My best friend who'd come with me to New York didn't know what to say. I stepped out of the bus, onto the streets of New York.

Noooooooooo.....

Back in the more lively part of Manhattan where everything seemed normal, I burst into tears. My knees were weak. A dream fell apart for a brief moment.

We couldn't stay where we got off the bus. We went to a Starbucks nearby and sat down. I could not say a word. I was silent. I was stunned. *What just happened? Is this real? Within hours from hope and trust to losing it all.*

Don't get me wrong. I totally understood why the marathon was canceled. I had seen the damage with my own eyes. Parts of New York were like a ghost town. You entered Manhattan from Brooklyn with a bus because the subway was not operating fully. At 9:30 in the morning on Thursday morning, there was nobody on the streets. The traffic lights were not working. All the shops were closed because of the electricity problems. New York might have been the city that never sleeps, but in these post-Hurricane Sandy days, it was not the hustling bustling city as we know from the movies.

So yes, I understood that they needed all their resources to help people and fix things. But it was so

contradictory to what was communicated by that same mayor only hours earlier that I was in shock. After 45 minutes of realizing what had just happened, I got myself together. *It's a fact, deal with it. Time to have fun!*

“Let’s go eat and drink!”

Sunday, race day, I ran ten kilometers with hundreds of other runners. There was a sense of solidarity I will never forget.

I arrived back in Amsterdam with a feeling of having cheated, or maybe of being cheated. Either way, I was still determined to run a marathon. But my own limiting belief got in the way at that exact moment. I was ready to run a full marathon, I had done all my training. I had run every kilometer that was in my schedule, I was more than ready physically. But mentally this whole situation got to me. I kept running and I enjoyed the running, but running a marathon was no longer in my head. Looking back, it’s incomprehensible to me that I thought I’d never run another marathon. I was fit. I was ready. It had taken me half a year to get myself mentally ready for the challenge. I kept my physical condition enough to run

half a marathon. I needed to realize that I had already come so far. From not doing sports for 25 years to taking up running and being ready to run a full marathon in one year. It was beyond what I thought was possible. I did it all by myself.

And then the self-doubt began. *Can I do this a second time? Maybe I was just lucky. My parents are not really athletic. Why should I do this?*

No! I needed to prove myself that I could do it again. Months of training AND running that 42,195 meters. I signed up for a running course that was going to provide me with a personal schedule, a weekly training, organized long distance practice, and skill training. Meeting more like-minded people was great. So was sharing my progress and asking the people who had already run a marathon what it was like. Even sharing a bit of grief with runners who had also been in New York and had the same or maybe a different experience from those days.

This time the training was not going like it had the first year. I suffered injury after injury. I had days of not training, physiotherapists, dry needling, back in training, another injury, more physiotherapy, lower

training intensity. Building up the intensity. More kilometers. Another injury. Six weeks of not training during the last three months before the marathon.

With only six weeks left to the marathon of Amsterdam, I almost gave up. *How am I supposed to run the marathon when there's only six weeks left and I'm not being completely fit?*

While I was still recovering, my running coach said that I only had a chance if I tried. I could always stop, but it was not impossible. With his experience, with his expertise, I took this message very seriously. He believed it was possible. With his belief it was possible, and his belief in me, I continued the training with a revised schedule.

Two days before the marathon, it was unclear if I was able to run the marathon because of the injury in my calf. Even on race day, it was unclear. But I had nothing to lose. It was in my hometown. I could crawl home if I needed to. I bought compression socks at the expo when I was there to pick up my license to start. I was not planning on buying socks or to find any kind of solution. But I was open to a miracle. And of course, I knew there was no such thing as a miracle. But I was

passing the stand and I wondered if it would help. A chat with the salesman gave me no guarantees, of course. But it gave me hope and made me believe a bit more that it was possible. A short run with the socks a day before the event gave me even more confidence. No guarantees though.

After a short night, I woke up at 6 in the morning. I had prepared everything the night before. I ate, rested a bit more, and rode my bicycle to the start. Nervous. Excited. Ready. Everything to win. *Let's go!*

The first ten kilometers were easy. The left sock was putting more pressure on my left knee. *Oh no, not more pains?!* The pain and thinking about the pain did not contribute to the running. So, I ignored it. The next ten kilometers I needed to adjust my pace. I needed to let go of my finish time. *But hey, I am still running!* A phone call from my aunt with where she would be standing and cheering for me gave a shot of energy and a point to focus on. After my aunt, there were many friends and neighbors all along the way to the finish to cheer and support me. *What a rush!*

It gave me so much energy that I was not thinking about how many kilometers I had to go. I was not

thinking about pain. I was only thinking about all those lovely people who were there especially for me. Wow! I felt blessed and loved. My legs were still strong. My breath was still constant. My energy was still good. The last three kilometers were the hardest. I could smell the finish line, but I still needed to run those kilometers. I knew I could do it and nothing in my head was telling me otherwise. Seeing the old Olympic stadium made me feel like I had already finished, so that last round in the stadium was magic. I even sped up. *Why?* And with a big smile, I crossed the finish line only six minutes slower than I had wanted as my finish time.

Proud. Happy. Emotional. *I did it! Yes yes yes! I finally did it!* My injury did not get worse by running the marathon. I will never know if the socks were really necessary. But it at least helped me mentally to go. I needed to adjust my plan as I went along. But most important, I did it and I enjoyed it too. Not only running the actual marathon, but also the whole journey to get there. From beginning to end. And I still benefit from that journey.

I did not grow up with an athletic family. I did only

do sports myself for a very short period of time. But you are never too old to start and find something you like. This whole journey taught me that I am much stronger than I thought I was, both physically and mentally.

Make a plan, chunk it down, set realistic goals, and adjust the plan when necessary.

I have learned to embrace change and obstacles. To push through with setbacks and those setbacks are not failures as you learn from them and pursue. And ask for your support. You do not have to do it alone. You need it, not only in bad times but also in good times.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nienke van Dijk (1980) is a mindset coach and writer (author).

Nienke has many years of experience as a human resource professional in a wide variety of industries such as IT, lifestyle, maritime, media and non-profit.

With her many years of experience, extensive expertise, and deep understanding, she is able to guide people to get the most out of themselves and therefore their lives.

She currently works as a mindset coach and as a consultant for businesses to help them grow their people and, as a result, their businesses.

Her expertise is in the field of human relations, personal growth, and achievement of work/life

harmony. Using life lessons extracted from the practical experience of daily (business) life, she helps people break through whatever is holding them back from growing.

It is her mission to encourage and empower people to believe in themselves no matter where they are now in life. She believes that there are new levels to discover in your personal and business life.

Nienke is endorsed for her strong personality and honest feedback. She is non-judgmental and has a strong focus on effectiveness. She is gifted at identifying the root cause of a problem and the right system to create the path to lasting, sustainable results. She will encourage you to make the desired changes in your life. Her belief strategy is that regardless of what life has thrown at you, you can make an amazing future for yourself.

Movement is a word that is central in her life, emotionally, intellectually, physically, professionally, spiritually and socially.