

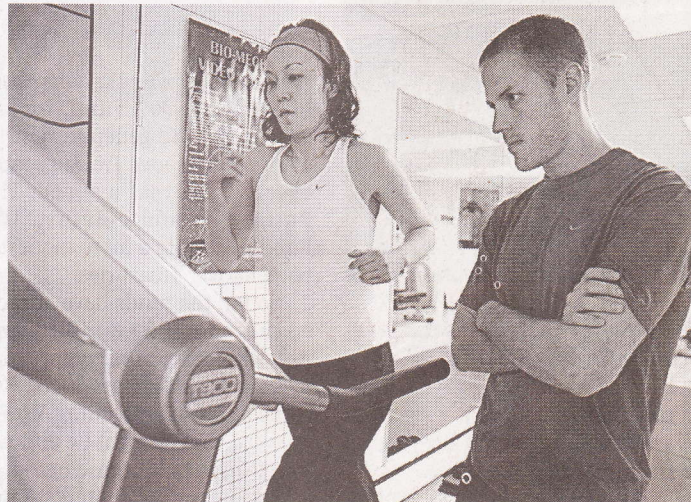
## ON THE JOB

# Coach sees the competitive edge in each client

By Cindy Atoji Keene  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A running coach may seem an extravagance, but for serious runners, a good coach can not only improve your performance but help you avoid injury and develop strategies to tackle tough races. Joseph McConkey, a running coach with Boston Running Center, said many runners don't know "how to organize energy to explore your own potential."

A certified USA Track and Field coach with a master's degree in exercise science, McConkey works with clients on everything from correct basic technique to building speed, strength, endurance and mental strength, too. Though some of his faster clients are competitive college and high school runners, one of McConkey's proudest successes is a 240-pound nurse who lost 90 pounds and completed the Boston Marathon. "To watch her go through 'beginner doubts' and push all the way through



KAYANA SZYMCAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Joseph McConkey of the Boston Running Center emphasizes proper technique, strength, endurance, and mental strength.**

was inspiring," said McConkey.

**What sort of people seek the help of a running coach?**

I have a mix of individuals, from CIA or FBI agents trying to fulfill the physical requirements of their application; lacrosse ath-

letes hoping to increase playing speed; marathon-minded folks looking to qualify for Boston; and others. I even have a couple of runners in Kenya who report to me — they need to run to another town to get onto a computer and communicate with me,

since they don't have Internet in their own neighborhood.

**How many of your runners completed the recent Boston Marathon?**

I have 15 to 20 runners do the marathon every year, and this year was no different. I go out to the course with a little notebook that has everyone's name, number, and what they're wearing. I wait at Cleveland Circle and do a loop all day back and forth, waiting for my runners to show up. Trying to find everyone on race day is tough, but most of the runners find me despite the crowds.

**What's the highest compliment an athlete can pay you as a running coach?**

Whenever a runner compliments me, I feel a little uncomfortable, because they did the hard work; I only helped to organize their training and avoid injuries, the key factors that got them to the starting line.

## JOB DOC

# Boosting morale takes time for a new boss

By Patricia Hunt Sinacole  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** *I was just hired into a role managing a small group of technical employees. From what I can gather, their former manager's style took a toll on the morale of the entire department. These employees behave in a very timid and introverted manner. They seem afraid of their own shadows. There is very little interaction. Employees come in and put their heads down and do their work. No one goes to lunch together. It is concerning to me. How do I improve the work environment? The other departments seem OK. I really think it is just my department.*

**A.** As the new manager, you have a tremendous opportunity to rebuild and repair the culture. First, ask questions and observe your department in a non-threatening way. Meet with your employees one-on-one. Ask them what they like and dislike about their jobs. Listen, really listen, when you meet with employees. No cellphones, no checking e-mails, no distractions, and good eye contact.

Having a voice and a safe place to share likes and dislikes is incredibly important. You are also sending a message to your employees.

Your message is "I am listening. I care. I hear you. You are important to me." What a won-

derful message to send as a new manager!

Second, as you develop a rapport with your employees, ask them what one thing they would change about their work life. Sometimes you will be able to make a small change that will be simple and improve an employee's work life considerably.

Third, ask your employees for ideas on how to improve the workplace. For technical employees, sometimes professional development is of interest. Or, do employees want a chance to connect on a regular basis with their peers over pizza and sodas? I could give you 1,001 ideas on how to improve your workplace. But who knows better than I?

Your employees.

Don't get discouraged if one or two of your ideas are met with little fanfare and few accolades. Sometimes it takes time for employees to understand that your motives are pure. Employees who are detached may take time to reengage. It takes time. You will have to earn their trust.

Lastly, keep an open door. Ask questions. Be approachable. Walk the talk. Employees will appreciate your effort. Cultural change requires effort and it takes time.

*Patricia Hunt Sinacole is chief executive of First Beacon Group, a human resources consulting firm in Hopkinton.*