

# *Chasing the Runner's High: My 60-Million-Step Program*

BY RAY CHARBONNEAU

The most common how-to running book is a step-by-step, didactic approach to the sport and lifestyle. Instructions and guidelines are laid out carefully, rationally, and precisely. The table of contents says it all: here is what you do when and how in order to succeed in the sport.

A handful of books have taken a more personal approach. In fact, I wrote one of them myself, way back in 1978, just after I started working for *Runner's World*. It was called *Return to Running* and recounted the steps—and missteps—I had taken to drop 45 pounds and get back into a running lifestyle. It was a sort of personal memoir of what I had done to return and how that journey played out. It detailed some wrong turns down blind alleys and essentially wore /*QQ*: *wrapped together*? *XQQ*/ together the reasons why it is always better to learn your lessons early so you can straighten your path to success.

Ray Charbonneau has been at running for quite some time, and he has learned as much by taking wrong turns as by steering a straight course. His approach to teaching a runner how to do it is to tell stories of his own life and running career. It sounds as though that might be a rather boring way to learn how to run because it is always being filtered through someone else's experiences. In the hands of some runners, that intimate approach to the wonders of running could get real old real fast.

What Charbonneau has going for him is that he is a very genial running companion and his writing is clear and clean and uncomplicated. And he is very good at getting across the nuances of the civilian becoming a runner.

But just because he is genial doesn't mean that he is a wimp.

Take page 97, where he discusses racing:

"I admit it. I want to beat people. Other people. I want to be the one who congratulates the lesser runner for putting forth a good effort. I want to modestly tell others that it was just a good day, and that some other time, I'm sure they'll come out on top. All the while, inside I'm dancing and shouting 'In your face, slugs!' That doesn't make me a *bad* person—as long as I keep it inside."

He goes on with some solid advice toward achieving that goal:

“The key to achieving the victories we all crave is to find an environment that’s conducive /*QQ: conducive? XQQ*/ to your success. Look for races that play to your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. Maybe you’re strong on hills or especially sure-footed on rough trails. Maybe you run best first thing in the morning, or in the heat of summer. Maybe you’re better off if you avoid races with free beer. Figure out what works best for you, search out the race that fits, and sign up!”

He actually does sneak in a bit of the didactic, however. On page 237, when the book is nearly finished, he offers an appendix titled “Advice for the New Runner.” It’s 8 1/3 pages of straight, boring stuff: “Once you pick your course, begin by alternating running for a minute with walking for a minute until you make it all the way around the entire loop.”

See? Pretty deadly dull when presented that way. Better with Ray’s patter and his personal explanations.

And for those interested in going beyond regular running to running ultras, he includes two chapters of up-close, inside-the-race stories of doing a 50-miler and then a 100.

Ray comes across as a pleasant if determined guy, just the kind of fellow you would like along on your weekend long run.