

MACPA'S

# STATEMENT

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# Italian Lessons:

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*How a 1,000-mile bike race can help  
get you through tax season*

By Greg Conderacci  
Business Learning Institute Senior Fellow





*“Knowing thyself” is extremely important... It bears directly on how well you cope with serious stresses, anxiety, pain, injury, illness, cold, heat, thirst, hunger, fatigue, sleep deprivation, boredom, loneliness and isolation.”*

—U.S. Army Ranger Handbook.

If the Ranger Handbook sounds like a description of tax season to you, read on. I have a little advice for you, based on a rather unusual experiment: a 1,001-mile bicycle race around Italy.

So what does tax season have to do with a bike race?

For years, I have found that business and, indeed, life imitate ultra-long-distance cycling. All three activities are largely mental games. All three can strain the limits of endurance to the breaking point – and beyond. All three demand a high level of decision-making while tolerating pain and exhaustion. And, finally, all three create profound insights into your character.

“Oh, so that’s what I really am,” is a pretty common “ah-ha” at the end of a multi-day race.

The 1001 Miglia Italia, one of the longest bicycle races of its kind in the world, is a great test bed. It’s long, complex and difficult. (Racers climb the equivalent of twice Mount Everest in about five days or fewer.)

Yep: it’s like tax season.

**“...if you just keep going, steadily and surely, you will finish the race.”**

### **LESSON NO. 1: PREPARE TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE**

I prepared for months for the August race. But I didn’t just ride thousands of miles, which would be typical preparation – I learned Italian. Why? Because the race weaves through hundreds of miles of Italian back roads, far from the English-speakers in the cities. I knew I’d have to communicate in their language, not mine.

Are you speaking your clients’ language? Do you know what their expectations and needs are in advance of tax season?

### **LESSON NO. 2: PACE YOURSELF**

You would think that 1,000-mile race would start slowly. No such luck. From the gun, the Italians in the pack tear down the road at more than 25 mph, as if the race is 25 miles and not 40 times that long. With the adrenalin pumping, the temptation is to follow – and burn out early.

I let them go.

It’s difficult to do, but developing a work plan before the season and sticking to it can mean the difference between an exhausted, stressful first quarter and a sane one.

### **LESSON NO. 3: DON’T RIDE ALONE**

Any bicycle racer can tell you: A pack can move faster, longer than an individual rider. Riders can share the responsibility of the lead position, which must fight the wind, while the other racers can draft comfortably in the slip stream. If a rider gets in trouble, there are others to lend a hand with a flat tire or a broken spoke. Emotionally, it’s much easier to share the pain with a fellow traveler than go it alone.

The stresses of the season are best shared. Fight the temptation to “go into the cave” and work alone. Find “energy buddies” who will support you – and whom you can support.

### **LESSON NO. 4: KNOW WHERE YOU ARE**

The 1001 Miglia Italia is a 1,000-mile exercise in navigation under stress. You see,

there are few route signs in Italy on back roads and almost no posted road names. The scenery is beautiful, but it’s hard to pick out landmarks – especially at night. And I ride through the night three times. The mountains and miles seem to go on forever. It’s clear, though, that it’s better to go a little slower and not get lost than to go too fast and head miles out of the way.

Understand that, at times, the workload may seem insurmountable. Slow down and look at the map. Remind yourself that, if you just keep going, steadily and surely, you will finish the race.



*Greg Conderacci in the 1,000 mile race.*

### **LESSON NO. 5: REST AND RECOVER**

I realize that, when I am about four days and 800 miles into the race, I am becoming very, very stupid. Running on about 10 hours’ total sleep to that point, I am having difficulty remembering even the simplest things. I am cranky. Whenever I feel lost, which is almost always, I am tending to panic. I stop repeatedly to ask directions. I am having difficulty clipping my feet into my pedals.

Relative to my fellow riders, I am doing very well. However, ahead lies some of the steepest climbs and sharpest descents. Corkscrew roads with marginal surfaces that had been featured in this year’s Giro d’Italia. Not the kind of road to tackle half-asleep. I check into a bed & breakfast and sleep for six hours, which moves me far back into the pack. But I ride well the last day of the race and finish healthy.

Even in April, sleep is good. It can save you from making the kind of mistakes that cost clients money and you a good reputation.

*BLI Senior Fellow Greg Conderacci completed the 1001 Miglia Italia Aug. 22. A long-distance bicycle rider for years, he shares his secrets of achieving and maintaining high energy levels – at work and at play – in his course “Energy Management: Finding the Strength to Get It Done.”*