

Feelings are Fickle and Provide Poor Guidance!

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Have you ever felt “on top of the world”? It’s a great sensation, isn’t it? How long does it last for you? A couple of days maybe? Maybe a little longer if the situation is a big deal in your life?

How do you think Michael Phelps is feeling these days? (Phelps won eight gold medals in swimming in the Beijing Olympics. His 14 Olympic gold medals are more than any other individual in history.) The media love him; he’s the focus of their attention. So, how long do you think his euphoria will last?

The excitement always fades, doesn’t it? So, why does it feel so hopeless when you feel “down”? If jubilation passes quickly, won’t your disappointment, discouragement, or feelings of inadequacy also dissipate? You may know intellectually that they will, but when you are in low spirits, it *feels* permanent!

Imagine that you are Milorad Cavic. Never heard of him? He swims for Serbia and last week won his first Olympic medal. That’s cause for celebration, right?

The videotape of the final seconds of the 100 meter butterfly has been shown repeatedly on television. Cavic was ahead and cruising to the wall, when Michael Phelps made a final burst, beating him by .01 second, the smallest increment the timing equipment measures.

Imagine that you train for eight years. At age sixteen, you make it to the 2000 Olympics--but your times aren’t fast enough to qualify for the finals. You keep working and you make it to the 2004 Olympics, but again you find disappointment in the early heats.

Four years later during the preliminaries, you set a new Olympic record, 50.76 seconds! Having prepared your whole life for this moment, your dream is here! Amazingly, you swim .17 seconds faster than the record you set just two days ago! Yet a Michael Phelps fingertip grabs your gold medal.

How would you feel? You’ve trained all your life, and the guy who’s already receiving so much glory gets even more attention. How many times might you lament, “If only I had taken one more stroke?”

In an interview, Milorad confessed, “If I had lost by a tenth of a second or two-tenths of a second, then I could probably be a lot cooler about this. But with a hundredth of a second, gosh....I think if we did this again, I could win it.”

Ah, but it doesn’t work that way. The results are in the record books. Milorad set a fast pace, but Michael broke his Olympic record. This seventh win tied Phelps with the 1982 record of Mark Spitz for the most gold in any single Olympics.

Have I generated some compassion in you for Milorad Cavic? Does he feel elated because he won an Olympic medal? Or does he feel disappointed because he missed a gold medal by less than an inch? With all the attention on “the winner,” does Cavic feel like a “left-out loser”?

Only those closest to Milorad will know. He may not even reveal his deepest feelings to them.

So, what does Milorad do now? Does he redirect his life, focusing on something new? Or does he rededicate himself to swimming, coming back in four years with new commitment and hope?

We all experience disappointments in life. You have them, and so do those who look to you for direction. How do you help them? What counsel do you offer?

Feelings are fickle. They change quickly. Feelings may be good indicators of what’s going on inside us, and we should investigate what they represent. But feelings make poor rudders. Allowing feelings to guide your choices sometimes causes you to expend your limited time and energy in unproductive ways. For making decisions, your values and your vision for the future are far more reliable!

Leaders have feelings, too! Leaders sometimes need a safe place to blow off a little steam or to think creatively about “what might be.” Contact Dennis Hooper at dhooper2@juno.com or (478)-988-0237.