

# Roger Bannister.

## Overcoming self limiting beliefs

[http://www.maximizepossibility.com/employee\\_retention/2007/11/limiting-belief.html](http://www.maximizepossibility.com/employee_retention/2007/11/limiting-belief.html)



This is about overcoming self limiting beliefs. It was done with good planning, breaking it down into 4 laps each of less than 1 minute with helpers (pacers) and team work, and some smart thinking.

On May 6, 1954, the Roger Bannister did what no man could possibly do previously. Bannister became the first man to break the 4 minute mile. Prior to that day, it was commonly accepted that no man could break the 4 minute mile barrier. It was believed that the 4 minute mile was *physically impossible*. It was commonly accepted as a fact.

The reality was ..... The four minute mile was a **psychological barrier** more than anything else!

*The power of your mind is incredible. Your “limiting beliefs” or “mental barriers” are profoundly more powerful than physical. What are you thinking about?*

Forbes at the time called the breaking of the 4 minute mile by Bannister one of the greatest athletic achievements (check out [http://www.forbes.com/2005/11/18/bannister-four-minute-mile\\_cx\\_de\\_lr\\_1118bannister.html](http://www.forbes.com/2005/11/18/bannister-four-minute-mile_cx_de_lr_1118bannister.html) )

Bannister wasn't alone in his new paradigm. *Once it became mentally feasible, others would join him...* Within 56 days, John Landy broke Bannister's record in 3 minutes and 57.9 seconds in Finland.

By 1957, 16 other runners had also broken the 4 minute mile.

***Change your thinking to change your results.***

**Exercise:**

1) What mindsets do you have that are getting in your way or restricting you?

Examples might be:

- Today's not my day?
- Some people are luckier than I?
- I can't work with...
- Mondays aren't good for me...

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2) What is your "Four Minute Mile Barrier"?

Opportunity! Probe the limiting beliefs, mental barriers (like the 4 minute mile), or negative attitudes that you are keeping in your mind...

- Write them down.
- Change the "I can't" to "I will".
- Remove the negative thinking.
- Decide to break through your mental barriers.

The choice is yours.

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3) List your 3 main ambitions for the next 3 months.

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4) What has stopped you achieving these or other ambitions in the past?

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**Now go Maximize Possibility!**

When Bannister crossed the finish line of Oxford’s Iffley Road track on May 6, 1954, he could hardly see straight. Completing the mile in 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds, he had not only trimmed two seconds off the world record, but also run the world’s first sub-four-minute mile.

“People thought it was like bouncing off a brick wall,” explains close rival John Landy, who had come within three seconds of the four-minute mark six times.

“It was a sense of relief,” says Bannister, recalling the momentous event more than 50 years later. “There was a mystique, a belief that it couldn’t be done, but I think it was more of a psychological barrier than a physical barrier.”

Landy, who broke Bannister’s record with a 3 minute 58 second finish only six weeks later, argues otherwise. “It has nothing to do with psychology,” he says. “It was just a matter of having the right runners at the right level of training and the right set of circumstances.”

**Exercise:**

Landy might be right. However, the psychological barrier was there.

Bannister actually used a bit of “Landy logic” to help himself overcome the psychological barrier that people had imposed.

Change the word Impossible to “I’m possible” --- and list at least 3 things that you can achieve that you previously thought was impossible, or hard to attain. Do you really want these things?

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In 1954 it seemed unlikely--maybe even impossible--that anyone could run a mile in less than four minutes. Several runners had come close--Sweden's Gunder Haess had run the mile in four minutes and 1.4 seconds nine years previously--but no one could break through the four-minute barrier. People began to believe that it couldn't be done. Until Britain's Roger Bannister. Competing at Oxford's Iffley Road track on May 6, 1954, the 25-year-old medical student wowed some 3,000 spectators when he crossed the finish line in three minutes and 59.4 seconds. Once the psychological barrier had been broken, mile times kept falling. Bannister's record stood a scant six weeks before John Landy of Australia ran

the mile in three minutes and 58 seconds. The current world record is three minutes and 43.1 seconds (2008).

Bannister, arguably the most famous record-setter in the mile, is also the man who held the record for the least amount of time, at least since the IAAF started to ratify records.

**Sir Roger Gilbert Bannister**, CBE (born 23 March 1929) is an English former athlete best known as the first man in history to run the mile in less than 4 minutes. Bannister became a distinguished neurologist and Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, before retiring in 2001.

### **Early running career.**

Bannister was inspired by miler Sydney Wooderson's remarkable comeback in 1945. Eight years after setting the mile record and seeing it surpassed during the war years by the great Swedish runners Arne Andersson and Gunder Hägg, Wooderson regained his old form and challenged Andersson over the distance in several races.

### **Exercise – Inspiration.**

Bannister was inspired to become a great runner and a great neurosurgeon.  
What do you want to do?

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Do you have any special heroes or people who inspire you?

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Why do they inspire you?

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Like Wooderson, Bannister would ultimately set a mile record, see it broken, and then set a new personal best inferior to the new record.

Bannister started his running career at Oxford in the autumn of 1946 when 17. He had never worn running spikes previously or run on a track. His training was light, even compared to the standards of the day, but he showed promise in running a mile in 1947 in 4:24.6 on only three weekly half-hour training sessions.

He was selected as an Olympic "possible" in 1948, but declined as he felt he was not ready to compete at that level. However, he was further inspired to become a great miler by watching the 1948 Olympics. He set his training goals on the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki.

Chastened by some lack of success, Bannister started to train harder and more seriously. He started winning regularly, and was renowned for his fast finish.

Bannister suffered defeat, however, when Yugoslav Andrija Otenhajmer, aware of Bannister's final-lap kick, took a 1500 m race in Belgrade out at near-record pace, forcing Bannister to close the gap by the bell lap. Otenhajmer won in 3:47.0, Bannister set a personal best finishing second in 3:48.4. Bannister was no longer seen as invincible.

### **Exercise – Challenges**

Bannister was challenged by the 4 minute mile. This was a goal that many considered unattainable – yet he achieved it.

What challenges do you face at present?

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How can you overcome these challenges?

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### **The 1952 Olympics**

Bannister avoided racing after the 1951 season until late in the spring of 1952, saving his energy for Helsinki and the Olympics. He ran an 880 on 28 May in 1:53.00, then a 4:10.6 mile time-trial on 7 June, proclaiming himself satisfied with the results. At the AAA (the British Amateur Athletic Association) championships, he skipped the mile and won the 880 in 1:51.5. Then, 10 days before the Olympic final, he ran a 3/4 mile time trial in 2:52.9, which gave him confidence that he was ready for the Olympics as he considered the time to be the equivalent of a four-minute mile.

His confidence soon dissipated as it was announced there would be semi-finals for the 1500 m at the Olympics, and he knew that this favoured runners who had much deeper training regimens than he did. When he ran his semi-final, Bannister finished fifth and thereby qualified for the final, but felt "blown and unhappy."

The 1500 m final on 26 July would prove to be one of the more dramatic in Olympic history. The race was not decided until the final meters, Josy Barthel of Luxembourg prevailing in an Olympic-record 3:45.28 (3:45.1 by official hand-timing) with the next seven runners all under the old record. Bannister finished fourth, out of the medals, but set a British record of 3:46.30 (3:46.0) in the process.

### **Exercise – Setting New Goals.**

If a plan doesn't work, don't be afraid to change it.

1) What areas in your present plan are you unsure of?

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2) Do you have a backup plan (a "Plan B")?

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3) Will it be hard or easy to make adjustments to your plan? Give reasons for your answer.

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## **Bannister sets a new goal**

After his failure at the 1952 Olympics, Bannister spent two months deciding whether to give up running. He decided on a new goal. It was to be the first man to run a mile in under four minutes.

Accordingly, he intensified his training and did hard intervals. (Interval training is broadly defined as repetitions of high-speed / intensity work followed by interval periods of rest or low activity. This training technique is now often practiced.

As a medical student, Roger Bannister chose to use his lunch hour for a 9 minute jog to Paddington track, where he ran 10 X 400 m in about 60 s with two minutes rest, then he ran back to work. The whole procedure took 46 minutes, leaving him 14 minutes to eat his lunch.

On 2 May 1953, he made an attempt on the British record at Oxford. Paced by Chris Chataway, Bannister ran 4:03.6, shattering Wooderson's 1945 standard. "This race made me realize that the four-minute mile was not out of reach," said Bannister.

On 27 June, a mile race was inserted onto the programme of the Surrey Schools athletic meeting. Australian runner Don Macmillan, ninth in the 1500 m at the 1952 Olympics, set a strong pace with 59.6 and 1:59.7 for two laps. He gave up after 2 1/2 laps, but Chris Brasher took up the pace. Brasher had jogged the race, allowing Bannister to lap him so he could be a fresh pace-setter. At 3/4 mile, Bannister was at 3:01.8, the record - and first sub-four-minute mile - in reach.

But the effort fell short with a finish in 4:02.0, a time bettered by only Andersson and Hagg. British officials would not allow this performance to stand as a British record. Bannister felt, in retrospect, that this was a good decision. "My feeling as I look back is one of great relief that I did not run a four-minute mile under such artificial circumstances," he said.

However, other runners were making attempts at the four-minute barrier and coming close. At the end of 1953, Australian John Landy ran 4:02.0. Then early in 1954, Landy made some more attempts at the distance. On 21 January, he ran 4:02.4 in Melbourne, then 4:02.6 on 23 February and at the end of the Australian season on 19 April, he ran 4:02.6 again.

Bannister had been following Landy's attempts, and was certain his Australian rival would succeed with each one. But, knowing that Landy's season-closing attempt on 19 April would be his last until he travelled to Finland for another attempt, Bannister knew he had to make his attempt soon.

## **Bannister's Four-Minute Mile**

It was a cold and blustery spring day in 1954 when Roger Bannister stepped onto the track in Oxford, England, in an attempt to make athletics history. For more than a year the slender, sandy-haired medical student had trained relentlessly with one goal: to become the first man to run 1 mile in under four minutes.

The wind, which had gusted up to 40.2 km/h (25 mph) in the hours before the race, dropped slightly as Bannister and his race opponents toed the starting line on the damp cinder track. Low clouds scudded above the English countryside surrounding the Iffley Road track. The gun sounded, and Bannister set off to try and break a barrier that many believed unbreakable.

The mile run has exerted a particular fascination ever since runners began competing against one another. With their combination of speed, endurance, and power, milers are considered the purest runners in track and field. Although distances in international competition (including the Olympics) are computed in meters, the mile run remains a part of many major track meets, and the holder of the mile world record is still considered the premier middle distance runner in the world.

Two great Swedish runners, Arne Anderson and Gunder Hagg, swapped the record back and forth several times during the 1940s. In 1945 Hagg recorded a time of 4:01.4, which had stood for nine years when Bannister took the track for his record attempt.

After graduating from Oxford, Bannister went on to medical school at St. Mary's Hospital in London while continuing to train as a runner for the British Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) team. Applying his medical research, he calculated precisely the amount of oxygen intake a runner would need to sustain a pace of 60-seconds per quarter-mile. He ran consecutive quarter-miles at a punishing pace, strengthening his heart and lowering his pulse rate from the low 70s to below 50. His slender build (Bannister was 6 ft 1/2 in and 154 pounds), long stride, and great endurance made him an ideal miler. So did his intelligence and strength of will.

By May 1954 Hagg's record had stood for almost a decade and several runners were threatening to break 4 minutes. John Landy of Australia and Wes Santee of the United States had both run the mile faster than 4 min 3.5 sec. Bannister himself had run 4 min 2 sec in a specially paced run. The summer track season, Bannister had calculated, would see the four-minute barrier fall. Largely a self-taught runner, he accepted the training of Austrian Fritz Stampfl in the months leading up to his record attempt. They set their sights on a small, early May dual meet between Oxford and the British AAA. That Thursday morning, May 6, Bannister took a train to Oxford from London, where he had been studying for his

final examinations. In the mile run that day he would be paced by AAA teammates Chris Chataway and Chris Brasher.

The inclement weather drove Bannister to consider abandoning his record attempt. According to athletics lore, Bannister kept his eye on a flag at one end of the Iffley Road track; a few minutes before the start of the mile, the flag drooped, signaling a respite from the gusty winds. The race was on.

The nervous runners false-started once before setting off cleanly. As planned, Chris Brasher led Bannister through the first half-mile. After a half lap (200 meters), Bannister called out to his teammate: "Faster! Faster!" Accelerating, the runners sped through the first quarter-mile in 57.5 seconds-ahead of pace. At 600 meters, Stampfl shouted from the infield: "Relax! Relax!" Running smoothly behind Brasher, Bannister reached the half-mile mark in 1 min 58.2 sec.

Chataway sprinted into the lead, with Bannister on his heels. The third lap was the slowest yet: 62.3 seconds. Bannister needed a 59-second final quarter to break 4 minutes. He took the lead with 300 meters to run and began a long sprint to the finish line. Famous for his finishing kick, Bannister poured it on, his head thrown back and his face contorted in pain. He sprinted through the tape and collapsed, utterly exhausted, in the arms of his coach. His time: 3 min 59.4 sec. The insurmountable barrier had fallen.

Bannister's world record stood for only seven weeks: John Landy ran a superb 3 min 58 sec in Turku, Finland, on June 21. In August of that year Landy and Bannister met at the British Empire Games in Vancouver, Canada, in one of the most celebrated mile races of all time. Bannister outsprinted Landy in the final 100 meters to win in 3 min 58.8 sec.

Bannister himself ran competitively for only a few more months, giving up the sport to pursue his medical career. John Landy finished third in the 1500 meters at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia. Bannister went on to a distinguished career as a physician and sports official. He always downplayed the significance of his historic run, asserting that the four-minute mile was inevitable and that the true spirit of athletics lay in competition, not in a stopwatch reading.

"Naturally, we wanted to achieve the honor of doing it first," he said after his record-setting run, "but the main essence of sport is a race against opponents rather than against clocks."



*Blue plaque recording the first ever sub-4-minute mile run by Roger Bannister on 6 May 1954 at Oxford University's Iffley Road Track.*

The race was broadcast live by BBC Radio and commented on by Harold Abrahams, of "Chariots of Fire" fame.

The roar of the crowd drowned out the rest of the announcement. Bannister's time was 3 min 59.4 s.

### **Quotes.**

- "The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win."
- Roger Bannister on breaking the 4-minute mile (Cameron, 1993: 185): "No longer conscious of my movement, I discovered a new unity with nature. I had found a new source of power and beauty, a source I never dreamt existed."

### Exercise – Strategy.

Two other runners, Brasher and Chataway, provided pacing while completing the race. Both went on to establish their own track careers.

1) What was Chris Brasher’s role? Why was it important?

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2) What was the role of Chris Chataway, who has better known for longer distances such as 5000 metres?

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3) Bannister had a special skill for the last 200 yards. What was it?

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4) Why was it so very important to have an effective Plan of Action to overcome the self limiting beliefs of the day?

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5) Do you have an effective plan of action?

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6) Who can help you?

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The claim that a 4-minute mile was once thought to be impossible by *informed* observers was and is a widely propagated myth cooked up by sportswriters and debunked by Bannister himself in his memoir, *The Four Minute Mile*, 1955. The reason the myth took hold was that 4 minutes was a nice round number which was slightly better (1.4 seconds) than the world record for nine years—longer than it probably otherwise would have been because of the effect of World War II in interrupting athletic progress in the combatant countries.

Note that the Swedish runners Gunder Hagg and Arne Andersson, in a series of head-to-head races in the period 1942–45, had already lowered the world mile record by 5 seconds to the pre-Bannister record.

What is still impressive to knowledgeable track fans is that Bannister ran a 4-minute mile on *very low-mileage training* by modern standards.

Just 46 days later on 21 June in [Turku](#), Finland, Bannister's record was broken by his rival John Landy of Australia, with a time of 3 min 57.9 s, which the IAAF ratified as 3 min 58.0 s due to the rounding rules then in effect.

## Legacy

On the 50th anniversary of running the 4-minute mile, Bannister was interviewed by the BBC's sports correspondent Rob Bonnet. At the conclusion of the interview, Bannister was asked whether he looked back on the 4-minute mile as the most important achievement of his life. Bannister replied to the effect that 'no, he rather saw his subsequent forty years of practicing as neurologist and some of the new procedures he introduced as being more significant'. His major contribution in academic medicine was in the field of autonomic failure, an area of neurology focusing on illnesses characterized by certain automatic responses of the nervous system (for example, elevated heart rate when standing up) not occurring.

The 50th anniversary of Sir Roger's achievement was marked by a commemorative British 50 pence coin. The reverse of the coin shows the legs of a runner and a stop watch.



*50th anniversary of Bannister's four-minute mile, commemorated on a 2004 British fifty pence coin*

## **The 3 Important Ingredients of Success: Vision, Belief and Action**

Successful people have a strong vision, it helps them to see and visualize something that most people can't. They also have a strong belief, this allows them to bring out their passions. And of course they have the courage to take massive actions! They understand that only through actions that they can realize their vision and belief.

Taking actions to realize your dreams require courage and strong determination! Have you heard of the four-minute mile story?

For thousand of years, people believed that it was impossible for a human being to run the mile in less than four minutes. Scientists and experts declared that there was no way, a man could run a mile under four minutes. They said that if any person should try, "His heart will jump right out of his body". This barrier of belief continued until a man by the name of Roger Bannister broke it.

Roger Bannister believed in himself and he had the courage to take actions to prove his belief. He went through a massive and systematic training program and in 1954 he ran the mile in less than four minutes. The 'barrier of belief' that human couldn't run a mile under 4 minutes was finally broken, and within one year later, 37 other runners also broke the barrier.

What is the morale of the story? Roger Bannister was not held back by self limiting beliefs

- He chose to believe in himself.
- He strongly believed about the possibility of the 4 minute mile.
- He visualized himself breaking the 4 minute barrier
- He had the courage to go through a tough training program to get into shape physically and mentally.
- He had a great plan, with the right people helping him

The greatest quality of his breakthrough was what it did for others. If Roger Bannister can do it, so can we!

Barriers and obstacles will always come between you and success. But, with strong vision, belief and the courage to take actions will break through all barriers.