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How We Approach the Game

by Michelle Mellon

All of the things that we do in our lives say something about us. Even if our "working" selves do not seem to match our "extracurricular" selves, we can't hide from who we really are. ↴

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I don't think of myself as an aggressive person. I prefer to watch people; to sit back and take in words and gestures and figure out how best to proceed. Although this helped me tremendously in my career as a consultant, it did little for me on the ultimate field. Players that I looked up to told me repeatedly over the years that if I were more aggressive, I could be a great player. So I **thought** about being more aggressive. I **thought** about what I needed to do to make the cut to get the disc. But in the end, *thinking* and *doing* are still two different things, and my efforts failed.

In other areas of my life I was much more "out there." Although I played the diplomat in difficult situations with clients at work, I was willing to bear the brunt of their wrath if I felt we were heading down the wrong path. I was more of a wallflower at parties in college, but after I graduated I could march up to people I wanted to meet and introduce myself without a second thought.

Eventually I figured out that the difference was in my expectations for the task at hand. Although I loved playing ultimate, my goal really wasn't to be the best. I wanted to have good throws, run enough to play and stay in shape, and meet people. If there were other people on the field with similar throwing skills, I deferred to them. At work, my goal was to keep our clients happy, but not at the expense of my colleagues and myself. In college, I had my friends and my own secure life to focus on. When I graduated, I had to build a new, expanded life for myself.

One day I realized how different my view of ultimate was from the rest of my life. I am by nature a very organized, detail-oriented person who strives to do the best possible job and be liked by other people. Why wasn't my drive spilling over into ultimate?

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My first thought was that ultimate was my outlet; my opportunity to "escape" my other self. It was a way for me to relax and escape the pressure of continually trying to do my best. My next thought was that this might have been the wrong approach. So I decided to test it out. I started going to the gym to increase my strength and took sports conditioning classes. I learned what cuts worked best for me, as someone who was quick on the field but still not the most aggressive player. And I practiced my throws so that I *craved* getting the disc and making it do what I wanted. I began to notice a difference in my attitude toward the game, and so did others. It wasn't drive or ambition that I was lacking--you can't really change what's at the core of your personality--it was **confidence**.

The truth of the matter is that ultimate highlights one of my greatest fears in a more immediate way than anything else--the fear of making a mistake. When you make a mistake on the ultimate field, the ramifications are immediate and felt across your entire team. In other areas of your life there is usually time to correct mistakes, or there are mitigating factors that make them seem less bad. At work my confidence was fueled by my knowledge of the subject matter, my experience in communications, and my desire to spare my project team unnecessary difficulty. In other areas of my life--meeting people, writing, volunteer work?my confidence was fueled by past experience and the need to grow or express myself. Although I had the experience in years playing ultimate (I began playing when I was 17), I lacked confidence. I had started playing ultimate for fun, and as a way to get in shape. There was no *need* that drove me. But working out and working on my throws increased my confidence. This wasn't just an outdoor aerobics class for me; this was something I traveled around the country to play, at my own expense (once I even slept in a bathtub for the privilege of playing the next day). Once I stopped looking at ultimate as the possible realization of my fear and more as another representation of real life, I felt like I was being true to myself in every facet of what I do.

Think about the things you do in **your** spare time--running, dancing, going to the gym, reading, writing, volunteer work, etc. What is it about those things that make you want to do them? Enjoyment? A sense of fulfillment? Or are they steps to reach another goal you have in mind? Focus on what you're trying to achieve, and think of new ways to integrate every aspect of your life into your master plan for yourself. Once you've done that, you can't lose.

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