

# SUCCESS

FREE CD | REACH ALL YOUR 2015 GOALS!

What Achievers Read

## TONY ROBBINS

On Pushing Past Your Comfort Zone to Achieve the Extraordinary

**6** QUICK CONFIDENCE BOOSTERS

Don Shula on *winning!*

THE SUCCESS **25**

2014's Top People in Personal Growth

LEARN TO DELEGATE (finally!)

An Action Plan For Hitting Your 2015 Sales Targets

How to Survive a Lawsuit



SUCCESS.com  
January 2015



## Personal Best

# Seven Years, Seven Oceans

Sharks, jellyfish and extreme fatigue couldn't stop Adam Walker from chasing his epic goal.

▶ **AS ADAM WALKER** waded into the Hawaiian surf, he felt supremely confident. An aspiring long-distance, open-water swimmer, he'd already mastered the bitterly cold English Channel, so the swim that lay ahead of him—the 26 miles of Pacific Ocean between Molokai and Oahu—should have been a piece of cake by comparison. “I thought, *Let's have some warm water for a change,*” he says. “How hard could it be?”

The swim started well. Eight hours in, Walker was 3 miles from Oahu and on pace to set a world record when the current started carrying him backward. Night fell. And then, suddenly, Walker felt the most excruciating pain he'd ever experienced. He'd been stung by a Portuguese man-of-war. “I can only describe it as being scalded by a kettle, but times a thousand,” Walker says. “I lost feeling in my spine and I started to vomit for five to 10 minutes.” Walker asked the boatman accompanying him how far he was from shore. The answer: about an hour. *I can't do a minute, let alone an hour,* Walker thought. Yet he was no more willing to quit than he was to drown. He had to persevere.

The incident was just one horrific episode in a career that grew to encompass a challenge of epic scale and suffering: This past August, 36-year-old Walker became the first Briton (and the sixth person in history) to achieve the “Ocean's Seven” by swimming all seven of the world's most difficult open-water passages. The final feat, crossing the North Channel between Northern Ireland and Scotland, topped a list that included the Strait of Gibraltar, California's Catalina Channel, Japan's Tsugaru Strait and New Zealand's Cook Strait. Along the way, Walker faced sharks, giant jellyfish, fatigue and prolonged bouts of vomiting. “Some people might find it pointless,” admits Walker, who has since launched a motivational speaking career, “but to me it was a sign of discipline and dedication.”

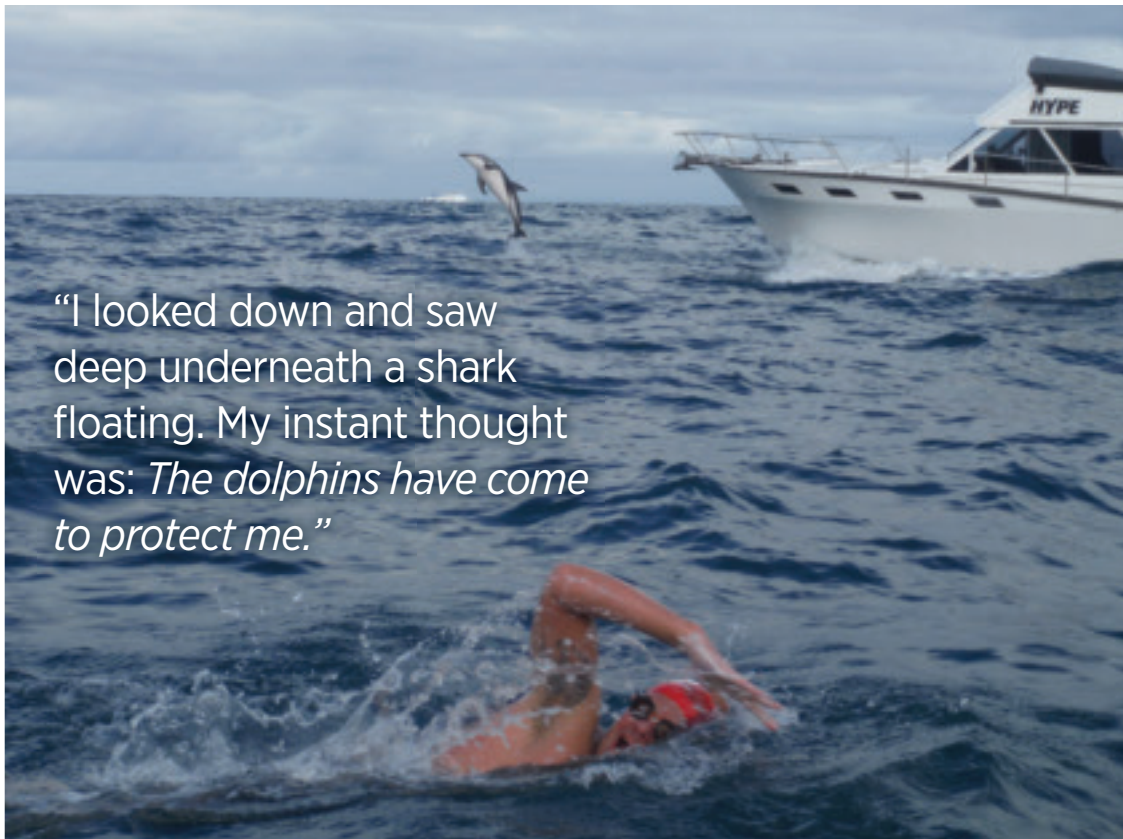
Growing up in Nottingham, England, Walker was always athletically inclined. He played cricket and water polo and thought he might have a future as a pro athlete. But at the age of 16, he dislocated a kneecap while playing cricket, destroying any hopes for a professional career. After university, he joined a local swim club and competed in sprints. “Long

**Jeff Wise** is a New York City-based science writer and author of *Extreme Fear: The Science of Your Mind in Danger*.



JIM RYDER

Scan this page with the Layar app to see dolphins accompanying Walker as he swims the Cook Strait.



“I looked down and saw deep underneath a shark floating. My instant thought was: *The dolphins have come to protect me.*”

COURTESY ADAM WALKER

distance was a big no-no. It was too much like hard work,” he remembers. “I only ever swam for a straight hour once, and I remember thinking, *God, it seemed like I’d swum for days.*”

Walker figured he could channel his competitive spirit into career success. He became a salesman, and by 27 he was a national account manager for a company that distributed kettles and toasters to retailers. “I thought that doing well professionally would tick my boxes,” he says. “What I realized was that I wasn’t really interested in the job. In fact, I hated it. And that made me realize that success isn’t about doing something that you don’t want to do. It’s about being happy and chasing what’s important to you.”

Then came the epiphany. On a long flight to Australia in March 2007, Walker watched a movie about a man who loses his job and can’t figure out what to do with himself, so he decides to start long-distance swim training and ultimately swims the English Channel.

“When I finished watching it,” Walker remembers, “I put my earpiece down and said to myself, *I’m going to swim the Channel.*”

Many would have forgotten that resolution before they exited the Jetway, but something inside Walker had clicked. “I think I saw this challenge as a way of putting a marker down in my life,” Walker says, “a way to accomplish something that I was really proud of.”

Once he got home, he decided to see if he could swim for an hour nonstop in the local public pool. It had been a decade since he had swum for so long, but he managed to pull it off—barely. “I was constantly gasping, not knowing how to breathe properly,” he says. “And I remember thinking, *How the hell am I ever going to swim the English Channel, when an hour is such a struggle?*” But he kept at it. He started swimming an hour three times a week, then four times. He upped his time in the pool to three hours, then five. He challenged himself to swim faster.

## Personal Best

By that October, he decided to try swimming in cold water. His first lap in a nearby pond left him so severely hypothermic that the paramedics who rescued him told him that if he'd been in the water another two minutes, he would have died.

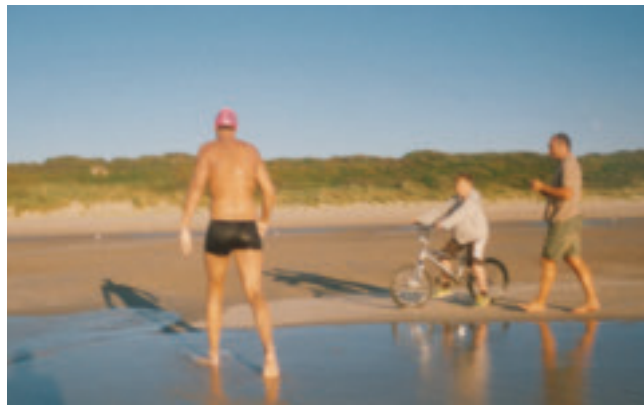
Chastened, he waited until spring before traveling to Dover to start acclimatizing himself to the Channel. That July he made his first attempt at swimming across—and succeeded, less than a year and a half after conceiving his epic plan. “As I walked out of the water, a French family said, ‘Have you just swum from England?’ and I said, ‘Well, I think so.’ And they said, ‘Can we have a picture?’ I put my arms around them, all soaking wet, took a picture, and then swam back to the boat, thinking to myself: *I never, ever have to do this horrific sport ever again.*”

It wasn't long, though, before he began to dream of another challenge. The Ocean's Seven fit the bill. A sort of oceanic marathon-of-marathons devised by California swim coach Steven Munatones, it seemed to Walker to straddle the gray area between the outlandishly ambitious and flat-out crazy. Finishing it took seven years, including training. “I've had some horrific times,” he says.

Yet along with the suffering have come moments of transcendence. Midway across the Cook Strait, Walker suddenly saw a fin scudding straight at him. Soon he found himself surrounded by a pod of dolphins that leaped and played around him. “I thought, *God, this is incredible,*” he says. “After 20 minutes, I looked down and saw deep underneath a shark floating. My instant thought was: *The dolphins have come to protect me.*” When he next looked down, the shark had vanished. After another hour, the dolphins went on their way, too.



Clockwise from left: Walker with friends John Raynor and Gemma Clarke after swimming the Tsugaru Strait in Japan; displaying the Portuguese man-of-war sting suffered near Oahu; and completing his English Channel swim.



And that encounter with the Portuguese man-of-war near Hawaii? In Walker's telling, even that horrible experience contained a spark of the sublime. To pull himself through, Walker forgot about his grand ambitions and forced himself to focus on what was immediately in front of him.

“The boat was 100 feet ahead of me, and I told myself that I had to get to the boat,” he says. “I was in so much agony that I couldn't stretch out my legs. I had to drag my body across the water. People talk about having a devil on your shoulder; I had probably 100 devils telling me to quit. To get by, I was thinking of every motivational quote I'd ever heard, things like, *Pain only lasts for a minute; success lasts for a lifetime.* I did two minutes, then another two minutes. An hour went by, two hours. In the end it took me 3½ hours to finish the swim, and I was in the most pain I'd ever had in my life.”

What some people might experience as a trauma to be medicated away was the essence of what Walker was seeking. “Some people are happy to go on their beach holidays and lie on the beach for two weeks and then go back to work. That's just not me,” he says. “I'm at my happiest when I'm challenging myself and pushing myself. I chose open-water swimming, but honestly it could have been anything. It could have been rock climbing or anything else that would have let me look in the mirror and say, *You know what? You've done all right, lad,*” Walker says. “*You've achieved something above and beyond.*” **S**

COURTESY ADAM WALKER