



ENDURANCE COMES FROM ENDURING

INTERVIEW WITH

Dean Karnazes

Ultramarathon runner Dean Karnazes is known globally for his legendary feats of endurance. Named “One of the 100 Most Influential People in the World” by TIME Magazine, he is also a best-selling author. Dean delivered an inspiring keynote at EFG’s Senior Management & Top CRO Conference in September 2025. He also spoke to *InTalks* about a life spent pushing the limits.

Your passion for running developed in early childhood. Are there any defining moments or events that you remember from that time?

My earliest childhood recollections are of running home from kindergarten. I remember sitting anxiously in class waiting for the bell to ring. Once it did, I felt a rush of freedom and I would dash out of the room and run home. I remember the sense of liberation that running gave me. I could go wherever I wanted on my own two feet and explore. There was a sense of excitement and power in knowing this.

How much do you plan and strategise before a race – and to what extent do you adapt your tactics on the go?

There is a saying in long-distance running: “Plan the race, and race the plan”. That said, when you are running 100 or 200 kilometres, there are bound to be some unexpected occurrences. So inevitably, I adapt the plan based on the circumstances. I like to have a back-up plan, and a back-up plan for the back-up plan. You can never be too prepared for an ultramarathon.

What is the most challenging moment during a marathon and how do you overcome it?

It is usually when you reach around the 35-kilometre mark and have seven more kilometres left to go. This is what is called “hitting the wall”. At that point, running becomes more of a mental challenge than a physical one – it is about you versus you. I love those moments because they test what you are made of. Instead of trying not to think of the pain, I embrace it and celebrate the suffering. This mind shift helps me to persist.

You have repeatedly pushed yourself to the limits physically and prevailed. Do you believe that resilience is a quality that can be learned?

I have a saying: “Endurance comes from enduring.” I believe that resilience and endurance can be learned in practice from performing an action over and over again. It is about setting

micro-goals, working hard and achieving them – and then pushing yourself a little further each time. You could describe it as stretching a finish line so that it gets further and further away. That is how you learn resilience.

How do you deal with uncertainty or failure?

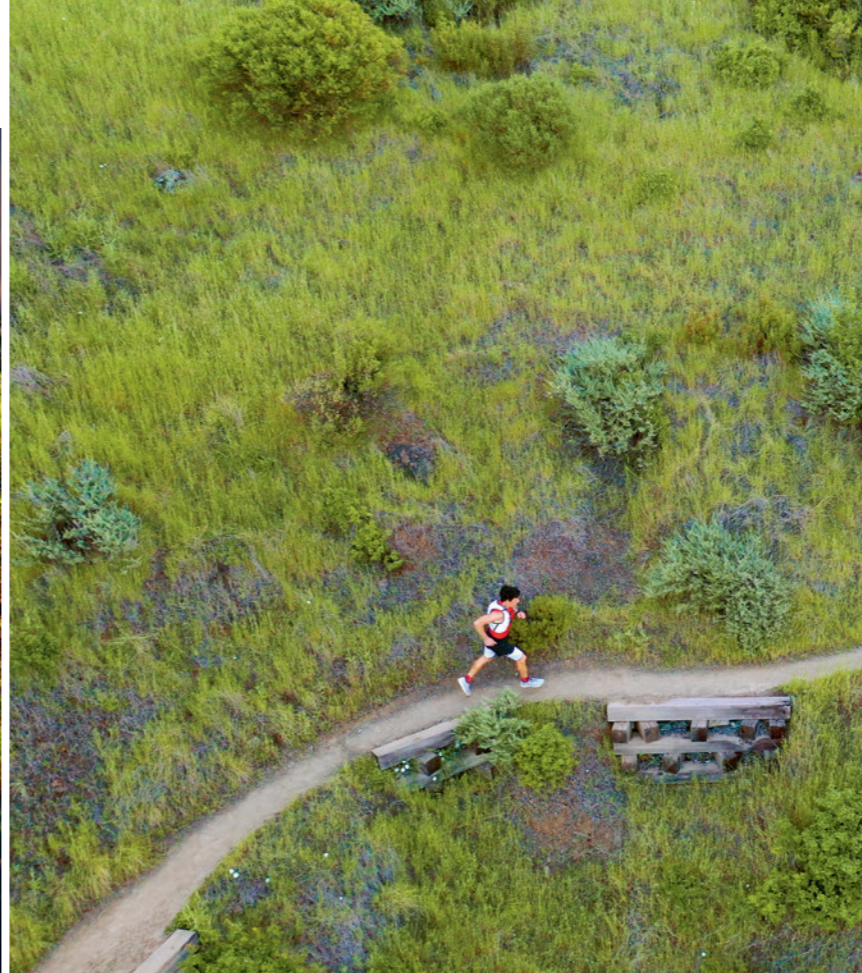
Uncertainty and the possibility of failure are interwoven into everything I do. I deal with failure by celebrating it. I think that if you take on very audacious goals, there is a chance you will fail. And if failure happens, you learn from it: You analyse it and consider what you could have done better, and that teaches you many valuable lessons. And you could say that if you never fail, you are not trying hard enough and you are limiting your personal growth.

How have changes in nutrition, science and technology impacted competitive running since you started?

You could argue that changes in nutrition and technology have changed everything but it can also be said that little has changed. Phidippides, the original Greek long-distance runner, ran from Athens to Sparta – a distance of around 240 kilometres – arriving the day after he set off. That is an impressive performance even by modern standards. Phidippides ate figs, olives, cured meat and the honey and sesame bars known as *pasteli*. And he either ran barefoot or wearing primitive leather sandals. The year was 490 BC!

You ran 50 marathons in 50 US states in 50 consecutive days. You also ran a marathon to the South Pole and once covered a distance of 560 kilometres without sleeping. What do you consider your greatest athletic achievement?

Yes, I have raced and competed on all seven continents – in fact, I have done that twice now. But my greatest achievement was running a 10K with my daughter Alexandria on her tenth birthday. Nothing will ever surpass that glorious moment.



Do you think that the mental strategies you deploy during an ultramarathon, such as staying focused on the end goal, can successfully translate to everyday life and business?

I think the lessons from any running distance carry over into business and life. Running teaches you about discipline, commitment, sacrifice and focus. You learn that high achievement takes hard work and grit. These are universal qualities that are helpful for almost every aspect of business and life.

You founded a company in your thirties. What was the inspiration behind this venture – and how would you define entrepreneurial spirit?

Launching a company taught me a lot about people and a lot about myself. I established my own business out of passion and purpose, and I later sold the company for the same reasons. I learned that I preferred to be the CEO of just myself, not an organisation. I would say that entrepreneurial spirit is about exploration and curiosity.

What is your greatest success story outside of sport?

I am a two-time New York Times best-selling author. I write all my own books and don't use a ghost writer. I am self-taught and would say that learning to write well was as challenging as any ultramarathon I have run. Both require 1% inspiration, and 99% perspiration!

Has your understanding of “excellence” evolved over time? And if so, how?

To me, excellence is being the best that you can be. The worst sin in life is not being all that you can be and not living up to your true potential.

What motivates you to keep going?

I have a clear sense of purpose – I feel like I was put on this earth to be a runner and that is the highest calling I have. What I try to do is live up to that calling: If you are going to be a runner, be the best runner you can be.

This issue of InTalks explores the theme vision. Do you have your own vision of what you want to achieve in the next five years?

Right now, as a Greek-American who was born in Los Angeles and studied Classics, I have a clear “Vision 2028” because that is the year when the Olympics are coming to this city! I am working with the Olympic Committee in both Greece and Los Angeles to try to promote even greater awareness of the heritage and the history of the Olympics. After all, today's Olympic Games may be different to what the Greeks conceived back in 776 BC but the Olympic spirit remains the same. It is all about striving for excellence and uniting humanity through sport. That is why I am completely focused on 2028. Once I get there, I'll create a new two-year plan for 2030.

About



Dean Karnazes is a Greek-American ultramarathon runner who is renowned for his extraordinary feats of endurance. Known as “Ultramarathon Man”, he has tackled some of the world's toughest races. A two-time Olympic torch bearer, Dean is currently the Global Ambassador of Greek Tourism and previously served as a US Athlete Ambassador. He has also achieved success as a New York Times best-selling author of several books and seeks to inspire others to overcome obstacles and go beyond perceived limits to achieve their goals.

Going the distance

“Running teaches you about discipline, commitment, sacrifice and focus,” says Dean Karnazes. He has demonstrated all of these strengths during a 20-year career that has seen him master incredible tests of physical and mental endurance around the globe, including:

50

Completing 50 marathons in 50 days across 50 US states

53°C

Running 217 kilometres non-stop across Death Valley, the hottest place on earth

SAHARA

Crossing the Sahara Desert at temperatures of around 50°C

-40°C

Running a marathon to the South Pole, the coldest place on earth

>80 hr

Covering more than 560 kilometres in 80 hours and 44 minutes without sleep

4,800 km

Running more than 4,800 kilometres from the California coast to New York City in 70 days

4 deserts

Claiming overall victory in the 4 Deserts Ultramarathon Series, crossing the Antacama, Gobi, Antarctica and Sahara deserts



Watch the video interview with Dean Karnazes.