

Interview

Pulling Greatness Out of People



Jim Craig

An Interview with Jim Craig, President and Founder, Gold Medal Strategies

EDITORS' NOTE *Jim Craig was the goalie for the 1980 USA "Miracle on Ice" Olympic hockey team. He went on to the NHL and started for three franchises prior to an injury that forced his retirement. He parlayed his success in sports into an impressive business career. Craig was the National Sales Manager and Salesman of the Year for both Marketing Corporation of America and Valassis Communications. He was chosen as the Marketing Services Consultant of the Year by Valassis Communications and was inducted into the Valassis Sales Hall of Fame. He has been an actor as well as a consultant on the filming of Walt Disney Pictures' Miracle. Buena Vista Home Entertainment presented Craig with a special sales recognition for growing its sales during a contract assignment he had with the company. Craig has sat on many boards and currently sits on the board of directors for Friendship Cup. Craig is a national spokesperson for W.L. Gore & Associates, and the Ultimate SAAAVE, a public affairs campaign that raises awareness about abdominal aortic aneurysms – commonly called triple AAA – a disease that claimed his father's life. Craig recently released his first business book, Gold Medal Strategies: Business Lessons from America's Miracle Team.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Gold Medal Strategies (www.goldmedalstrategies.com) is a motivational speaking and training company that is committed to assisting individuals and organizations in achieving their full potential by coaching, educating, guiding, and inspiring individuals and teams to operate at peak performance, thereby building strong and virtuous legacies.*

What was your vision in creating the company and the key focus for the brand?

When I was developing and building the foundation for Gold Medal Strategies, it was based not only on years of being mentored and trained as an Olympian but also on the 25 years I spent

in business. What I found during that time, especially as an athlete, was that every time we went out and played, whether we won or lost, I liked the competition of it. So wealth never became my real driving force. Instead, it was that I enjoyed the competition and the goal was to win. As I got involved in corporate America, I discovered that sometimes people there are afraid to win.

I always wanted to open my own company, so I took my 20-plus years in sales and marketing consulting and I started Gold Medal Strategies with the goal of creating something that would really make a difference. I wanted to go from being mentored to being a mentor.

Is it challenging to differentiate yourself from all the other motivational speakers and teamwork coaches out there?

It is, but my background in sports and being a member of so many great and winning teams, and then spending 20-plus years as a sales consultant, has prepared me to compete at the highest level in this profession. I also rely on and recruit within my office or my network of independent consultants the right team of people to help me prepare my presentations and appearances.

We then spend hours on conference calls, prior to the event, working to understand the culture of the client and the goals and objectives it has set for my appearance. We then customize every speech and do a lot of research to make sure that what I present and teach is relevant, highly valuable, and transmits competitive advantage.

I cannot learn the minute details of everybody's business, but I can specialize in making the person I'm addressing a better teammate, and a company a better team. Follow up is also a key to our success, so I build a platform that will support them throughout the year to ensure they reach not only their team goals, but also their individual goals, which will help those individuals become better as teammates. I feel I have made that breakthrough, because the business I'm in is normally one where you're hired once as a "one and done." You are rarely hired again by that same company but my repeat rate at companies is close to 80 percent.

How did the writing of the book come about?

I wanted to gain credibility in the marketplace, as well as to take all my life experiences, which have been so diverse, and use them to teach a special way of looking at things differently.

It was way out of my comfort zone to write a book, but I knew a book would be an important and valuable instrument to help me teach, coach, and inspire.

This book can be used by anyone from young kids confused about where they want to go to young adults who are searching for what they want to do and how to get there to the seasoned veteran who has gotten comfortable and forgotten that it's not about how much money you make in your lifetime, but how you continue to grow your legacy. If done correctly, the money will follow.

My goal is to refocus the reader on what the objective is and all the key components of taking that objective and staying youthful by always striving to get better. Everyone needs to understand that what you did three years ago is probably not going to work now. If you keep trying to make it work, it's because you're not embracing change.

Was this wisdom a result of your Olympic experience or something you developed earlier in life?

We're all a product of the environment we're brought into, and family, community, and mentors become the foundation of what we accomplish. Our team was recruited and built on this foundation.

We all can create our own destiny through hard work, and by capitalizing on the help and direction that mentors provide us.

Winning is also about pulling greatness out of people and making them believe in achieving dreams that they never thought they were capable of. People who are winners will work as hard as they have to in order to achieve their dreams.

Will you always be remembered as being part of the "Miracle Team" or will there be a time when you're remembered equally as a businessperson?

I would be honored to be remembered as a member of the team that was voted the greatest sports moment of the 20th century. I hope that my current work will also be remembered. I would like to think the experience I have accumulated now provides an opportunity to do something I love, which is to mentor others based on the successes and failures I've experienced and all that I've learned from the people who have mentored me.

I believe in not letting your memories be bigger than your dreams. So I have never stopped trying to be the best at anything I do. I love what I do because every day is new and invigorating, and I have to work harder to live up to my own standards. ●