



Brownstein, Barry. (2018). What Roger Bannister Taught Us About Human Achievement. Retrieved from Intellectual Takeout Website: <https://www.intellektualtakeout.org/article/what-roger-bannister-taught-us-about-human-achievement/>.

Watch for yourself: The first sub-4-minute mile (3:59.4):  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTXoTnp\\_5sl&t=280s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTXoTnp_5sl&t=280s)

When I was a young boy, one of my most cherished books was *One Hundred Greatest Sports Heroes*. The pages were filled with heroes' accomplishments. Often, having overcome great adversity, these sports heroes exhibited great resiliency. Today, I wonder what other mindset traits contributed to their success?

Roger Bannister, the first man to run a four-minute mile, died last Saturday. He was one of the "100 greatest"; I returned to his chapter many times. Bannister's mindset strengths are legendary and can inspire us all.

In Bannister's day, for a human to run a mile in four minutes was thought to be impossible. Runners were warned against even trying. Another great English runner and Olympic champion Sebastian Coe explained the belief barrier that Bannister had to break: "Not only was it seen as a physiological, physical, mental barrier but learned treaties in medical journals basically saying if anyone tries this then there's a chance they may lose their life in the process."

Stopping here, my curiosity aroused, I searched for "*One Hundred Greatest Sports Heroes*" in both the Nioga and NYPL catalog. Suffice it to say, it's not there, BUT! Nioga has a wonderful selection of books about Roger Bannister himself and the other men that set out to break the 4-minute mile. Just so you know, a 4-minute mile means *they're running 15 miles an hour. Holy guacamole!*

See: <https://tinyurl.com/NiogaRogerBannister>

In 1954, Roger Bannister broke that belief barrier. Bannister, because he did not share the same belief system as others, was able to develop new training methods, methods he had to fit to his strict schedule as a medical student.

Running the first four-minute mile, Bannister shattered an unquestioned belief about the limits of human performance.

Looking back at his miraculous run in unfavorable weather Bannister reflected, "The earth seemed to move with me. I found a new source of power and beauty, a source I never knew existed."

Coe reports that Bannister was always learning, “always interested in training techniques, altitude training, why we were running quicker and faster...Conversations could go anywhere. He was always full of questions.” In other words, Roger Bannister never went to seed. His life story is a lesson in self-renewal. In his book, *Self-Renewal* John W. Gardner tries to answer “the puzzle of why some men and women go to seed while others remain vital all of their lives.”

I went poking around for this particular book and it seems neither we nor the NYPL have it as an electronic item, but, the NYPL HAS THE BOOK! How do you get it? Go to your library and make a request! It takes a little time, but we MIGHT be able to get the paper copy for you! How cool is that?

“Exploration of the full range of his own potentialities is not something that the self-renewing man leaves to the chances of life.” Gardner explains, “It is something he pursues systematically, or at least avidly, to the end of his days.”

To be sure, Gardner’s standard for self-renewal is not that we become a champion like Roger Bannister. In a 1990 speech, Gardner made clear that self-renewal is for everybody, including “people who fail to get to the top in achievement.” Gardner continued, “We can’t all get to the top, and that isn’t the point of life anyway. I’m talking about people who -- no matter how busy they seem to be -- have stopped learning or growing. Many of them are just going through the motions.”

One way we go to seed is by clinging to rigid beliefs. Gardner warns, “We can’t write off the danger of complacency, growing rigidity, imprisonment by our own comfortable habits and opinions. Look around you. How many people whom you know well -- people even younger than yourselves --are already trapped in fixed attitudes and habits.”

Going beyond rigid beliefs is at the heart of Bannister’s legacy. Chris Chavez eulogizing Bannister in *Sports Illustrated* said this, “The first sub-four-minute mile remains one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. It opened the floodgates to something people believe to be physiologically impossible and broke down the walls of what our minds believed could be accomplished.”

“Limits,” Bannister showed, “are just a creation in our minds,” Chavez tells us. Bannister didn’t stop there; he continued to be a life-long learner.

Learning is not just becoming more skilled. “You come to understand your impact on others,” Gardner advised, and so you develop your character....

This was a fascinating reminder to me of what we, as humans, can do. The last line I quoted here dovetails nicely into the *Verbal Judo* videos I have done, as well as the *Soft Skills Series*. I’ll link the playlists below. There’s a lot to be explored here – if you have more ideas for me, please let me know!

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