

Whatever It Takes: When Motivation Turns Deadly

by Jedidiah Coppenger

When I was a basketball player at North Greenville College, there is only one reason why my teammates and I would wake up at six in the morning to torture our bodies. Our coach had drilled into our minds the motto, “whatever it takes.” We were so motivated to do “whatever it took” to win a championship, that we would do things we hated, sometimes groaning and grumbling all the way.

There’s something noble about that kind of motivation. It is what we want from our athletes, our students, and our leaders. Every employer wants to hire a “self-starter.” But it can also be a horrifying trait. Recently I came across two examples of the “whatever it takes” mentality gone mad.

A.Q. Kahn is a hometown hero in his native Pakistan. He’s not a superstar athlete. But he’s even more motivated. Faced with warring neighbor India’s nuclear capability, Kahn became the “father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb.” He won his country’s greatest civilian honor, the Hilal-e-Imtiaz medal. Celebrated in textbooks, he was Pakistan’s most famous hero.

But the Pakistani bomb boy had a little something going on, on the side. You see, while he was being hailed as the savior of his country, he was selling nuclear secrets to Libya, Syria, Iran and maybe others. Kahn claims money wasn’t his motivation, and his friends seem to believe him. Instead, it is argued that Kahn was motivated by fervor for Islam, believing that Muslim possession of nuclear weapons could ensure Islamic supremacy in the world. Under house arrest after being caught by U.S. and British intelligence officials, he remains unbowed in his zeal for Islam. His “whatever it takes” attitude for Allah just might leave a nuclear hole somewhere on the planet.

The other recent example of the “whatever it takes” mentality is Gloria Feldt, a feminist activist for “reproductive freedom” through her leadership of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Feldt recently celebrated 31 years on the frontlines of the abortion rights cause. She argues that women’s autonomy is so important that the legal rights of the “fetus” should be sacrificed to make the point. Whatever it takes, right? Reflecting on a generation of “choice,” Feldt recently remarked that she was “proud of everything we have done in my tenure” with Planned Parenthood.

Pride seems to be an odd emotion, given thirty years of carnage in Planned Parenthood’s clinics. Even if Feldt believes that the “fetus” is not a “person,” she can’t deny that abortion ends biological life of some kind. But her “whatever it takes” mentality causes her to suppress the humanity of the unborn in order to pursue a feminist political cause of a constitutional “right to privacy” found in the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*.

That kind of logic made sense thirty years ago, but, then again, so did leisure suits. We’ve designed better clothes. And we’ve advanced technology to the point that the inner workings of the womb are no longer shrouded in mystery, but are accessible in pictures at your local bookstore, pictures that reveal not a blob of tissue, but a baby. But that doesn’t deter Gloria Feldt and the Planned Parenthood

legal dream team. Whatever it takes.

American culture fears Kahn's "whatever it takes" mentality, while it celebrates Feldt's. After all, the Planned Parenthood activist is not under house arrest but is instead hailed as a heroine by *Glamour* and *Vanity Fair* magazines, even though her activism has resulted thus far in more human death than all Kahn's nuclear blueprints combined. We rightly fear the potential death that could be unleashed by Kahn's efforts, but we shrug at the actual death unleashed by Feldt's.

Maybe Kahn didn't frame his motivation with the right kind of language. Feldt, after all, won the public relations battle by talking about "reproductive health care" and "women's rights" against "anti-choice extremists." Maybe if Kahn could speak to Westerners about his fight for "occupational liberty," "entrepreneurial rights," and "vocational self-determination," he wouldn't seem to be such a bad guy. And with that frame of reference in place, maybe his "whatever it takes" mentality would have seemed just as commendable to our culture as Gloria Feldt's.

Kahn and Feldt should remind us that motivation and drive are not virtues in and of themselves. The apostle Paul speaks of a "whatever it takes" mentality in his striving toward the goal of conformity with Christ (Phil 3:12-14). But Paul also warns us that there is also a danger of striving toward the things of death and destruction (Phil 3:18-19). When all is said and done, the Christian life is a different kind of "whatever it takes" mentality—one that tosses aside our lives for the sake of Christ (Mark 8:35).

By the way, my college basketball team never won that championship. We gave it our best shot. But in the end, it took a lot more than we had to give. It turns out it took a little more than "whatever it takes." Islamic nuclear powers and the abortion industry are both striving toward a future that promises freedom through the death of others. Let's remember that we strive toward a different reality—in which freedom is found through crucifixion and resurrection. The best part is that this new reality is not found through self-motivation but in an already accomplished event. So let's toss aside everything to find the only kind of freedom that brings everlasting life—whatever it takes.

Jedidiah Coppenger is a student in the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he serves as an intern with Dean Russell D. Moore.

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