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Learning to Run the Alexander Way

Do you believe it? At 60 years of age I'm learning to run. It is quite incredible, as I have never considered myself to be particularly athletic, nor have I spent much time running in my life. It recently began for me when author of [The Art of Running](#) and Alexander Technique teacher, Malcolm Balk, came to Southern California in March to give several workshops. My husband used to be a runner and I thought he would enjoy learning about how the Alexander Technique applies to running. The workshop was a birthday present for him and I went along as an "observer". Well, with Malcolm, it was hard to stay on the sidelines watching! Before I knew it, he had coaxed me into trying things out. The wish (translate "stimulus") to not look like an overweight lumbering mal-coordinated idiot was huge. After going through several routines of bouncing up and down on two feet, then alternating feet, we were running through a parking garage (it was pouring outside). Hmm? It was actually fun and I didn't notice my extra 20 pounds. Maybe I really could learn to run.

Six months and two more workshops later, I'm still "giving it a go" as they say in England. My progress seems incredibly slow, but I am **progressing**. In fact two weeks ago, marked a **milestone** as I switched from running with frequent intervals of walking to **One Mile plus Continuous Running**.

How did I sustain my motivation through this challenging process? To begin with, it really helped to have an experience that made running seem like a real possibility. Shortly after I began the learning-to-run process in earnest, [Born to Run](#) by Christopher McDougall gave me another boost of inspiration. However, viewing running as an opportunity to work on my "use" is what has really sustained my efforts these past 6 months. In order to work on my use it is important to stay present and not tune out by listening to music or books on CD just to get through the run.

In addition to being present to my "use" in terms of the Alexander Technique, there is also paying attention to the various running elements such as form and cadence that I learned from Malcolm Balk:

- Shorter stride allowing each foot to land underneath the torso instead of in front of the torso.
- A more upright stance.
- Leading with the knees, not the feet.
- Landing more toward the front of each foot, not on the heel.
- Allowing the legs to move in a semi-circular pattern.
- Using a $\frac{3}{4}$ cadence at about 180/minute.
- "The external direction is forward, the internal direction is up". (This is a primary principle of the Alexander Technique.)

These elements help runners to be more efficient and lighter on their feet.

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