

Run Your Own Race

A practical guide to building focus and confidence as a firm owner



There's a piece of advice I keep coming back to, no matter where I am in my journey as a firm owner. It came from a close friend years ago, when I was returning to school as an older student. I was self-conscious about being in rooms with people who were younger than me, further along than me, different from me in ways that made me question whether I belonged.

My friend stopped me and said:

The image

"Hope, just run your own race."

Think of yourself as a horse running a race. He's not looking to the left. He's not looking to the right. He's focused straight ahead on his own journey. He doesn't care what that horse is doing or that horse is doing. He's just running.

It sounds simple. But that image has served me more consistently than almost anything else I've learned as a firm owner. And I apply it every single day.

Why this is harder than it sounds

When you're building something new, comparison is almost automatic. You see another firm growing faster. Someone else lands a client you wanted. A peer gets recognized in a space you're working hard to enter. And before you know it, your attention has shifted from your own path to everyone else's.

That's the real cost of looking sideways. It pulls you out of the moment you're in.

For firm owners specifically, the comparison trap shows up constantly. The industry is full of people who have been doing this longer, who have bigger teams, more credentials, more name recognition. If you measure yourself against all of that, you will always find a reason to feel behind.

But behind compared to what? Their race is not your race.

What running your own race actually looks like

This is not about ignoring the world around you or pretending competition doesn't exist. It's about being deliberate with where your attention goes, especially when self-doubt is loudest.

For me, one of the clearest examples came when my mentor invited me to co-lead a tax tour at Scaling New Heights. I was surrounded by some of the biggest names in the accounting world. I was newer than most of them. Less known. And I felt it.

The old version of me might have spent the whole experience measuring myself against everyone in the room. Instead, I came back to the same habit: you're right where you're supposed to be. Don't worry about who's sitting on your left or your right. Focus on your lane. Keep moving.

And I was present for it in a way I wouldn't have been otherwise.

That's what running your own race makes possible. Not just resilience, but presence. The ability to actually show up for the experience you're in, instead of mentally leaving it to compare yourself to someone else.

The moments when it matters most

This habit is not just for the big, high-stakes situations. It's for the everyday ones too.

It matters when you're early in building your firm and everything still feels uncertain. It matters when you see a competitor doing something you haven't done yet. It matters when you walk into a room where you're the newest person, or the least credentialed, or the one who has never done this particular thing before.

In all of those moments, the instinct is to ask: do I belong here?

The better question is: what's my next move?

**"BELONGING IS NOT SOMETHING YOU EARN BY
MATCHING EVERYONE AROUND YOU. IT'S
SOMETHING YOU CLAIM BY SHOWING UP AND
STAYING FOCUSED ON WHAT YOU'RE THERE TO DO."**

How to build this into a daily habit

The reason this advice has lasted for me is that it's simple enough to actually use in real time. When the noise gets loud, I don't need a long process. I just need to come back to the image: head down, eyes forward, running my race.

Here's how to make it practical for yourself:

01 Name it when it happens

When you notice you're comparing yourself to someone else or feeling like you don't belong, call it out. Naming the feeling interrupts it. Then redirect: what's actually in front of me right now?

02 Find your version of the metaphor

The horse image works for me. Maybe something else works better for you. A phrase, a physical anchor, a short ritual. Whatever helps you return to focus quickly is the right tool. The simpler it is, the easier it is to use under pressure.

03 Pull your attention back to your own metrics

Instead of measuring your progress against what someone else is doing, define what success looks like for you this week, this month, this quarter. Then measure against that. Your timeline is the only one that matters.

04 Remind yourself why you're in the room

When you're in a new situation and self-doubt shows up, come back to the reason you're there. You were invited, you applied, you showed up. That means something. Lead with curiosity instead of comparison.

05 Make it a daily practice, not a one-time mindset shift

This is not something you figure out once and never think about again. I apply it every day, in small situations and large ones. The consistency is what makes it stick.

A note on imposter syndrome

I want to name this directly, because I think a lot of firm owners experience it and don't talk about it openly enough.

**"IMPOSTER SYNDROME IS NOT A SIGN THAT YOU DON'T
BELONG. IT'S USUALLY A SIGN THAT YOU CARE ABOUT DOING
SOMETHING WELL IN A SPACE THAT MATTERS TO YOU."**

Most people who are genuinely good at what they do have felt it at some point.

The goal is not to eliminate the feeling. The goal is to not let it make your decisions for you.

Running your own race doesn't mean you never feel uncertain. It means you keep moving anyway.

Where to start this week

You don't need to overhaul your mindset overnight. Start with one moment at a time.

This week, notice once when you catch yourself comparing your progress to someone else's. Just notice it. Name it. Then ask: what would it look like to redirect that energy toward my own next step?

That one small shift, practiced consistently, is how the habit builds.

Everything you've built so far, every decision you've made, every room you've walked into, that's your race.

Keep running it.