



## Ready to ride: Andover CEO sees parallels of cycling and running a company

By Judy Wakefield

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**I**t is 4:45 a.m. and that means the CEO of this Andover company is awake and getting ready to ride.

On a personal quest to log 15,000 miles on his bike this year and to never miss a day of peddling, Joe Gagnon's ride will be done by 7:30 a.m. Then he's off to Dundee Park to start the work day of running Exit41, a software company focused on the restaurant industry's online ordering customers. Clients include Panera Bread, Wendy's, Qdoba and Swiss Chalet.

Earlier this month, Gagnon had the chance to mix his two passions - cycling and work.

Gagnon said he put on his game face, threw away his water bottle - it's extra ounces to carry on your ride - and rode his heart out on Paris Mountain in Greenville, S.C., as part of an event called the CEO Cycling Challenge.

He raced uphill as that's the only way to ride a bike, Gagnon said. "Sure, it hurts...but the harder, the better," said this 40-something who has been CEO at Exit41 for two and a half years.

Competing with five other business executives who enjoy cycling, Gagnon climbed the 1,978-foot mountain in just 12 minutes and 18 seconds. He placed first in the CEO Cycling Challenge. It was co-hosted by George Hincapie, a five-time Olympian in cycling who has been on Lance Armstrong's team for his seven Tour de France victories. Hincapie lives in the Greenville area.



Joe Gagnon sets high goals for himself and his company, Exit41. He says his athletic focus translates into momentum at work. He recently won a CEO Challenge for cycling among his executive peers.

Now back at work, Gagnon talked about the parallels between work and uphill cycling, saying that forward momentum is the common denominator.

"Each day there is a hill to climb and the only way that you can get up a hill is by creating forward momentum," he said. "With cycling, this means pedaling, and as a CEO, it means actively driving the business strategy."

He said CEOs living and working through today's wild economy are tapping into perseverance skills like never before and those skills are also important to serious cyclists.

"Customers are not buying quickly and that hurts. My uphill racing hurts, too, but you don't stop," he said.

Gagnon, a married father of two high-school daughters, said a lot CEOs are like him. They enjoy difficult forms of recreation, which help to keep

their lives in balance.

"There is an intersection of activity and a CEO," he said. "I find they thrive on suffering. Like me, I like to ride my bike uphill."

Businesses seem to be getting more involved with recreation promotion for employees and Gagnon said that's a good thing. He has not been sick in the past six years and attributes that to healthy living, which includes his serious exercise routine.

Riding Paris Mountain was not all business. It was plain fun, too.

The CEO Challenge was also for a good cause, as a portion of the net proceeds will be donated to the Challenged Athletes Foundation, according to organizers. The foundation, established in 1997, supports the athletic endeavors of all people with physical challenges by providing grants for training, competition and equipment needs.