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Medals and more than medals

The B2ten approach that is helping some Canadian athletes win medals at the Vancouver Games is a promising model for other endeavours

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The B2ten approach that is helping some Canadian athletes win medals at the Vancouver Games is a promising model for other endeavours. Several months ago, a University of Montreal official visited a local businessman, J.D. Miller, a founder of B2ten, to explore how business leaders could mentor and support the best minds in medical-science research and development. If B2ten can help lead the charge to creativity and excellence, it would truly be a gift to Canada, no matter how many medals this country wins, or loses, in Vancouver.

The premise of B2ten is that individual Canadian athletes, much like Canadian businesses, need adequate resources if they wish to compete globally. And that business should show some leadership in extending these resources, for the broader good. (The “B” stands for a business-like approach.)

There's an implicit notion here that may get some people's noses out of joint: that existing programs are falling short. But it's just a fact of life that programs have limited money and will not meet all needs. B2ten isn't a replacement for government support of athletes, or public-private partnerships such as Own the Podium, which is distributing \$110-million

over five years in the sports most likely to produce a medal haul for Canada. It's a supplement of \$3-million, spent on giving 18 athletes in the Winter Games, and a few others, the services they believe they need to compete at the highest level. For instance, when Kim St-Pierre, a goalie in women's hockey, was coming back from a hip injury, she worked out with the Montreal Canadiens strength coach Scott Livingston. In another case, the money bought two bobsleighs at about \$100,000 each from Monaco. For the silver medalist moguls skier Jennifer Heil, it bought (among other things) as much time as she needed with a sports psychologist. The program supports Alexandre Bilodeau, who won gold in moguls skiing, with state-of-the-art coaching.

The 25 business people, anglophones and francophones, from Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, are upset that Canadian athletes were sent out to compete on shoestring support. "For decades athletes have given the marrow of their bones to be the best they can be, but haven't been given the resources," says Mr. Miller, a mergers and acquisitions specialist. In the B2ten approach, business people support individuals by asking what they need to succeed in global competition. That kind of business leadership could produce more than medals for this country.