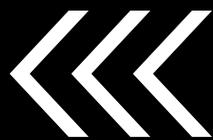
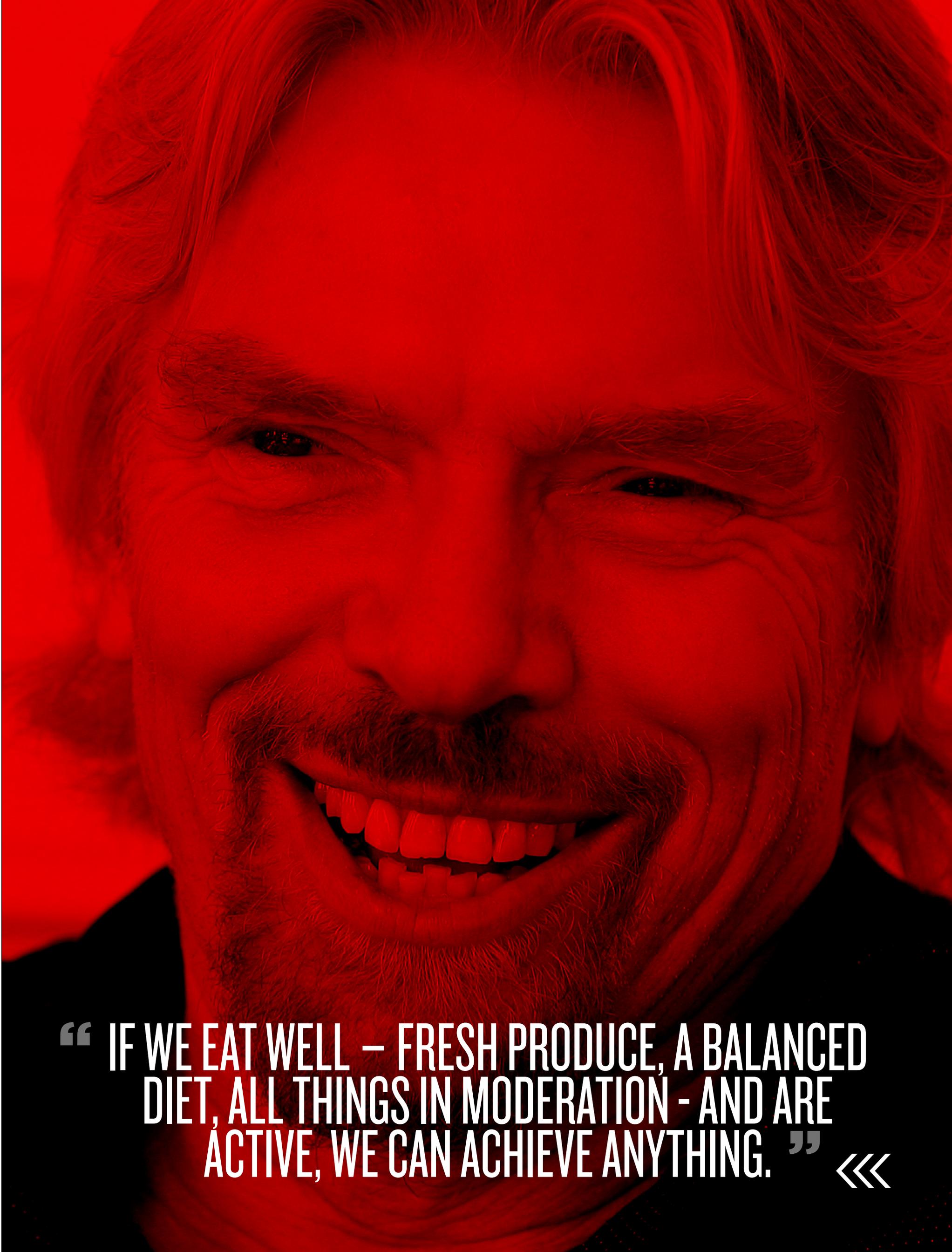


The Unstoppable Branson

Words by: Shaun Curran

Richard Branson talks exclusively to BESTFIT magazine about his love of exercise and why keeping fit gives him his best ideas.





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“HEALTH IS EVERYTHING IN LIFE, ISN'T IT?” EXCLAIMS RICHARD BRANSON. “IF YOU'RE FIT AND HEALTHY YOU FEEL AS IF YOU CAN DO ANYTHING, GO ANYWHERE YOU WANT.”

Branson has built a commercial empire the envy of most businesspeople, but that doesn't mean that the Virgin leader, as the old adage goes, knows the price of everything but the value of nothing.

There is very little, not even when it comes to matters of business, which Branson values more than his personal health, as well as that of his family. It's a matter he is paying close attention to, especially now as the 63-year-old – worth an estimated £2.6 billion, making him the fourth richest person in Britain – enters his fifth decade as the nation's most prominent, daring and charismatic entrepreneur.

His money-making portfolio, which includes airlines, railways and media is a jewel in the UK business crown. “All good products of mine are a labour of love; I need to be passionate about something to get it off the ground otherwise nobody else will be passionate about it,” he explains, but passion alone isn't enough.

“If you're not healthy, then everything else suffers, so fitness is critical,” Branson says. He realised this when he was much younger and counts Sebastian Coe, Viv Richards and Ian Botham as his sporting icons. “I was rubbish at school – all my teachers said so – but I always loved being active from a young age, and adored running across Blackheath Common or visiting Battersea Park,” he says. “I loved to play football and other games, and that feeling of just running until I couldn't breathe. The adrenalin rush would hit me and cause the synapses to electrify and suddenly I had all these ideas of how I'd make my fortune... through rabbit breeding or a monopoly of paper rounds. Most of those early ideas were a complete disaster, but the power of fitness was something I learned to hone as I understood early on how important it was.”

Advancing age – “I have to remind myself that I'm not as young as I used to be, and as you get older fitness is incredibly important” – has increased the need for Branson to not just exercise but to count the calories.

He isn't yet ready to give up the party lifestyle that is a key essence of his Necker Island home, the Caribbean holiday resort where he retreats from the stresses and strains of his work – “every night I'm there is a party, so I like to join in” – nor is he able to hand over a good hangover cure (“I have no idea – drink less, I suppose!”)

But aside from the decadent days on Necker Island, Branson does have a sensible approach to what he eats and drinks, mostly because “I thought that if I keep really fit, then my mind is active and alert and I can achieve more in a day than if I'm not fit. I know I like to party so it's all the more important that I balance my books.”

This juggling act includes a regimented effort for “getting my five a day, staying mindful of eating and cooking local produce.” This is particularly pertinent when he is in the Caribbean. “If I'm on Necker, I want to eat fruit and vegetables that have come from the island or somewhere nearby, not from halfway around the world. It's the same if I'm in the UK – I try to eat locally. I do love my British roast, and where else are you going to get a better roast than the UK?!”

“If we eat well – fresh produce, a balanced diet, all things in moderation – and are active, we can achieve anything,” he says. “I have to be careful what I eat. We are what we eat, it's pretty much as simple as that, yet so many don't follow that line of thinking. I lead a healthy life; I don't smoke, or drink too much. I exercise regularly, more for fitness than vanity. I guess I'm lucky in that respect.”

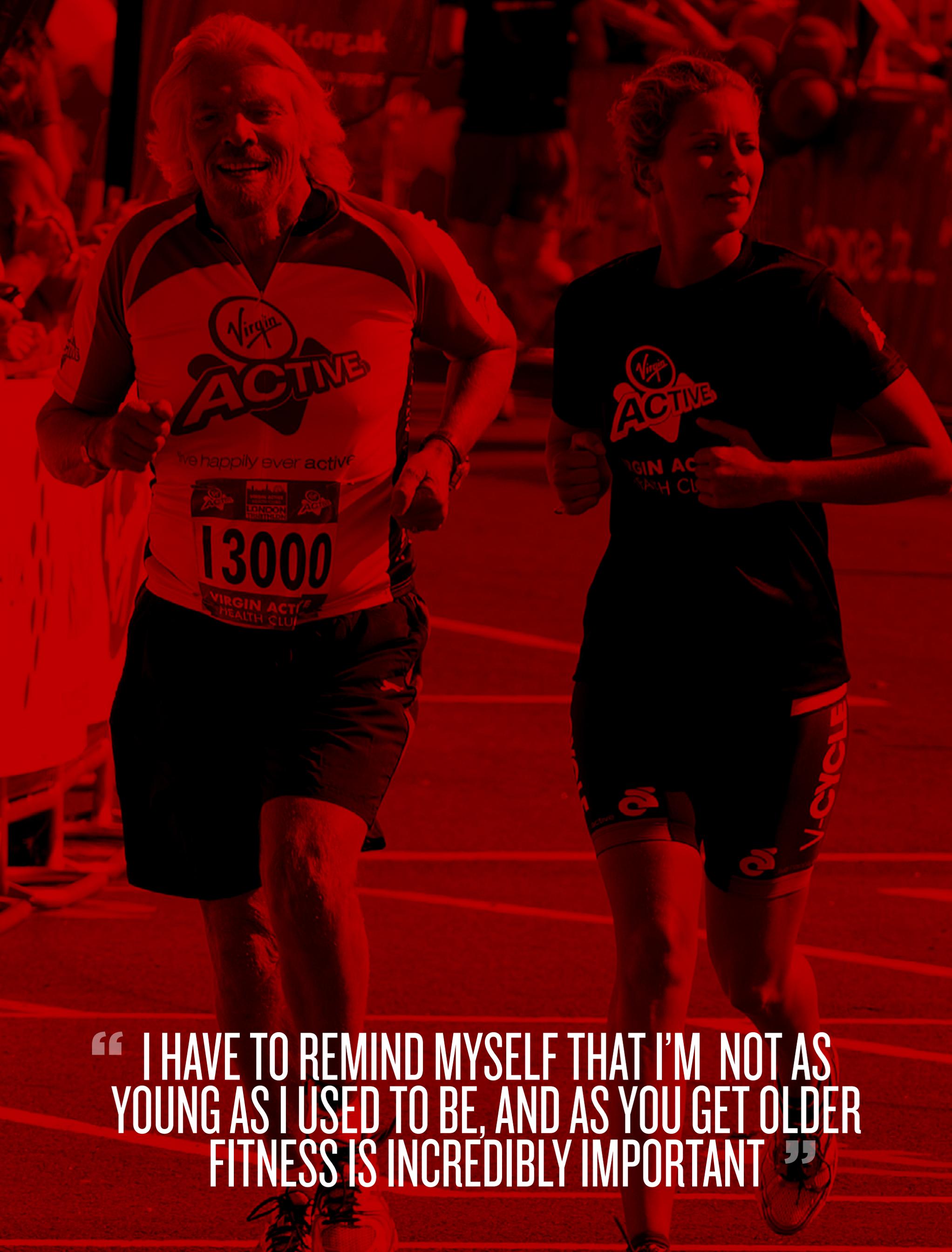
Naturally, Branson being Branson, his outdoor pursuits are of the more outlandish variety. Sure, he likes to “surf, paddle board, play tennis, go skiing” and says that “I just love all sports, and can honestly say, there isn't one that I don't like” but there is one sport that he currently can't get enough of: kite surfing.

“It's above and beyond my favourite sport right now,” he explains. “It's just wonderful, because you use the wind to perform. It looks great and is very skilful, it should be an Olympic sport.”

Could we see Branson competing if the International Olympic Committee is listening? He did, after all, become the oldest person to kite surf the English Channel in 2002. “Why not?! If we can get it included I'll participate, unless, of course, by then I'm too old. Although who am I kidding... I'm too old now, but we can all dream.”

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TOKYO 2020, RICHARD BRANSON
IS GUNNING FOR YOU.**





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