

A Personal Handbook:

Living The Fit Life

Integrating fitness, life and work in the 21st Century
and other important things...



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Living the Fit Life

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Important: If you have access to a printer, please PRINT this report. You'll get a lot more out of it if you're not reading it from a monitor. Take a few minutes to sit down in a quiet space and really absorb what's here. This is a start; but you'll want to make notes, edit and adapt what's here to create your own personal Fit Life.

Note that the web links included will only work in the computer version; but I still recommend you have a printed copy.

The Fit Life Table of Contents

0: Welcome, About You, Our Mission (go)

- * The Mission of Endurance Lifestyle Design
- * Why Design A Fit Life?
- * About Me

1: Planning from the Ground Up (go)

- * Endurance Planning Is Broken
- * The Problem of Periodization
- * A Bulletproof Three-Step Planning Process
- * Your Task: Re-think Your Annual Plan

2: Focus on Fun & Challenging Activities (go)

- * Planning to Race
- * Identifying Your Cool Factor
- * Adding Events to Your "Real" Season
- * Re-Thinking Post-Race
- * Your Task: Find Three Fun & Challenging Events for your Season

3: Create A Basic Training Week (go)

- * Planning Is Sexy; Execution Is Progress
- * Basic Week = Basic Unit of Time
- * Managing Event Requirements & Your Life
- * Integrate, Don't Balance Special Case Scenarios
- * Your Task: Outline your Basic Week

4: Integrated Nutrition & Recovery Plans (go)

- * Nutrition
 - o Eating for Performance
 - o What Are "Poor" Food Choices?
 - o Basic Guidance
 - o Tricks, Tweaks and an Eating Holiday
- * Recovery
 - o Planning to Fail...Unspectacularly
 - o Learning To Listen
 - o The RAP Sheet
- * Your Tasks

5: Well-Organized External Commitments (go)

- * The Personal Sphere: Go online, start outsourcing, build "focus" periods.
- * The Professional Sphere: Avoid email, stop meeting madness, "create" don't just do.

6: Further Reading (go)

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."
-- Lao-tzu"

"Our life is frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify."
-- Henry David Thoreau

0: Welcome, About You, Our Mission Together

You have officially taken the first step toward becoming a much improved endurance athlete -- feel better yet? You know as well as I do that it's not that simple. Despite constant marketing messages and stories to the contrary, personal experience shows that the best results come after periods of hard work and focus.

As an endurance athlete, you have likely organized almost everything you do in such a way that you can actively participate to your fullest. You need to exercise frequently, to eat properly, to manage your sleep, to balance recovery, and choose the right equipment. There are so many different areas where you can focus on improvement and find opportunities for growth and development that we all, at some point, become consumed by it.

Stories of mega training hours and the pro lifestyle seem alluring on the surface, but reality is much harsher. The message is clear: there is no easy way.

But there is a better way.

The Mission of Endurance Lifestyle Design

That super double top-secret protocol that the pros and elite age groupers take advantage of isn't the latest carbon widget or special coach – although those things can't hurt. The single unifying factor across all these individuals is far simpler: the relentless pursuit of physical excellence through incredible discipline, consistent training, and exhausting all avenues of learning.

The contents of this handbook are designed to help you transform your life at a macro-level. Tweaking workouts, buying gear, picking races...these are all minute changes that may or may not address the root cause of what's holding you back from achieving your potential. Besides, those decisions are highly individual and are best left in your hands.

Our goal in these pages is to go one better than the lopsided lifestyles of the phenomenally fit and fast: **We aim to provide you with a framework for improving key elements of your endurance lifestyle.**

Why Design A Fit Life?

Sure it's sexier to start with a race and a challenging training plan, plotting century rides and marathon greatness weeks and months ahead of schedule. Before you know it, you are plotting September's workouts...in January!

Your life and schedule will change so many times between now and September that your initial plan will probably have to be rethought several times...and you'll still only be able to fit in certain training regardless because of your other commitments.

That's where Endurance Lifestyle Design comes in.

Instead of getting lost in the details and ineffective dream-lining exercises, we can focus on aligning the big picture elements of your endurance goals and daily life. This integrated "lifestyle" approach creates conditions where you can exercise consistently and effectively without taking away from your other priorities.

What's The Catch?

I have to be honest here at the outset: this will not be easy, and it's not for everyone. We're going to try and cram a lifetime of "lessons learned" into a few pages. Not to mention a heavy-handed dose of the perspective that this is all just a game -- there are other things in our life that are simply more important than the sports we play.

The lessons and basic framework below are the result of over eight years of coaching triathletes, runners, adventure racers, and more. It's been tested, re-thought, overhauled and more...and it continues to help athletes looking for a better way than just doing "more."

Consider this your first step in the Endurance Lifestyle Design process. You'll more than likely need to take a few tries at constructing something that works for you, so be sure to save this handbook!

About Me

In writing this guide I am by no means claiming that I have all the answers. In fact I have made all of the typical mistakes (some more than once!) that I will cover in these pages. You can [learn more about me and my personal athletic journey here](#). Depending on the year and my focus, I could be raising money for charity through some crazy event, training for the Boston Marathon or trying to qualify for my fourth trip to Ironman Hawaii -- all while working from home and staying one step ahead of my two little girls.

I wish you the best on your journey and hope you stay in touch via [my blog](#) or [Twitter](#) so I can follow your progress and learn from you!

All the best,

Patrick

"Everyone has a plan until they get hit."
-- Joe Lewis

1: Plan From The Ground Up

Not too many years ago, my life was a mess. I was on a personal mission to qualify for Hawaii as it represented both a personal and a professional milestone. My wife and I were planning on starting a family soon and I knew it was do or die time to get serious about my training.

So I did what any avid triathlete would do. My knee-jerk reaction was to find an expensive coach with an impressive pro Ironman resume and I buried myself following his workouts. His training plan was just one week -- 25 hours a week. He told me to do for the next 10 weeks - no variation, same workouts - after which I could email him again for further guidance.

I worked out every day, typically 3 to 5 hours. I biked on the trainer in the AM, swam at lunch and ran at night. I fell asleep at my desk. I drank coke and coffee like it was water. I ate anything that wasn't nailed down. I eventually got better at doing the workouts, but after my taper and race, I still didn't make the big dance.

Hugging my proud wife at the finishline, it crossed my mind that I was physically out of options -- there was no more time in my life. Something had to change. My training plan looked great, but everything that went into it was so unbalanced, so poorly set up, that it was simply unsustainable.

What began then was a long process, one that continues today, of deconstructing my schedule and my goals and building them all over again from the ground up. You will need to go through this same process if you are to realize your true endurance potential.

Endurance Planning Is Broken

As an endurance athlete, chances are you are familiar with the annual planning process. Whether you are a beginner or a veteran, one of the first "a ha" moments you had was that you couldn't just roll out of bed on a Sunday and race to your best.

So you follow in the footsteps of your peers, targeting a race in the distant future and then begin the process of training for it across many months. You use software to measure your training, then draw a straight line between where you are now and where you want to be in three, five, or eight months. This is a massive undertaking, and when done poorly is little more than a guaranteed way to burn out, get injured, or worse. Are you excited yet!?

The Problem of Periodization

The most commonly accepted form of annual season planning is known as periodization. While the approach presupposes various phases of training designed to build fitness and create peak fitness, it's been regurgitated and copied so many times that all the plans begin to look the same:

Base 1, Base 2, Base 3, Build 1, Build 2, Peak, Taper & Race

Simply adding 10% more volume or distance each week, making sure to take every fourth week as recovery isn't a plan -- it's a scientific model.





This model assumes that your time is flexible and that training is your number one priority. Time flexibility is required as you'll be adding more and more each phase to build training stress and create fitness gains. The training as number one priority is a foregone conclusion; there is no other space on the template planning sheets where you can account for other parts of your life outside of training.

At the end of the day, you can spend several hours massaging data and numbers to create the dream training plan. It will look pretty, but chances are it will have absolutely no bearing on your personal reality. I can say this with such conviction because I have years of personal and professional experience trying to shoehorn my own life, and the lives of countless athletes, into a rigid training plan structure.

A Bulletproof Three-Step Planning Process

Your life, your job, your means, your goals, everything down to the work you need to do to achieve your goals...they all constitute critical elements of your plan. You now know that you ignore these elements and you risk creating a fantastic plan for a season that will only ever exist in a vacuum. Here's how you can beat the system:

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Step 1: Start Where You Are

Forget calculating 10% more than last year's annual hours. Instead, begin your seasonal journey by taking a 360-degree look at yourself both as who you are now, but who you want to be. Are you a mother? A CEO? Do you work full-time? Do you want to volunteer or spend Sundays at Church? Are you a vegetarian? Do you want to become one? There are so many complicated facets to our lives and who we are, that planning everything we do according to how we exercise and how we'd like to perform on a single day is almost laughable.

Once you have a bigger picture sense of who you are and where you want to be headed, break out your calendar / schedule and map your available time. Not the time you want to have, the time you actually have. Block out recurring commitments and "flex" time for other demands. Add in fun / family time, or whatever fits that category for you. Be sure to scan the last six to eight weeks of your calendar so that you don't miss any basic commitments.

Step 2: Outline Goals + Sketch Week

With your other time commitments defined and your big picture in mind, you can begin sketching out your basic week. We'll go into more detail on this later, but the basic week is essentially a training week that you can repeat, year-round, pretty much without fail.

Swims work on Monday and Wednesday because the pool is open and life says it's okay. Long bikes are on Sundays because of your Little League commitments. Runs are a lunchtime because you have an awesome boss who "gets" your fitness lifestyle.

However it works for you, when you're done you'll know that you have a schedule that you can actually complete. That's very, very powerful.

Step 3: Identify "Critical" Training Windows

The final step is to identify areas in your year when making your training a higher priority will have a significant impact on your fitness. These windows vary by event type and distance, but in general:

- 12 weeks out from your event it's time to "Get Serious" about making 95% of your workouts.
- 12 to 8 weeks out you can do one "volume" weekend or week, committing to significant time on the bike. Note this time is a good place to do a "B" or "C" level race as well.
- 8 to 4 weeks out you can do another "volume" weekend or week, committing to time in all three disciplines if possible.
- 4 to 2 weeks out you should plan for a race rehearsal workout where you complete anywhere from 100% (shorter events) to 66% of the overall race distance.
- 2 to 0 weeks out is time for tapering and recovery; plan on travel and being a bit "stressed".

Your Task: Re-think Your Annual Plan

Block out an hour sometime this week, and revisit your current training plan. If you can't rebuild it from the week up, how closely can you make it map to your current schedule. If you have a coach, make her/him earn the monthly coaching fee by converting the schedule to one that fits better into your life. Be sure to save the basic week you create as a template to either work from or to compare future training weeks with as a baseline.

Conclusion

It seems like a lot now, but it's easily managed when you focus on that single race and are actually working with your existing calendar. To be your best, everything about you needs to be in "sync" with your athletic goals. Forget calculating annual hours or pie charts dividing each week by discipline...these all pale in comparison to who you are today. Always remember: A plan you can actually do beats the plan you want to, but can't do, every time.

"If it's not fun, why do it?"
-- Ben & Jerry's Company Motto

2: Focus on Fun & Challenging Activities

If you look closely enough, you might notice that there was a critical element missing from the annual plans I described in section one. Ready? It's fun.

Go back and read that first section again. You'll notice from my tone and the description of my day that training had become a job. It was just another thing to schedule, suffer through, and repeat the next day. What was once an amazing sport filled with cool people had become my own personal aerobic hell filled with energy bars, caffeine and little else.

I am living testament to the fact that you can still train for an endurance event -- at a very high level -- without making incredible sacrifices.

Sounds almost too good to be true, right? Let's see what it takes...

Planning to Race

Very little of your training and hard work really goes into your race. It's really just the last twelve weeks, the last 84 days, that truly has an impact. Everything before that point is simply preparation for the training you will do for the race itself. We know this from research that has attempted to mathematically model the load-performance relationship (e.g. Banister, 1986, Morton, 1991), generating what's known as influence curves -- a representation of when the work you do will affect your fitness.

This critical knowledge allows us to take a very large step back from the pressures of annual planning. If we need to get serious with about 12 weeks to go, then it follows that everything before that point in time is really just getting our ducks in a row. Taking your race goals into consideration, of course, it's possible to outline a season where you have fun and get fit and are ready to hit it out of the park within your own race training window.



Identifying Your Cool Factor

Now that that the pressure is off, let's take a second to find out what you think is "cool." Maybe there's a 24-hour team running relay, or an annual epic bike ride. Maybe you've always wanted to do a particular race but never seriously considered it. Maybe you want to go out on your own and make up something entirely new.

Whatever it is -- do it.

Its just a simple fact: if something is cool and exciting you are way more likely to enjoy the preparation process and the event itself. Take a moment to stop geeking out about your season and instead reflect back on the times in your own past, or perhaps when you learned of what others had done, that made you say "Wow." That's exactly the spirit we want to capture.

Adding Events to Your "Real" Season

In some cases, these cool events are actually pretty massive undertakings. In general I recommend you start with the small and manageable, building your way up the cool spectrum. A 10 day backpacking trip to Patagonia is cool, but might overwhelm you a bit early in the cool process. The initial step here is much like brainstorming or building a bucket list...just write it all down and we can sort it out later.

Rule #1 Is Specificity: While anything prior to the last twelve weeks is fair game, it's safe to say that the closer you get to your event window the more specific these activities should be. So an epic cycling trip to California is cool, but it's cool and relevant when it's pretty close to the start of your Ironman race prep phase. Same way that a 5-day backpacking trip is very cool, but not so relevant, and perhaps best scheduled earlier in your year.

Rule #2 Is Fatigue: The only other real consideration for these fun and challenging events is the impact they'll have on your ability to train for your race preparation phase. So picking something like Western States 100 as your cool thing, while epic, isn't really an appropriate supplemental activity. Instead that's probably more of an "A" race in and of itself, and should be treated as such. Heck, think of all the cool things you could do in preparation for an event like that! So remember: cool is cool until it's not so cool and you are worn down from being so cool that you can't train when it matters. Definitely not cool.

Re-Thinking Post Race

The time of your season with the most potential for coolness actually falls after your big race. The pressure is off. You are wicked fit. You are most likely bored out of your mind and driving your family and friends insane. What better time to pick something fun and low-pressure to keep you occupied and make the most of the hard work you have done?

Anything is game here as long as (A) you are healthy enough to do it and (B) you can do so without seriously burning any bridges with your inner circle.

- Good Example: Xterra World Champs on Maui after the Ironman World Champs.
- Bad Example: Adding a Marathon to the end of a long Triathlon season.

Do your best to fight the planning blues by filling your calendar with regularly scheduled fun and cool activities. Outside of your sport, there are plenty of events that will keep you focused (athletically), test your abilities (physically) and force you to execute (mentally)...all without the perceived cost of the long-term event. Do your best to incorporate these events roughly six to eight weeks apart across your season. Whenever possible, try to involve others in your quest for fun and fitness.

Your Task: Find Three Fun & Challenging Events for your Season

You heard me, three events. Put on your thinking cap, email your friends, do some research online. Spend a week just thinking about it and adding to this list. Then sit down with a "cool" drink (I'd choose a manly beer or something), put your feet up and start plotting. The only thing holding you back at this point is your imagination!

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