

Game Plan: Getting Organized

Here's a common scenario that might resonate with you:

You have taken the initiative to begin a workout routine but, when you step onto the gym floor, you realize—gulp—that you haven't a clue as to what to do, where to begin, or how to use the equipment.

Or, you've been working out for quite some time and feel like you are stuck in a tiresome routine, unsure if you are really making progress.

Let me help you develop a game plan so that you can stop spinning your wheels and start making strides towards reaching your goals.

Step 1: Set a Goal

You've probably already done this in your mind to some extent but without a firm, measurable goal it's difficult to quantify your progress. Digging deeper into the **why** behind your goal is critical to formulating a meaningful one. If you haven't already read my article on that topic, [*The Fitness Mindset*](#), then you should start there.

Whether it be losing weight, reducing your blood pressure, climbing Kilimanjaro, or just staying in good overall shape, there should be some overarching theme to help focus your individual workouts.

Start by picking a shorter term goal—something you can achieve in 1-2 months*—so that you can experience success before boredom and disenchantment sets in.

**Be realistic about what you can accomplish in that time. Losing 30 pounds to fit into that revealing bathing suit...not realistic. Losing a belt size, now that's reasonable.*

Step 2: Objectively Assess Your Starting Condition

It is very important to establish a baseline in the areas relevant to your goals so you have a way of objectively determining if you've achieved them.

An obvious example would be to weigh yourself before you start working out in order to know if you've lost some fat after a couple of months. If you want to be able to run a mile, you'll have to determine how far you can run now and in what amount of time.

Although you may not be someone who loves numbers (like me), consistently taking even one metric can be incredibly helpful and motivating. For example, I don't test myself very often with max weights but I have a number in the back of my mind of my heaviest deadlift, against which I can gauge my level of strength at any particular time. If I get too far away from that number then I can focus on my deadlifts for a few weeks to get it back up.

So, you can use assessments to either establish your goal or use them as a way to determine how far away from your goal you have may drifted. Either way, data will help your training consistency and results.

But it's as important to understand *how* to take measurements as it is to collect them.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- No matter what numbers you use to keep track of your progress—your body weight, the amount of weight you can lift, how fast you can complete a mile—***use the same testing technique each time for more reliable results.***
 - For example, if you weigh yourself for the first time in the morning before eating or dressing, don't reassess under different conditions. The numbers will be skewed. Likewise, if you are testing how many pushups you can do make sure you warm up the same way each time and aren't sore from a previous workout.
- Try to resist measuring more than ***once a week for bodyweight and once a month for performance measures*** (i.e. amount of weight you can lift, how fast you can run a mile).
 - If you do it too often you might get discouraged that the numbers aren't moving quickly enough (and then possibly abandon your hard work for a tasty-looking piece of cheesecake).
 - If you do it too infrequently you might not be aware that you are slowly veering off course (due to nightly consumption of said cheesecake).

- **Write them down.** I can't tell you how many times a client has asked me if she has made progress and then becomes pleasantly surprised when I show her that she started out 6 months ago squatting with 15lbs in each hand and can now do 35. Because I keep pushing clients in new ways the workouts still feel hard, and they may lose sight of the objective, measurable facts.

Make the effort to document your assessments so you can focus on the workouts rather than trying to remember if you started your training weighing 142 or 124.

Some sample goals and corresponding measurements to take:

Goal: Lose 10 pounds of body fat

- **Measure:** Use a non-elastic measuring tape, find a landmark (i.e. around the belly button), exhale fully (but don't "suck in") and take a measurement.

Goal: Increase cardiovascular function

- **Measure:** After a brief warm-up on the treadmill, complete one mile as fast as possible. Note the time on the machine when you've begun the test so you can deduct that time from the total test time.

Step 3: Get to the Gym

Trust me, this is the absolute hardest part of the workout. That's why most people hire trainers like me—just to get them there. It's hard to bail on an appointment when another person is waiting (and for whom clients pay a pretty penny).

Don't spend time bemoaning the fact that it's dark out, too early to competently tie your sneakers, or that you're so tired from the workday that the most amount of energy you wish to expend is hitting the "down" button on your e-reader.

Just accept the fact that **exercise is not optional** and get to the gym, park, or living room. Wherever it is that you will move consistently.

That may mean mixing up your locations to keep you interested and engaged. That may mean tagging along with a friend for morning walks or joining a fitness class to sweat it out with like-minded folks.

Do whatever you need to in order to adhere for the long-term so that you can experience the joys of a fit, healthy lifestyle.

Step 4: Pick 5

When people sign up for gym memberships there is no magical information passed along with the ID card stating what to do when you actually use the facility. Knowing how to create workouts has traditionally been the domain of trainers but I want you, with a little guidance, to dip your toe in the program design waters.

I have written a separate set of Workout Guidelines that explains this Pick 5 concept in its entirety, and you will check that out once you've finished this document. (Head to Step 4 of the [Workout Builder](#) page on my site for that information).

But, I can tell you want a teaser, so here it is:

Pick 5 is a simple system that lays out 5 movement categories, which are broken down as follows:

Upper Body: Push
Upper Body: Pull
Trunk
Lower Body: 1 leg
Lower Body: 2 legs

Each category contains several movements and you will select one movement from each category to create a well-balanced, total-body workout.

In addition, you will learn about structuring essential workout variables: intensity, rep ranges, rest intervals, and cardio training integration.

Sound doable? OK, be patient and finish up here before checking out Step 4 of my [Workout Builder](#) resource.

Step 5: Assess Progress

Once you've gotten into a groove with your workouts and have been consistently active for about 1-2 months, re-assess the metrics that you identified in *Step 2*.

Step 6: Reward Yourself

It is perfectly acceptable to do a jiggle, wiggle, and jive because you achieved your goals. Acknowledge and celebrate your accomplishments with some reward, preferably one that will not set you back a few days (like a burger and fries).

Try a movement-related venture or therapy: go to a rock-climbing wall, buy a day pass for a pool, get a massage/spa treatment, head to a yoga or meditation retreat, or treat yourself to a session with a trainer.

Step 7: Repeat Steps 1-6 for Life

Not to dampen the party but someone has to level with you. Exercise, movement, activity, whatever you want to call it, is an undeniable part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Consistency over time is key.

There may be days, weeks even, when you have lulls in your training intensity due to sickness, life stresses, or a simple lack of interest. I certainly have. But, sometimes motivation follows action, and you keep going until you form the next goal to work towards: playing with your grandkids, returning to the slopes after a 30-year absence, or running your first marathon. Just keep moving!

Good luck and let me know how you do with your game plan.

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Keep on Movin'

-CA