

Fitness Level 4: Racers.

Transformation. Each of the following fitness groups is in the process of transforming from one fundamental way of being to another. Inner transformation occurs at the level of one's personality: the person we declare ourselves to be, thereby obtaining the results we desire.

- **Transitioner.** Non-athlete to novice athlete.
- **Launcher.** Novice athlete to beginner.
- **Practitioner.** Beginner to intermediate Practitioner.
- **Racer.** Practitioner to advanced Racer.
- **Master.** Racer to master runner.

Racers want to do a specific race but they aren't clear about how to train for it effectively. Their training is fraught with pitfalls based on limited experience, incorrect ideas, and haphazard planning, all of which prevents them from becoming fully racing fit.

- **Their racing goals** are a work in progress, as the more they learn about the training process, the more their goals evolve, along with the means to achieve them. The hard-easy system they are learning illuminates and reveals a correct path forward.
- **Racers learn** how the fundamental aspects of the training process—effort and energy—can be used to measure their recoveries. With that understanding they can exert optimal workout efforts, and thereby more effectively enhance their racing fitness.
- **Practice races** and test-efforts reinforce the learning process, along with a full schedule of moderately difficult workouts structured according to ability-building rules. A few hard workouts late in the training give racers an experience of training at the master level.

Racers are becoming racing fit—a transformation from mere practitioner to competitive racer. It helps to already possess a predisposition to becoming more competitive. Hard training is, by definition, difficult. The road there challenges like a part-time job.

- **It helps to** focus on doing certain race events while practicing the means to develop a full complement of racing abilities for them.
- **It helps to** start at a modest workout effort level for the sake of gradually and incrementally approaching a harder and more optimal level.
- **It helps to** have the time to train on a strict time-table, with three major workouts scheduled in regular weekly time slots, and with 2 or 3 recovery runs in between.
- **It helps to** review and practice the skills of running, already made habitual at the Practitioner level, where the eight basic skills are a major training focus.

The Five Racer Habits.

Personality-based habits form a feedback loop, as positive behavior garners satisfying results that reinforce right behavior. Habits are not about *having* something, but *becoming* someone: the person you want to be. New habits have the power to change your beliefs about yourself.

- **A habit is an automatic**, unconscious solution to a real-life problem. You don't have to think about habitual behavior. The thinking only occurs as you are setting up and repeating the behavior you want to do automatically, without thinking about it.

- **There are four steps** to building a habit: declaring your intent, remembering in the moment, following through on your commitment, and reaping rewarding results. This program will suggest appropriate habits; you must provide the mental and physical work.
- **The most effective** form of learning is self-discovered through practice. Habit formation is the process by which behavior becomes progressively more automatic through many repetitions. Every meal and every workout becomes a health and fitness opportunity.

Habit 1. Take responsibility for eating three full meals and a snack every day. Unless you are fortunate to have a servant, you must personally commit to habitually providing your running body with the nourishment it needs to train optimally, without exhaustion.

- **The program recommends** eating a variety of mostly whole foods that you enjoy. Whole foods (see 4 food groups below) are those that have not been processed into more refined versions by having nutrients removed and, often, sugar and salt added.
- **Think about meals that include** reasonable portions of the following food groups:
 1. Animal protein (fish, meat, poultry).
 2. Dairy products (milk, cheese, eggs).
 3. Vitamins A and C, and the mineral Calcium (most fruits and vegetables).
 4. Sources of other key minerals (grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds).
- **A full meal doesn't mean stuffed**, just full. And a snack should be light and satisfying. Don't eat between meals and give your body time to digest its food before eating your next meal or doing your next workout.

Habit 2. The hard-easy training system provides an effective way of thinking about the training process in the competitive context. But its tenets are often non-intuitive and difficult to grasp, even at the racer level. You'll need to be carefully taught.

- **A course** on the hard-easy training system is taught as an adjunct to the training program. Graduating from the course is necessary to assume the master athlete level. The course has eleven, 90-minute, in-class sessions.
- **See about attending** at least 8 of 11 sessions, and listen to the video recording of all missed sessions. Watch the 15-minute video program in preparation for each in-class session. Read 2 pages of supplementary material and take a quiz.
- **The course is an opportunity** to talk about your training and get feedback about it from a master-level teacher. In the process, you will find new, more fruitful directions for your training. Maybe even to train at the master-runner level.

Habit 3. Become training proficient. You'll need to know all five components of exertion by heart, as well as the rules for structuring those components to build a full complement of five racing abilities for the specific goal race you are training for.

- **You'll develop an appreciation** of a gradual, incremental approach to establishing ability-building workouts without becoming sick or injured. Proficiency grows safely when you challenge yourself initially at only the passable level.
- **You'll develop heart rate standards** for pacing each workout at the adaptive level. Experience will indicate a narrow range of about five beats per minute that keeps you in the adaptive ball-park as you repeat each established workout.

- **You'll also use** pace and heart rate standards to end all workouts at the first sign of noticeable fatigue. Becoming aware of the way fatigue affects your energy is one of the necessary mindfulness skills at the racer level.

Habit 4. The other part of becoming training proficient is to develop an awareness of your sensations of energy in its several forms: running energy, workout energy, and capacity for exertion. The course teaches these ideas; you'll need to learn them.

- **Every workout** has an energy component, which is even more important than effort to adaptive processes. Indeed, your effort must be coordinated with your energy as you find it during every workout, otherwise adaptation is problematic.
- **Energy-related practices** include logging your energy after every workout, adjusting your exertion to your energy (in spite of pacing or heart rate standards), and ending workouts according to the onset and depth of fatigue.
- **Your energy aligns with** metabolic forces which put it outside of your direct control. Yet you must control it for adaptive or competitive purposes whenever you do a race or workout. This conundrum is the central Racer reality.

Habit 5. Become racing proficient by becoming skilled at focusing, tapering, gathering, warming up, and pacing a race. Test-efforts and practice races will give you an opportunity to practice these skills and to develop confidence in newly formed habits.

- **Workouts and races** differ fundamentally in their purpose. Thus, you'll look to build ability with your workouts, while proving superiority with your races. The Racer discipline is to save racing for the races; never race the workouts.
- **Workout efforts** are highly structured between the very-easy and difficult levels, depending on your recovery level/energy. Races, by contrast, are always at least very difficult, with your highest level of energy needed for success.
- **The racing process** can begin as early as one or two weeks before race day. At that point, training takes a backseat to one's competitive purpose: a much harder effort with the most energy you can muster, producing a best performance.