

2ND EDITION

THE WORKING TRIATHLETE

***MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE WITH
BRUTAL EFFICIENCY***

By Conrad Goeringer

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Preface

The Working Triathlete Philosophy

The prospect of training with brutal efficiency, as per the Working Triathlete training philosophy, is not a shortcut or hack. It is not “easier” than a more traditional, volume-focused program, nor is it an approach only relevant to severely time-strapped age-group athletes (though it is effective in the latter regard). **The Working Triathlete training model focuses on wringing every drop of potential from the time you have available to train—whatever the duration.** For working professionals with a plethora of responsibilities, this may mean structuring training in such a way as to maximize performance on 6-8 hours per week. For elites, it may involve getting the most out of 25-30+ hours of training per week. In all cases, efficiency means getting more out of the time you have to commit to training.

Since the first edition of *The Working Triathlete* was published in 2017, I have enjoyed discussing principles of efficiency with hundreds of athletes and coaches and have had the privilege of speaking about the training methodology on numerous podcasts and in countless publications. Over that same time period, we have seen a shift in how people train for triathlon. Compared to ten years ago, there is a greater emphasis on executing a well-rounded plan as opposed to the relentless pursuit of volume for volume’s sake. I do not necessarily attribute these trends to the first edition of this book (though it may have helped a little)—I believe them more to be a result of the proven efficacy of various tools and technologies to optimize training adaptations. This is especially true for cycling, where indoor trainers, the nearly universal adoption of power meters, and the rise of virtual cycling (e.g. Zwift and Trainer Road)

have transformed the way athletes train on their bikes. For swimming, tools like Vasa SwimErgs (which have built-in power meters) along with the prevalence of digital coaching and technique tutorials have allowed athletes to develop fitness and form more efficiently than ever before. Even within a sport as simple as running, new shoe technology has enabled athletes to not only run faster (who can ignore Kipchoge’s sub-2 hour marathon in a certain shoe), but also with a potentially lower rate of injury—meaning athletes have the ability to train smarter and, for those sufficiently resilient, at a wider range of precise intensities.

All this is not to say that to get fast you need to geek out with the latest and greatest technology or that you need to adopt the latest exotic training approach (on the contrary, actually). I refer to technology and cutting-edge training methodologies simply to offer tangible examples of how athletes are optimizing their training to achieve marginal and, in certain cases, substantial, gains. Every new product or piece of technology is not useful. In fact, many are distracting gimmicks. However, there are undeniably effective ways to integrate certain new tools to enhance your training, and I will cover a few of these in the following chapters.

Most of my focus in this book will be on uncovering simple principles that, when integrated strategically in a manner that fits your lifestyle, will make you a better triathlete. In this way, my goal is to equip you with the knowledge to create and execute upon a plan that will enhance your performance in the most effective and efficient manner possible—all within the context of your unique life situation, schedule and goals.

Who are you?

If you are reading this book, you are likely one of two types of people. Perhaps you are a working professional with a rich life and an interest in getting faster. You have an overabundance of responsibilities apart from training,

including family, work and travel. Add the prospect of high-level triathlon training on top of all that and you might be wondering if you will ever get the chance to sleep again. And — what’s amusing — if you are like many triathletes, you may be rationalizing the prospect of not sleeping again. We are a hardcore bunch!

Or perhaps you are a second type of person—one who doesn’t necessarily have an executive-level schedule, but who wishes to get the most out of the time you train. Even if you have unlimited time, you do not have unlimited energy. Even professional triathletes who have the luxury of training dozens of hours each week are best served optimizing that time to ensure that each minute has a productive purpose.

No matter who you are, this book will equip you with the knowledge and tools to achieve more in less time—whether that means literally training fewer hours overall while still achieving exceptional results or getting more out of the time you have available to train.

Why I wrote this book

I have always been interested in people who achieve in athletics, business, or other realms. One common trait that successful people have is their ability to accomplish more in less time. Yes, you can get there with brute force, but the best way to excel in any given field is via focused practice and execution. The same concept can be applied to triathlon.

As a triathlon coach, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of endurance athletes all across the world, ranging from true beginners to professionals. I’ve coached athletes to national championships, world championship qualifications, and to their first sprint triathlons. In all cases, the most successful athletes were those who were consistent. And, surprisingly, the top 1% (i.e. elite age groupers and even the professionals) were consistent AND busy. More often than not, the most successful triathletes I work with are also

the most successful in their careers or other ventures. For these athletes, progress in their endurance sporting endeavors comes in spite of having less time.

Over the years, I have homed in on methods and strategies that enable motivated working athletes to achieve more in less time. Because I believe that triathlon can accentuate one's life by giving it purpose and meaning, I want to make high-performance triathlon accessible and rewarding. Notice, however, I said **high-performance**. My focus here is not on conveying a gentle or easy training plan — it is on creating an efficient one that, by distilling the most essential training principles and time management strategies, will equip you with the tools to become a better (i.e., faster) triathlete.

As a coach, I get tremendous joy helping others break through their perceived limitations. I know what it is like to juggle numerous responsibilities while still putting in the work to perform at a high level and I consider it an honor to pass along the strategies that my clients and I have used to achieve maximum (i.e. national and world-class) performance with deliberate efficiency. I've worked with high-power executives, graduate students, intercontinental pilots and time-strapped parents, all of whom have been able to achieve lofty performance goals without decaying into ego-centric, self-obsessed triathletes. Believe it or not, it is possible to be a world-class triathlete AND be capable of discussing something besides training at dinner parties.

What I am assuming you want to achieve

The framework and principles of the Working Triathlete methodology are informed by the assumption that you are motivated to perform well. Though you could haphazardly exercise each day at a random pace and still finish a triathlon, I am assuming that you want to reach your maximum potential given

your time constraints. To do this, you need a sustainable and well-structured plan that aligns with your lifestyle and allows you to achieve performance gains in the most brutally efficient manner possible. This does not mean that all training prescribed herein will be painless or effortless, but it will be balanced, time-efficient, personalized and fulfilling. Whether you travel for work half the week, are in the throes of medical residency, or put in the typical 9-5, you can achieve great results if you glean recommendations from this book and assimilate them into your training.

What this book is not

Although beginners will reap value from reading this book and adhering to its principles, my focus is on conveying an approach that committed athletes can harness to get faster. This is not a “My First Mini Triathlon” kind of book, nor is it driven by a “Just Finish” philosophy. Certainly not everyone can or should be gunning for the podium, but there is much satisfaction to be gained from setting challenging performance goals and achieving them — whatever they may be. As such, the intent of this book is not to be a comprehensive primer on all things triathlon or serve as a shortcut to the finish line; the intent is to convey a concentrated approach that dedicated athletes (beginners and elites alike) can use to boost race performance.

It is also not my intention here to advance the notion that mileage does NOT make champions. I am not claiming that one can qualify for Kona by training six hours per week or obtain their elite license on eight. I am not claiming that the medalists from the prior Olympic Games or current Ironman World Champions should lower their training volume. I would posit, however, that all athletes would benefit from integrating principles of efficiency into their own training—whether that means strategically increasing the density of workouts, targeting specific limiters, manipulating frequency, integrating new technology, and more.

How this book is structured

The first part of this book (Chapters 1-4) covers the more technical aspects of training, including the training cycle, zones and other nitty gritty items. After laying out the foundational vocabulary, I explain how the Working Triathlete approach differs from other plans and what a typical macrocycle looks like. In Chapter 5, I go over the special principles that drive an efficient training program, including tips that will get you fitter faster.

In the second part of the book, I dive into the disciplines and explore each the swim, bike and run in more detail and explain how each fits into the training plan. I also cover the importance of strength training and offer essential exercises you can utilize to efficiently build power and durability.

The third part of the books contains two training plans: an 18-week Olympic distance plan, and an 18-week half iron plan. Utilize these to see how a macrocycle evolves and as a framework for your own training. More detailed plans are available at www.workingtriathlete.com.

Throughout the book we will discuss the training approaches of four real-world athletes to see how each, with their unique schedules, backgrounds and abilities, were able to successfully train for and exceed their goals.

Why this books is unique

There is no shortage of great triathlon books and training plans available for sale, and many will make you faster. However, most come from a general and inoffensive perspective as they try to cater to the masses. They lack a niche focus and try to be all things to all athletes. If you have not guessed it yet, Working Triathlete, although grounded in proven training principles and foundations, deliberately diverts from a “traditional” approach to training. The purpose here is not to repackage the common textbook knowledge pervading triathlon into a riskless philosophy, relate it to a boiler plate training regimen and send you off. Rather, it is to equip you with knowledge derived from sound

training principles that will allow you to adapt the hyper-focused training plans herein to suit your lifestyle. The goal is to make you ruthlessly and unapologetically efficient so that you can perform (and excel) in not only triathlon, but in all areas of your life.

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Chapter 1

Types of Time-Strapped Triathletes

Effective training is not a one-size fits all endeavor

Errrr, errrr, errrr! The alarm clock wails as Maximus rubs his eyes. He can hardly believe that it is already 4:00 AM. After verifying that he did not accidentally move the clock forward five hours before going to sleep, he accepts the unbelievable reality: it is, in fact, time to wake up. He lets out a long sigh and a choice four letter word, questioning his decision to train for an iron distance race. One would think that two decades of 5AM swim practices would have made it easy for him to pop out of bed; but his ability to adapt does not extend to waking up early. As a young sales professional in Chicago, he has grown accustomed to long workdays and happy hours, but morphing into an early bird remains a struggle. The training plan that he downloaded from the internet calls for 17-hour training weeks, so he has conceded miserably to waking up before the sun rises to pack in the volume. As he stumbles to his closet to find a clean pair of running shorts, he wonders if there is a way to be competitive and not wake up before the rooster crows.

Meanwhile across town, Kim is already in the kitchen brewing her morning espresso shot. The mom and corporate executive cherishes her mornings since they are the only time she can be alone with her thoughts. She views her morning workout routine as a way to meditate, reset and recharge. Waking up is easy, but she is looking to spice up her training and complete a half iron distance race within a year. Since evenings are reserved for spending time with her family, she is wondering if she has the time to appropriately train.

Different lifestyles, similar goals

Though Maximus and Kim have different schedules, different motivating factors for doing triathlons, and different strengths and weaknesses, their needs are similar: to train efficiently without sacrificing performance or compromising other pursuits. Over the years, I have worked with athletes who have horrifying schedules, strong and weak backgrounds in all or none of the sports, and both selfish and charitable reasons for racing. However, in most of these instances, it was possible to achieve remarkable results by adhering to universal training philosophies while making intelligent adjustments unique to individual situations.

In this chapter, I want to present four real-life athletes (you already know Maximus and Kim) with varying backgrounds and schedules. You may see yourself in one or all of these athletes, but each should hopefully provide some useful takeaways as you strive to balance life and triathlon training. Although these athletes are at different stages of life, they all are busy achievers with responsibilities – much like you. Despite their busy schedules, with discipline, creativity and conscientiousness each can excel in triathlon without stifling their relationships or careers.

The former collegiate athlete: Maximus the magnificent swimmer

Age: 25

Background: Maximus is a hardworking, young sales professional who lives in Chicago. He is a former collegiate swimmer and is extremely competitive. He is a night owl and enjoys a bit of libations every now and then.

Training limitations: Although Maximus's competitive streak and discipline allow him to stick to a plan, he has the potential to be overly ambitious and burn out. Especially since he has little run background, it is important to build volume gradually and methodically to avoid injury.

Goal: To do an iron distance race ASAP.

Preliminary approach: It is important to rein him in and set a reasonable timeline for an adequate iron distance build. Because he is already an incredible swimmer, the emphasis should be on building bike and run fitness while preserving swim ability and confidence. He has tremendous natural talent and wants to perform well, so it is important to press the envelope in training while still ensuring that he remains healthy. Since he rarely crawls into bed before midnight, most key sessions should be in the afternoons or evenings.

The time-strapped, high powered CFO: Kim the Corporate Exec

Age: 42

Background: Kim is a CFO at an investment firm and is married with two children. She works long hours and her job is stressful, but she loves it. She tries to work out five or six times per week, with four or five of these sessions being runs. She is health conscious and has completed one sprint triathlon, albeit slowly. She does have some experience in all three sports.

Training limitations: Because of her life responsibilities, Kim can only work out once per day in the morning. Her workload increases dramatically around quarter end.

Goal: To complete a half iron race within a year.

Preliminary approach: By necessity, Kim is going to have a steady diet of morning brick workouts. Although not ideal, a well-structured plan composed of weekday bricks (i.e., doing two workouts back-to-back) and good endurance sessions on the weekends is the best approach. The toughest challenge will be balancing training with a high-stress job and family.

The older, busy, uber-biker: Bill the Biker

Age: 59

Background: Bill is a consultant based out of San Francisco who travels 2-3 days per week. He is married with three grown children. As an avid cyclist, he has a strong aerobic engine. He has very little run experience apart from hopping in a few local 5Ks, but the swim is his biggest weakness. He can barely doggy paddle two laps in a 25-yard pool and he has a subtle but genuine fear of drowning.

Training limitations: Bill's travel schedule often causes him to forgo working out, leading to inconsistent training during the week. As an older athlete, he is more injury prone.

Goal: Bill wants to become competitive in local triathlons, build general fitness and be healthy.

Preliminary approach: Bill needs to focus on two things above all else: getting comfortable in the water and preventing injury. These can be achieved through joining a Masters Swim group, building volume gradually and adhering to a good strength routine.

The creative free spirit who can't really bike: Imogene the Artist

Age: 30

Background: Imogene is a freelance graphic artist who enjoys a hip, somewhat nomadic lifestyle. She also places a high priority on volunteering and is a board member at a local charity organization focused on helping underprivileged youth. She enjoys working out, but it has mostly been limited to yoga and Pilates. She took swim lessons as a child and runs once or twice a week, but she has never done any serious road cycling apart from a casual ride on the local greenway. She has recently taken up mountain biking, but her lack of cycling strength is inhibiting her ability to ride on basic trails. Don't let her

calm and cool exterior fool you. She is ferociously focused and is a very hard worker.

Training limitations: Imogene has a limited sports background and is not particularly interested in tracking training data. She works a lot and has a rich social life that she wishes to preserve.

Goal: She wants to do local shorter races and build up to an off-road triathlon or half iron race.

Preliminary approach: The key for Imogene is creating and adhering to a simple and efficient plan. The initial emphasis should be on building cycling fitness and keeping workouts short.

Tailoring the training plan

Throughout this book you will see these four athletes pop up in various chapters as we address their special circumstances and develop solutions that will allow them to maximize the effectiveness of their training in light of their time-constraints and unique life situation.

Each of these athletes possesses unique goals and lifestyles. There are, however, certain fundamental commonalities between them, most notably the necessity to approach training with efficiency. Because they all have demanding jobs and people who rely on them, they cannot afford to engage in a self-absorbed training regimen composed of hours upon hours of aerobic exercise. Nevertheless, they have ambitious goals and the desire to chase them. These are the kinds of athletes for whom *Working Triathlete* was created, so let us bust the concept that one has to be an absent parent, distant spouse or distracted worker to race exceptionally well.

Chapter 2

The Hyper-Efficient Training Philosophy

The rationale driving the Working Triathlete methodology

Volume is not everything... efficiency, consistency, adaptability and specificity are

Unlike what you have heard from your hardcore triathlon friends or surmised after perusing Lionel Sander's YouTube channel, you do not need to commit an inordinate amount of time to training in order to progress and become accomplished. Although there is a certain bare-minimum volume that one needs to accrue to reach the big leagues, the amount of time one invests into training is just one small component of the puzzle. There have been countless examples of individuals (e.g. Kim, Maximus, Bill and Imogene) performing remarkably well by training ~6-12 hours per week or less over a training cycle and beating athletes who brag about slogging through 20+ hour weeks. What separates the individuals who perform well off of a limited time commitment from those who spend all day training with minimal payoff is not usually genetics – it is an understanding of the precise stimulus the body requires to get faster and the efficient execution of key workouts on a consistent basis to achieve steady and relentless progress. These athletes do what they need to do to get faster and little else.

The overarching philosophy in the Working Triathlete is that frequent and specific stimulus at key intensities throughout the training cycle can be achieved