

aging gracefully in the fitness industry

Discover how to feel fabulous and progress your career as you grow older.

“Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”

—Satchel Paige

It’s doubtful whether Mr. Paige ever performed a “down dog” in bike shorts after age 40 and faced with the reality of “droopy knees.” Most sane people would simply close their eyes in denial. When I did the pose, I lingered in it and breathed through the pain. My epiphany? Give my bike shorts to Goodwill, start practicing a program of self-goodwill and *admit* that I was an aging fitness professional.

For many fitness professionals the externally based standard to look perfect is tough even in youth. The mature years complicate the mix with wrinkles, gray hairs and, well, droopy knees. Know, however, that when it comes to aging we may choose to totally succumb, fight “kicking and screaming” or find a middle ground—and age gracefully.

Choosing grace over pressure in a society that prizes external values requires self-awareness and personal development. The following life-coaching exercises, if practiced consistently, will help you transform the way you look and feel. Note that there are no “right” answers. The exercises are designed to help *you* discover answers for wherever you are in your personal and professional journey.

Aging Gracefully Workout Personal Assessment

Are you living a life congruent with your values? Motivational guru Anthony Robbins describes your values as your life’s

compass; without them, you feel lost. Are you caught up in life’s “shoulds”? Do you *have* to teach 15 classes a week, take sole responsibility for your aging parents, master a headstand *and* keep a perfectly organized home?

Exercise. Ask yourself “What matters most to me?” Assign your answers to bigger values: freedom, integrity, love, spirituality, beauty, security, order, peace, health, pleasure. Look for values that provide your personal blueprint. Write down your top 5 values, review them daily and live by them.

Strength Training

Do you compare yourself to others or to a self-imposed standard? Do you have the strength of character to model total well-being and self-acceptance in an externally based industry? Forget perfect! W Mitchell survived two life-threatening accidents that left him paralyzed from the waist down, with stubs as fingers and more than 65% of his body burned. He is a professional speaker who changes lives based on *who he is*, not on how he looks. He spreads this powerful message: “It’s not what happens to you; it’s what you do about it!”

Exercise. Look in the mirror. Do you see a flabby inner thigh or a body that has conceived a child; a line on your face or kind eyes with a twinkle? Set yourself free. Make a list of your 5 best traits and review them daily, gratefully.

Endurance Training

Do you push your limits and overextend yourself? Barry Schwartz, author of *The Paradox of Choice* (Harper Perennial 2005), says that “more is less.” Are your choices making you happy or harried? Do you *have* to make your own pasta, your own red sauce and the pottery on which they are served?

Do you *have* to be an expert in every fitness trend to keep your clients feeling their best? Look for ways to reduce the pressure.

Exercise. Keep your life simple by replacing your “should-do” list with 5 replenishing habits. Include activities that bring you pleasure. Try meditating, reading a fun book, coloring with your children or writing in your journal. Write down your top 5 replenishing habits and “do” them daily.

Aerobic Training

Do you look for humor in your life? The University of Maryland School of Medicine cites that “laughter helps blood vessels function better . . . reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and offsets the impact of mental stress.” Adding humor helps us lighten up, accept ourselves and release stress. Stress shows in our faces. Viewing difficulties with humor can reduce the physical and mental toll.

Exercise. Find the humor in life. Watch children and see how they delight in everything. Read cartoons, listen to humor tapes and watch comedies. Schedule 5–10 minutes of play into every day.

Flexibility Training

Do you stretch all sides of you? Marian Diamond, PhD, a neuroanatomist from the University of California, Berkeley, suggests that “successfully aging” requires “redirecting” our lives through new pursuits and ideas. Filling our lives with new activities stimulates brain growth and keeps us passionate and vibrant. The idea is *not* to stress yourself, but to enjoy dabbling—in the hope that you may find a new means to fuel your spirit or explore a career facelift.

Exercise. Join Toastmasters, sign up for a FranklinCovey leadership course, enroll in an online writing program, mentor a youth and/or indulge in cooking, acting

resources

These books and websites are a few of my favorite starting points for some of the career paths discussed in this article:

Coaching

- *Authentic Happiness* by Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD (Free Press 2004) is helpful for finding your strengths.
- *Awaken the Giant Within* by Anthony Robbins (Free Press 1992) is a great resource by the guru of personal empowerment.
- *Co-Active Coaching* by Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey-House and Phil Sandahl (Davies-Black Publishing 1998) explores the world of coaching.
- *Finding Your Own North Star* by Martha Beck (Three Rivers Press 2002) is a wonderful self-coaching resource to help discover your best path.
- *Taming Your Gremlin* by Rick Carson (Collins 2003) is an excellent book to help you overcome self-sabotage.

Speaking

- *I Can See You Naked* by Ron Hoff (Andrews McMeel Publishing 1992) is an outstanding speaking resource.
- www.FranklinCovey.com provides leadership courses/skills.
- www.Toastmasters.org can help you hone your speaking/communication skills.

Writing

- *How to Write Irresistible Query Letters* by Lisa Collier Cool (Writer's Digest Books 2002) is great for learning how to submit articles.
- www.writingclasses.com offers online writing courses.

or other classes that strike your fancy. Ignite alternative passions, fan the flames and burn, baby, burn!

Cool-Down

Do you give yourself the time and permission to quiet down? Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Find purpose in the stillness; if you can hear the quiet stirrings of your heart, they will connect you to the rest of your life.

Exercise. Take time every day to just be. Meditation, stillness and reflection provide a safe place for many of us to go to as we are aging. If meditation per se is not for you, walk in nature, sit in front of your favorite painting at a museum, take a luxurious soak in a bubble bath or pray. Connect to *you*, and write down what you "hear" in a journal.

Finding Your Fountain of Youth

If you do the "workout" above, you will naturally find career options that fit for

you. The following choices worked for *me* as an aging fitness professional. Feel free to use these ideas as food for thought, but know that you have the wisdom to figure out your own path, in your own way, in your own time.

Become a Coach. Coaching is a perfect fit for an aging exercise professional because you are a helper, you have viable expertise and you bring the potential of a trusted client base in which to grow a coaching business. The same issues that surface in a fitness environment bleed into a host of coaching issues. As a profession, coaching offers you the chance to craft the work in ways that blend with your style and life experience.

Become a Presenter. Being a presenter is a natural extension of the teaching you already do with clients. Presenting involves developing speaking skills and expertise and having the confidence to "step into the place" of being an expert. As far as presenting at fitness conferences goes, you know the pains of the industry and have your pulse on the real issues.

Very little is really new. What is new is your point of view or your fresh perspective on a topic.

Become a Professional Trainer. Corporations, organizations and government offices need wellness education. As an aging fitness professional, you have the work-life experience and up-to-date education to provide effective wellness programs.

Become a Spokesperson. Fitness professionals are excellent role models to connect specific companies with their markets. Smart businesses realize that the best promoters are trusted, established experts. Companies set up media interviews and speaking engagements, and you speak on your expertise and slide in a comment or two about the companies' products.

Become a Writer. Share your knowledge by writing articles or books or working as a syndicated columnist. Writing can be an income stream and can also increase your visibility and establish you as a fitness expert.

A New Attitude

These days I don't mind practicing down dog and seeing my droopy knees; they remind me of my 46 years of life experiences, including 28 valuable years of fitness expertise. And yes, every now and then I try a new face cream, treat myself to a facial and contemplate a minimal "procedure." Yet I never forget what matters most. As aging fitness professionals, we offer something more valuable than anything found in a jar. We can help others access graceful beauty and total fitness, enabling them to feel ageless . . . from the inside out.

Mare Petras is a 28-year certified fitness professional, life coach and speaker. She is the author of two Fitness Simply books: Tone Up With Wine & Other Fun Fit Tips and The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Swimsuit Shoppers (Micro Press 2004, 2005). Mare lives and plays in Sarasota, Florida, and can be reached at FitnessSimply.com.

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