

Career Path: What Would You Do with 1,000 Hours?

Law Department Management

Career Development



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This article is not about sports, even though it might seem like it. This article is also not about personal fitness, although you could be forgiven for thinking so.

Today's article is about making use of our second most precious commodity, after our well-reasoned minds: time. As such, even if you could give a fig for swimming, biking, or running, I urge you to stay the course with me today. The reward for reaching the finish line may be a lesson that brings you far in life.

What does 1,000 hours represent?

- It's a bit more than 11 percent of all the hours in a year. If you subtract out, say, eight hours a night for sleep, and time spent working a full-time job, that still leaves us with something like 4,000 hours of time at our annual disposal.
- If you make US$10/hour, working 1,000 hours gets you a bit less than US$9,000 after tax. If you're a lawyer charging US$500 an hour, you'll gross a cool half million, although you'll pay a lot in taxes.
- The World Health Organization recommends we all get at least 150 minutes of exercise a week, or 2 1/2 hours. At that rate, you'd need almost eight years to hit your 1,000 hours. We can be more ambitious. Most fit people I know invest an hour a day on average in their training, say 400 hours a year. For them, 1,000 hours is 2 1/2 years of training.

Should I commit the time?

Why do I raise all this? I've been grappling with a decision for months now. *Should I commit to doing*

an Ironman*?* This is the ultimate of triathlons, comprising a 3.9 km swim, 180 km bike ride, and then running 42.2 km, a full marathon.

Although a handful of the world's fittest can complete this distance in under eight hours, non-elite times cluster around 12 hours. The course cutoff is usually 17 hours. As impressive as this feat may be, the training to be able to show up on race day dwarfs the race itself. And it is the training for an Ironman more than the event itself that is giving me pause.

The absolute best thing about having fit friends is that they inspire you to be more fit. The absolute worst thing about having fit friends is that they sometimes inspire you to crazy fitness goals.



Achievement of physical goals is often fruitful in helping us navigate intellectual challenges. Artwork by Michael Sanca / *Shutterstock.com*

I expect that most often I've been the one encouraging friends and colleagues to bake regular fitness into their lives. With an annual marathon streak extending 20 years, I wanted to demonstrate with my actions that a regular fitness habit could coexist with a demanding in-house job. Although the marathons themselves were stressful, the knowledge that one was coming up gave me motivation to be consistent in my training.

It doesn't help that I've had an Ironman on my secret bucket list for a long time. In my case, I need to build up my basic bike endurance before I could even start race training. Realistically, to perform as I'd like in a race, I would need to devote 10-15 hours a week to my training for the next year and a half. Hence the 1,000-hour question.

Why do you want to do what you want to do?

Having done all this preparation and thinking, I find myself asking a Stoic question. What would I be doing the Ironman race for? Is it for bragging rights (yes) or to check an item off a decades-old list (yes)? Is it to show camaraderie and have some fun with friends (yes and yes)? Is it to maintain or gain fitness? Hmmm.

> If I was following my own advice, I would say look to the underlying value of things. What is it you *really want* to accomplish? What will you be most happy about looking back in a couple years?

I cannot in good faith dispense Stoic advice without admitting that most of my potential rationales don't stand up to deep scrutiny. I want to stay fit, healthy, and avoid injury. Nothing about biking six straight hours is necessary for that. If I'm honest, I suspect little about running marathons is necessary for long-term health and avoiding injury either. At the same time, I've really enjoyed my new workouts: swimming, biking, yoga, and even strength training.

What do you value most?

If I was following my own advice, I would say look to the underlying value of things. What is it you *really want* to accomplish? What will you be most happy about looking back in a couple years? No doubt I would be gratified to have that Ironman medal and the accompanying backpack and t-shirt, etc. I would look back on the accomplishment with pride for a long time.

> Regardless of external rewards or pressure, it is eminently valuable to determine for ourselves how best invest our time.

I think I know, though, the wise thing to do is to take the same hours I am willing to commit to Ironman training and devote them to a sensible mix of fitness-focused workouts. Do them all in such frequencies and amounts that keep them fun for the long term. Will someone give me a medal for this? Probably not.

This is no different than deciding what is the most valuable use of our time at work. Regardless of external rewards or pressure, it is eminently valuable to determine for ourselves how best invest our time. In fact, it is the most valuable thing we can do, if we can follow the conclusions our thinking leads us to.

Each year, we've got 4,000 hours of free time at our disposal. How about we make a conscious choice to direct just 25 percent of that time. What will you do with 1,000 hours?

Be well.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

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