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Bulking Up On Income | Marine Corps gunny muscles his way into the fitness industry.

By Warren Duffie

As the United States staggers under the weight of a growing obesity epidemic, more Americans are turning to physical fitness to lose pounds, look better, ease stress, and prevent life-threatening diseases. This nationwide commitment to good health offers you a great business opportunity that may bulk up your wallet while keeping operating expenses trim.

Anytime Fitness — a gym chain based in Hastings, Minn. — seeks franchisees to strengthen its network of 1,000 locations. While it offers the same world-class equipment as more famous brands such as Gold's and Bally's, Anytime Fitness is unique — time-starved members can access the gym 24 hours a day, even when the facility is locked.

The signature of Anytime Fitness' business is the Lockmatic system. If you're a member, you'll receive a coded security card. To work out after business hours, simply swipe your card, and the gym's front doors unlock. When you enter, the doors automatically relock; the same principle applies when you exit after a workout. Aside from enhanced security and convenience, this wonderful feature eliminates the tired excuse of "not having enough time to exercise."

"You can work out any time," says David "Taz" Theodore, who, with his wife Stacey, runs a franchise in Virginia Beach. "Whether you work in the early morning, during the graveyard shift, or in between, you can make time to exercise. As a Marine, fitness has been a huge part of my life and has become even more beneficial as I've grown older."

On the Job

Theodore, 39, is a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps Reserve. He's been an Anytime Fitness franchisee since late 2006. He currently has 350 members and pulls in around \$14,000 a month.

Theodore and his staff of two open the gym each day at 8:30 a.m. He first uploads the software connecting his gym with other Anytime Fitness locations (members can use any gym nationwide) before reviewing the previous night's camera recordings for security breaches. From 9:30 a.m. until noon, he cleans and wipes down equipment, vacuums, and makes sales calls to local businesses and prospective members.

From noon to 3 p.m., Theodore has his workout, eats lunch, and hits the pavement to distribute flyers in the area. Upon returning, he mans the front desk and conducts member interviews until closing at 6 p.m.

"The most rewarding thing about this business is that my time is very flexible," Theodore says. "I can spend time with my family, and I don't have to be in the gym for 12 hours. Even when we're closed, we can still serve our customers."

A Robust and Healthy Industry

The fitness industry is a multibillion-dollar beast whose growth potential is limitless. This is largely thanks to the media. Each day, we read articles and watch television reports about research linking exercise to overall good health and happiness, celebrities and political figures embarking on new workout regimens, and corporations and insurance companies encouraging Americans to exercise more.

Anytime Fitness' 24-hour model is an ideal way to capitalize on this trend; its fitness centers serve as havens of good health for those with busy, stressful, and unpredictable schedules. A franchisee's total investment ranges from \$38,299 to \$286,499, depending on the size of your gym (three sizes are available).

Upon signing up, franchisees attend a weeklong training course at the company's Minnesota headquarters. They learn Anytime Fitness' signature nine-step sales process to generate memberships referrals and corporate sales; how to master incoming and outgoing sales calls; time management and daily gym operations; and how to create additional profit from nutritional programs, personal training, tanning, and diet supplements.



David "Taz" Theodore
Anytime Fitness Franchisee



Gunnery Sgt. David Theodore runs an Anytime Fitness Franchise with his wife, Stacey.

After this initial training, franchisees can benefit from regular onsite visits from company representatives, a toll-free telephone advice line, a chat room connecting them with other owners, and monthly mailings that spotlight sales tips, effective marketing ideas, and industry trends.

Fit for Combat, Fit for Business

David “Taz” Theodore enlisted in a Marine Corps in 1989. After boot camp, he trained as an aviation structure mechanic at Naval Support Mid-South in Millington, Tenn. During his active-duty career, Theodore deployed for Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, participated in the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Somalia, and served in Bosnia. He switched to Reserve status in 1999 but was reactivated for tours in Iraq in 2004 and 2005 (at Al Asad Airbase).

During Theodore’s first tour, his wife Stacey brought up the idea about starting a family business. After much online research, she discovered the Anytime Fitness concept, which she shared with David. The couple loved the concept, which could be tailored to their own busy lives. However, they wanted to wait until “Taz” returned home, so Stacey maintained contact with Anytime Fitness representatives. When David returned in early 2006, they decided to launch the business.

“Veterans are natural entrepreneurs,” says David Theodore. “They can handle stress and adversity and have discipline and a ‘can-do’ attitude. That’s important because you can get frustrated when first starting a business. You have to be organized, or it’s easy to be overwhelmed by your responsibilities.”

Theodore’s Advice

- Check out your business competition thoroughly.
- Don’t be discouraged by a slow start.
- Keep a positive attitude.