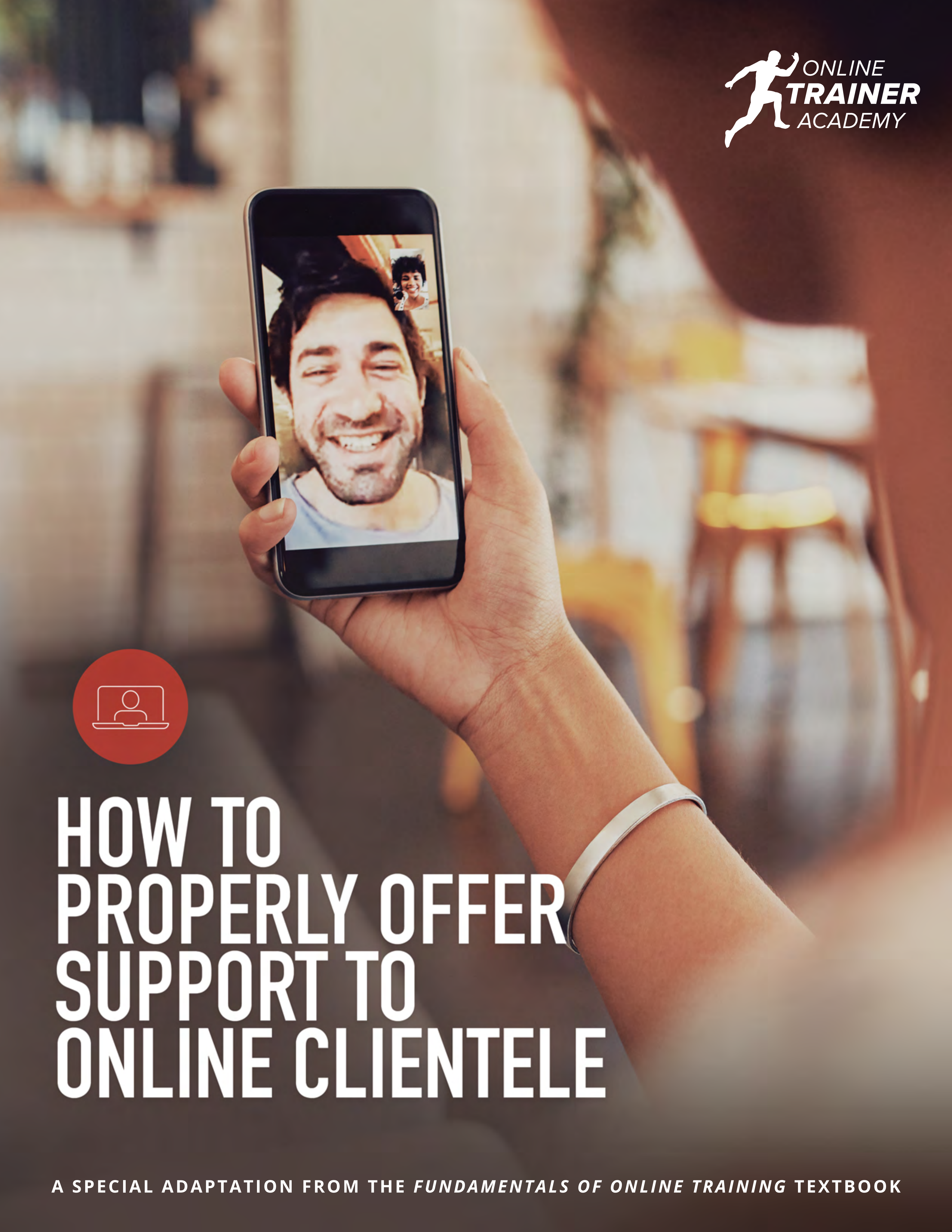

ONLINE TRAINER ACADEMY

HOW TO PROPERLY OFFER SUPPORT TO ONLINE CLIENTELE

A SPECIAL ADAPTATION FROM THE *FUNDAMENTALS OF ONLINE TRAINING* TEXTBOOK

Want to know one of the biggest mistakes online trainers make?

Not paying attention to the precedents and systems you use for online support.

For example, it's common to include unlimited email or text support. The concept sounds nice both to you – and even nicer to your clients.

Please think twice. This isn't as easy as it sounds.

Unlimited client contact can end up driving you crazy. If you're getting into online training to establish more freedom in your life, then developing a program where you're constantly connected to your phone is the opposite of what you should do.

It's not helpful for the client, either. Unlimited email support turns you into a crutch for them. For them to succeed in the gym long-term they cannot be connected to you 24/7.

Additionally, if you don't create a system that eliminates all needless questions then you'll become inundated with things like, "My wrist hurts when I bench press. What do I do?" or, "Can I wear running shoes to weight train?"

In this lesson, I'll show you a system that will allow you to eliminate unnecessary questions and focus your time on delivering effective, efficient client support.

Here's what you'll learn in this lesson:

- Parkinson's Principle and phone calls
- How to create an ever-growing F.A.Q. to answer questions before they arise
- A smarter way to offer email support
- When Facebook group support is good (and when it isn't)
- Office hours and under-promising / over-delivering
- Voice / video messaging
- How to structure your client support system

Parkinson's Principle and Phone Calls

In 1957 a British Naval Historian named C. Northcote Parkinson published a book that coined "Parkinson's Law." The law states that, "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion."

If you give a client an hour to talk on the phone, that phone call will take an hour. Give that call 30 minutes, you'll take 30 minutes. If you gave the call 15 minutes, you could probably get through the important points.

Aside from sales calls and assessment video chats (if you do them), check-ins with your clients should be 13 minutes long (this way you can book 15 minute slots back-to-back and have two minutes in between calls to set up for the next).

Using *Calendly*, create an appointment link for 15 minutes. Title the appointment "13-minute check in." In the description of the call you'll run through the same line of questioning each time:

1. Tell me something good that happened with your program.
2. Tell me something not so good that you want to improve upon with your program.
3. Do you have any major life events coming up?
4. Do you have any major lifestyle changes I need to know about?
5. (If there's time) – Is there anything with your plan you think needs changing?

These are check-in calls, not reporting calls. Reporting on the actual program does not have to be done on the phone together.

The only exception to my 13-minute phone check-in rule occurs if the coach is qualified to perform life coaching. If that's the case, then you will likely require much longer calls on more regular intervals.

One of the primary lessons in the Online Trainer Academy is that that your time is your most valuable asset and should be valued above all else.

Have a few blocks each week in which you perform your check-in calls. You may choose to do a weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly check in. The most successful model I've seen is a weekly check-in for the first month and then switching to bi-weekly moving forward.

These calls are not meant to discuss progress or exercise selection. They are simply to touch base, see how things are going, discuss any personal/private issues, and be made aware of any potential limitations on the horizon. The client should be submitting their workouts and assessment data to you either through spreadsheets or your training software. And they should be participating in your secondary support method. (I'll get into that momentarily.)

To help deal with client questions before they arise, it's a good idea to create a library of frequently asked questions.

How to Create an Ever-Growing FAQ

Your FAQ is an ever-growing document with the answer to every general question you could ever receive about your coaching.

To create a useful FAQ, take time to write your answers to questions that you expect to get. Then, whenever a client asks you a question that isn't in the FAQ, take a bit of extra time to write a sensational and generalized response. Copy that question and your response into the FAQ.

Having an FAQ document that clients can read through in advance will minimize the number of questions coming to you directly. And if they do ask, you can simply visit the FAQ, copy, paste, and make a few small adjustments for individualization.

Email is where information goes to die. Don't get stuck answering questions over email. Keep everything in one, handy FAQ document.

A Smarter Way to Offer Email Support

Email can be a boon to your business or it can run you into the ground.

Always set strict guidelines for how a client can message you via email. Here's what I suggest:

- The client can send you one email a week.
- The email must be all bullet points.
- Each bullet point is a question or comment.
- Each bullet point is a maximum of 3 sentences.
- There can be an unlimited amount of bullet points.
- A client can send you the email at any point of the week but you'll respond to it at a predetermined time each week (you determine this and stick to it).

With that said, let clients know that you're always available in case of emergency.

Why such strict guidelines?

Client email response time should be a block on your calendar. It's a time to shut off from the world, put on some old school hip-hop, and take care of business. The last thing that you want is a group of clients around the world expecting you to be at their beck and call, day and night. You need to offer support but it can be done all at once.

Forcing the email to only include bullet points eliminates the long-winded updates that are best kept for the check-in call. (Each part of your support has a purpose and those purposes should be kept separate.)

Next, most people aren't writers. In forcing a person to write a single question in a bullet that's no longer than 3 sentences you avoid the dreaded wall of words. The important information is succinct.

Finally, in advising a client to maintain a list of questions and include them all at the end of the week you've created something that University of Chicago Professor of Economics Richard Thaler and Harvard Law School Professor Cass Sunstein refer to as a "nudge." You've designed an environment that pre-selects the behavior that you desire.

A client will look at their list of questions and, if they decide the list is too big, they'll eliminate the unnecessary questions. It's an example of process design to help the unimportant questions get weeded out before they reach your inbox.

So what if a client doesn't follow the rules? I recommend responding to the email in full the first time, but prefacing your response by restating your email rules. Be sure to tell them that this enables you to provide better and more focused support in a timely matter. If they do it again, don't respond to the email but reiterate the rules and ask them to resend abiding by your rules.

If you wish to eliminate email all together, most online training software has an internal messaging system. You can easily communicate the same rules as above to your clients but ask that they do so as part of the platform.

When Facebook Group Support is Good (and When It Isn't)

A common way to offer support these days is to put all of your clients into the same Facebook group. There are a few benefits to this:

- Most people are already on Facebook anyway so it fits with their everyday habits.
- The group creates a nice platform for community and accountability.
- Experts will naturally arise. Other people in the community are likely to pipe up and answer questions or provide support, so you don't have to be the only one.
- It's free.

From the above points, forming a Facebook support group may seem like an obvious choice, but I recommend you consider the negatives, as well:

- Groups that people have to pay to be a part of are technically against Facebook's rules. Right now it isn't enforced, but Facebook has a habit of changing things quickly and without notice, and punishing offenders.

- As with any public forum, constant moderation is necessary. You'll need to be careful if a client complains about working with you or is upset by a lack of progress. These situations should be dealt with behind closed doors but in a Facebook group can escalate and become both public and ugly.
- You must foster an open and supportive environment where people feel open to share. This requires you to very carefully select your clientele.
- *Warning*: You must manage your time very deliberately when dealing with Facebook groups. You can quickly find the group eating up big portions of your day.

Facebook support groups generally work best for transformation type programs that consist of cohorts all starting at the same time, progressing similarly, and having similar goals.

That said, it's not the only way to do it. Chris Burgess of Lift the Bar in the UK puts all of his hybrid coaching clients into the same Facebook group. Chris is proof that it can work – but he would also acknowledge that it's a tremendous amount of work. His team goes to great lengths to involve these same clients in social events happening locally at his gym, and will only accept clients who live close(ish) to his club.

Office Hours and Under-Promising/Over-Delivering

Back in university, each one of my professors had scheduled weekly office hours. They were not available via phone or email. The only time that we had to talk to them about course material (or anything else) was during the aforementioned office hours.

I love this model for online coaching because it allows you to block off your time (seeing a pattern yet?) and offer personalized support to multiple people at once.

Here's how:

Let your clients know that you have a block of time set aside each week for support, such as check-ins, personalized questions, or just to talk. This span of time should be 1-2 hours. (If you have lots of clients, you may need to offer this twice a week. Splitting the client load helps. If you have more than 15 I'd suggest doing one time for people who have last names A-J and another for those with last names K-Z).

During these office hours you'll be logged onto Skype. Your clients have permission to log on and chat with you via instant message about anything. If the discussion requires a phone call, it's one click and you're connected to deal with the issue at hand.

If a client cannot make the office hours, instruct them to post the question to you via a message in Skype. During your office hours you can log on and answer all questions that have been left for you, in addition to providing live support.

Note: You can choose whether to use your existing Skype account or start a new one. If you use Skype regularly to keep up with family and friends, I suggest starting a new account and having your clients add you there. This way you can be logged in chatting to family without your clients seeing you and attempting to message you.

Under-promise and over-deliver

With this office hours structure built into your program, you can still make exceptions. If one client is struggling, go ahead and have an extra phone call. If someone can't make office hours but has something important to discuss, you can agree to Skype with them later.

The main thing is to set expectations around your availability so that you don't feel pressured to offer 24/7 support. If you make an exception for a special circumstance, your clients will appreciate that you are going 'above and beyond.'

When and if you make exceptions is your call.

Bringing It All Together: How to Structure Your Client Support System

Now that I've just outlined some various options for providing client support, how do you bring it all together into one system?

First, consider that some forms of communication are primary, and some are secondary. Primary means direct contact with you — such as speaking on the phone — and secondary means they're leaving you a message or email or post in the Facebook group and waiting for your response.

If your service offering is at the high-end (i.e. pricey but worth it), then you should offer both a primary and a secondary method of support.

If your package is at a lower price point, you may include fewer instances of primary support or only offer secondary.

Here are a few models that work well:

Facebook Group + Office Hours

Works well if: You have a transformation program or group of people who are all working towards similar goals.

Benefits: Group members can pose general questions and support each other in the Facebook group, with you as the moderator. Any personal questions or subjects that require a deep-dive can be discussed with you during your office hours.

Email + Phone Check-in

Works well if: You're doing conventional one-on-one online training. (This is the most common model.)

Benefits: You can fit in lots of client support without having it take over your life. As mentioned above, the 13-minute phone check-ins can be weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Combined with unlimited questions asked via email (abiding by your rules), this is more than sufficient.

Purely Email + à la carte Options for Primary Support

Works well if: You offer a low or mid-range price point package with only email support and want to offer upgrades in the form of primary support services like phone consultations when needed.

Benefits*:* Allows you to keep your offerings accessible and serve plenty of clients, while maintaining an option for clients who really need it. Gives you a financial bonus in the form of upgrades.

Purely Email

Works well if: You offer a low or mid-range price point package with only email support, and want to offer upgrades in the form of primary support services like phone consultations when needed.

Benefits: Keeps things simple.

Purely Voice Messaging

Works well if: You offer a mid-level program, and you prefer the speed, flexibility, and personal nature of voice messages.

Benefits: Your client can send you voice messages via Whatsapp or Voxer, and, unlike many of the other methods, you can respond quickly and simply from anywhere, in less time than it takes to type.

These are just a few options. You are free to combine any methods of support in any way that works for you and your clients.

Final note

Always consider that the more access to you personally (primary support systems like office hours and phone calls), the higher valuation you need to put on your support when developing your packages. This is because, at a certain point, time becomes your only limiting factor. All of the secondary support systems can be done on your own schedule and, if you so choose, could potentially be outsourced to a virtual assistant as you grow.

Of course, anything you choose for now can change over time.

What to do now

I'm not the kind of guy who is going to tell you that one way of operating your business is best. There's no 'my way or the high-way' in my materials. Instead, my team and I purposefully developed everything here and in the Online Trainer Academy to give you what you need to figure out the best model for you, your business, and your life.

On the page where you downloaded this PDF there is a worksheet. If you haven't already, download it and plug in the right kind of support system for you.

-Jonathan Goodman