

FIVE THINGS YOU MUST DO TO SUCCEED IN YOUR FITNESS PROGRAM

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The amount of information available on fitness and training continues to expand at an alarming rate. We have access to more data and information in every field of study than in any time of history. But are we as fitness enthusiasts really lacking the “Core” truths and principles on how to achieve success with our exercise programs? It’s easy to get overwhelmed while searching through thousands of training systems as well as the plethora of fitness gimmicks out there. You might be asking which system is the best? How often should I change my exercises, my repetitions and my tempo? The truth is there is no “Magic” formula or ultimate program. A solid and effective workout plan has more to do with the application of the correct training and success principles. In my 9 years as a strength coach I have discovered that there are fundamental principles that all successful programs have in common, regardless of the goal. Although not an exhaustive list on successful fitness principles, I have found that the following 5 principles must be applied in order to achieve success in any training program.

Principle #1 – IDENTIFY AND CLARIFY YOUR GOAL

I know, I know, you’re probably sick and tired of hearing people talking about goals, and writing it down on paper, yada, yada, yada. But let’s be honest here, can you really achieve anything in life without knowing what it is you are actually trying to accomplish? So many people I talk to come in and tell me “I just want to tone up” or “I’m just want to get fit.” What exactly does tone up mean? And what does fit mean? Fit for what? Without a clear and identified goal, the direction of your training is lost and mediocre at best. You must, I repeat **MUST** know what the goal is. Establish what you want to achieve and then ask yourself the following questions using the S.M.A.R.T Acronym: (Josh Henkin 2005)

- S. **SPECIFIC** – What exactly is your goal? Goals must be Specific as mentioned above. Write it down and clarify your goal. You want to lose weight, how much weight? You want to increase your deadlift, by how much. **BE SPECIFIC!**
- M. **MEASURABLE** – Goals must be measurable in some way. If it’s body fat percentage, take the measurement. If it’s improving your 40-yard dash time, have someone time you with a stopwatch.
- A. **ACHIEVABLE** - Is your goal realistic? Is it attainable? Set a worthy goal, but set a goal you can reach. Better to start with goals you can reach then start with goals so impossible to achieve that you end up discouraged and disillusioned. Once you achieve one goal it gives you confidence to set more goals.
- R. **RELEVANT** – Is this goal meaningful to you? Are you passionate about your goal? Goals have to be meaningful and important to you. If you are not passionately excited about your goal, chances are you will never do what it takes to reach it. The more you desire the goal the more you are willing to sacrifice in order to achieve it.
- T. **TIME BASED** – When do you plan on achieving your goal? Set a specific time and date you plan on achieving your goal. My own life experience has taught me that a goal with out

deadline rarely if ever gets accomplished. Set the date, map out the plan and put the plan into action.

Principle #2 – TRAIN THE WEAK LINK

One of the ways to create muscle imbalances and injuries is to continue training the same movements. Every time you do an exercise you gain the benefits and advantages of that particular lift. However, you also gain the drawbacks and negative aspects of each exercise. What do I mean by this? Let's take the bench press for example. If all you ever do is perform bench presses in the same fashion over and over again you stress the tendons, ligaments, muscles and joints in the same way. This leads to muscle imbalances because your shoulders (in this case the bench-press) require strength in more than one plane of motion. Eventually you become weak in the other ranges that you are not training and that can lead to injuries. If you want to improve your current lifts and athletic skills you must train and improve your weaknesses. Maybe the limiting factor in improving your deadlift is your grip. Try a cycle of grippers and various farmers' walks. You could also try deadlifting with fat bar (much thicker diameter). Sandbags are also amazing for grip development. Perhaps your weakness is that you lack the necessary mobility for various movements. One example might be the squat. If you are lacking mobility in the squat, it doesn't make sense to continue to increase the weight. Figure out which joints are restricted and regain mobility in those joints and you'll instantly improve strength once the mobility issues are sorted out. If you are lacking speed, work on your speed and quickness in your movements. If you have horrible work capacity and endurance, work on that. Find the weakness and attack it in a very intelligent and planned way.

Principle #3 – WORK LIKE AN ANT

What the heck do insects have to do with achieving your health and fitness goals? A lot! Have you ever sat down and watched an ant work? (You're probably remembering when you took your magnifying glass when you were a kid and torched them) Sometimes I wonder how long it must take them to take one grain of sand at a time and take it back to their ant colony and build a home. One grain at a time, over and over again. Instant gratification is not a word in the ant dictionary. They build their ant city one grain of sand at a time. Guess what? That's exactly how you build a strong, lean and muscular body as well.

Many people never embark on a fitness or nutrition plan because they want the results today. What the common person doesn't understand is that anything worth achieving takes time, discipline and lots of patience. The years continue to pass on by and before you realize it you've lost valuable time that can never be regained. ***Here is a great truth: a little work each day on improving a skill or movement might not seem like it's yielding you any visible fruit but over a period of months and years you will be shocked with what you are able to accomplish.*** Famous personal development coach Brian Tracy says, "People overestimate what they can do in a day but underestimate what they can do in one month." If you are one of those people who has an all or nothing type attitude I assume you haven't achieved much success in your life. Athletes do not become champions over night. Every day they work like an ant, picking up one grain of sand at a time, working on the things that will make them champions. How does a novel get written?.....One page at a time. How does someone learn to deadlift 600 pounds?..... One workout at a time. If you don't drink enough water, start drinking more water each day. If your neck doesn't move, work on some neck mobility drills in the mirror every day. Whatever your goal might be, get started today.

PRINCIPLE # 4 – TREAT YOUR WORKOUTS AS A PRACTICE SESSION

One of the most effective principles I have learned in the last couple of years from Russian Strength Coach Pavel Tsatsouline and legendary strength coach Charles Staley is to treat your

workouts as a practice session. What that means is approaching each workout as technique practice rather than trying to fatigue or totally exhaust yourself. Think about the following example. If you were learning how to play the piano, how long would your practice session last? Would you keep playing the piano until your fingers were bloody and totally fatigued? Of course you wouldn't but that's the approach many people take with fitness and athletics. Now don't get me wrong, there is a time and a purpose for extreme physical training. Unfortunately some people stay in that mode all the time and eventually get injured, burnt out or both. My personal experience with this principle occurred a couple of years ago when I wanted to increase my deadlift. I had just come off a 2-year lumbar disc bulge that had left my legs very weak and scrawny. What I really wanted to do was to add some strength and size to my legs and hips. So I started deadlifting (something I had never done) and for the first year I never really lifted over 225 pounds. In fact, most of the time I stuck with 185 pounds and perfected my technique. Well exactly 1 year later I was able to lift 365 pounds very easily and it wasn't because I had been lifting heavy. My improvement in technique allowed me to lift that heavy of a weight. Bottom line: your technique allows you to lift heavy, jump higher, throw a ball farther and perform better.

Remember that "Strength is a skill." Being strong is not just about muscle size and shape, it is about how efficient and biomechanically correct your body moves as an integrated unit. Being strong is a skill just as movement is a skill. My advice is to pick 1 movement in the next 2 months and master it. Maybe the deadlift or kettlebell snatch? Maybe it's a squat, a pistol or military press? Whatever your goal is, master the technique. Try doing what Strength Coach Pavel calls "greasing the grove." What that means is performing low repetitions multiple times a day in a specific exercise. An example might be that you want to improve your pull-ups. What you'll do is every time you walk by the pull up bar you crank out 2 repetitions in perfect form and with no fatigue. Since the improvement we are after is more neurological than muscular, never go to fatigue or even feel fatigue. Fatigue makes technique less than perfect and what you're after is PERFECT REPS! If you did that 10 times a day for one month, you would be much stronger and more efficient in your pull-ups. You can use this technique with almost anything. Try it and I trust you'll be pleased with the results.

Principle # 5 – LEARN TO SAY NO

Famous author and psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud talks about upsetting the right people if you want to be successful in life. You cannot and will not please everyone in this life so deal with it. Upsetting the right people means saying no to the things that will keep you from getting the results and success you desire. The list of people, companies, organizations, Tele-marketers, commercials, ads, news, media and noise determined to get your attention and time will not be a short one. Ask any successful person what makes them successful and you will find they all have an ability to narrow in on their goals and they've learned to say no to the things that are negative and toxic. You only have one crack at life and spending your time trying to please everyone is a miserable way to live. My nature is to be a people pleaser and this has led me to say yes to things I did not want to get into. Saying yes got me involved with shady people in business deals I knew would never go anywhere. It also got me to join many multi-level marketing companies just to be nice. I've even said yes to people who wanted to be my workout partner in the gym who I knew intuitively would make a horrible workout partner. Please, I repeat, please do not feel bad or be afraid to say no to things and people that are getting you farther away from your goals. Are you trying to get lean? Say no to late night bar hopping with your friends. Say no to the chocolate cake your grandmother wants you to eat every day (maybe once a week but not every day). Say no to the Pizza your room mates order every night? And what about the crispy cream donuts at the office in the morning? I certainly will be the first person to tell you that I do not eat perfectly. There is room for moderation in your lifestyle and diet. But what you do day in and day out will determine your future results, period!

Apply these five principles and you will achieve your goals. Make the decision to live and train by these principles. Discipline is not easy, but a life without discipline has far more consequences. Say no to the things that bring you down and keep you from your dreams and goals. Live life to the fullest and reach your goals.