

Be not afraid of growing slowly,

Be afraid only of standing still.

Chinese proverb

A personal return on experience from over 30 years strength sports experience.

By Mark Notschaele

5. Decades of knowledge in a nutshell

A matter of objectives - Fitness , bodybuilding and powerlifting

This booklet sets out from the assumption that a trainee wants to develop significant size and strength gains. If this not the case and people are just after keeping mobility high, and just maintain their fitness level or do some exercises to support their specific sports this is very much ok. But it must be an intended objective. Many people are confused about what they are actually trying to achieve. People on fitness routines very often do have the explicit or implicit desire to developing some serious strength and mass compared to their current state, but have so far been unable to realize their objectives.

Fitness centers are full at the start of the year (and give generous discounts for yearly memberships at these points - catching people to sign up when they are full of good proverb for the new year), before ski holidays, before and after summer - in between attendance is dropping significant. Most people only have a very short span of motivation when it comes to good proverbs and never realize any of their intended significant fitness improvement objectives.

Many gyms are not good at keeping their public tied to them and motivated – mainly due to the combination lack of proper coaching and variety in training, lack of creating a team feeling and lack of producing real results.

Due to poor coaching - I hear people reasoning that they are afraid to get too muscular, especially women. This sets the stage for avoiding training "to hard", usually ending up just not being "intense" enough to create any real progress. And when not making real progress, fooling themselves again, that they really do not want to get muscular anyway. A chicken and egg situation, which leads to demotivation due to lack of any real motivating result very soon.

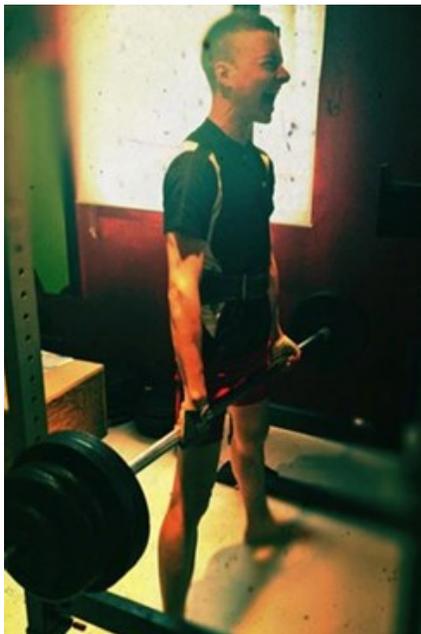
Result of poor routines offering - frequent reasoning exist that a trainee believes in the end that he/she is not able to develop any significant strength or muscle mass due to their genetics, stating that whatever they try they cannot grow. Alternative reasoning is that they are told or think that they are different, needing very special training routines and have not been able to find the correct routine, or plainly believe that no routine works for them.

I need to state here a few things. There is really no real need to worry about getting to muscular or to strong too fast. Everyone is able to progress significant in strength and muscle mass independent of gender or age. Everyone is genetically identical when it comes to the mechanics of responding to strength training and building muscle. It is relatively easy to be perceived as getting too big or too strong in the eyes of the general public – but alas this says more about the general state of the average under-motorized person. Reality is that intense training will just lead to creating an attractive athletics looking

body, and feeling good about yourself. If the general public envies you for that – so be it. Becoming a real muscle-monster is a challenge in itself – it will take years and years of dedication – or chemical shortcuts – and only few make it.

Limits of what you can reach and speed at which you reach strength and size depends, next to efficiency of your training methods, and your determination, on genetic predestination. Furthermore if you are happy with your looks at some point in time you can always decide to go into a maintenance mode.

The trick is to overcome excuses and get to the point where you actually realize set objectives. How do you do that? First you need to create the image of how strong you want to be, what you want to look like in terms of muscles you want to pack and fat levels. Then plan for and take the shortest route to realize that goal. This will always be a combination of dedicated intense, infrequent effective workouts, aerobics if you need to lose weight, sound diet and plenty of rest. Anything else is just wasting time, fooling yourself and getting frustrated over lacking results.



The fitness industry oriented gym you visit might not be able to support you in this approach for a few reasons. Their business model is based on selling more gym time and sessions, as the subscription plans are usually based on number of sessions per week, with sessions getting cheaper if you pay for more. The gym's business model seems to benefit from high volume training and not producing results fast.

Another reason is that fitness centers try to keep bodybuilders and power lifters out, as they illegibly turn off the regular audience. I already explained that the regular audience states that they do not want to become big, and has been conditioned to a very negative image from fanatic bodybuilders and powerlifters. Due to this process very often there is a drain the gym from any form of group and peer coaching practices and knowledge – a situation where the blind is leading the lame. Of course creating a market for the “personal coaches” for those who can afford it to get some real advice. This leads to a lack of promoting and coaching real effective weight training practices – and thus create mediocre results in the process. The analogy would be like running a ju-jitsu dojo – but not letting any blackbelts be a member. In the 80-s where we did not know any better, the experienced guys were our role models, and always felt obliged to coach the juniors – and they were proud to do so.

Decent coaching gets replaced by giving you a fixed schedule when you walk in and let you go at it for weeks at a stretch with no change or any real intensity change. These days even totally anonymous coaching is done by means of a chipcard to slip into the super-doper machines. It makes the weight training a very monotonous experience, which kills motivation and makes people turn away from it. The personal coaches roaming around the gym will not lift a finger and let you mess around until you pay

them by the hour. Even variants like “basic gyms” now pop up where they advert that you get no guidance whatsoever – only if you buy the “coaching add on”.

Fitness centers seem to rule out regular equipment which smells like powerlifting or bodybuilding, like squat racks and heavy barbells and dumbbells. They get replaced by fancy and expensive chrome and complex machines that isolate muscle movements and seem to make it easier and safer to exercise. I also think the sales equipment sales people are doing a good job explaining aspects to the gyms of lower risk, less need for coaching and thus staff, longevity of the machines, less messy and need for rearranging the weights back in their racks. Many convenience and business efficiency reasons, not geared towards producing results for the trainee. Some of these machines are half decent but often overly complex and too specialized on a certain muscle, and in combination with bad routines and no real intensity as such tend to not produce real results in an efficient manner for their customers.

Many gyms seem to get the customers what *they* want, not what the customer needs. No-nonsense gyms that are real honest and straight forward to their customers about what it takes to produce results fast are rare. Effectively practices of team and group coaching of customers towards their personal goals even more so. The best choice to achieve any strength and muscle mass objective is probably to become a member of a local modern powerlifting gym. With modern I mean a gym that uses Westside Barbell principles. You will find these gyms have less chrome, mirrors and machines, do not offer fancy extra offerings like aerobic classes, but have very dedicated trainees and coaches, who are or were strength athletes for decades themselves. The recent cross-fit trend is also promising and in that direction.

Training at a powerlifting gym is a bit as doing boxing training without doing a real fight. The moves and exercises are very much used in some strength and fitness routines as being very effective, but most people choose not to fight. Same thing for powerlifting training. The general training principles produce strength results fast, but not everyone wants to compete in a contest. Powerlifting gyms struggle with a dwindling supply of youngsters and could also do their bit to promote their version of no-nonsense approach to the general public and offer a polished version of their wisdoms to the general public. I am convinced that this would also convert many a person to start competing as part of their goal setting - doing the powerlifting scene a favor in return.

As we turn to the bodybuilding scene – it is usually still very confused on what methods to go for. The standard image and status symbol to which they compare each other at the gym seems to include that you need to spend many, many hours in the gym, many times per week and suffer a lot. Also there is a tendency to advocate the need to eat a lot and needing to be on diets that look more like a suffering (like rice and chicken for stretches of time). Just as with the fitness industry model discussed previously, it does not make this practice valid or most productive, just because everybody is doing it. Also here building mass is linked to developing strength, and it requires the same approach in terms of intensity, in-frequency, briefness and rest and a balanced diet. The difference with powerlifting will be that bodybuilders pay more attention to esthetics, the symmetry, proportions and balance in development of various muscles, adjusting training to develop lacking body parts. And of course preparation for a bodybuilding contest is a science and art in itself and very compelling in terms of discipline and diet.

Another aspect - to realize the process of developing your strength you need to take the objective setting a bit further beyond workout mechanics and work on changing your mental condition and social habits as well. Or maybe it is the other way around, i.e. to achieve a desired mental state you require an improved physical condition. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. Whatever the causality is, holistically they are connected, so work on aspects like for instance spending more time with friends, family (train intelligently). Shed negative influences from your life. I personally adopted the rule of not staying voluntarily miserable for longer periods of time. Stop doing things you feel obliged to, but are just social compliance and taking up quality time. Review friendships and avoid the ones that have very negative influence. Physical and psychological aspects are very much connected and similar in terms of required mindset to make significant changes deliberate to them to result in changes in your overall lifestyle.

In short - the difference between fitness, bodybuilding and powerlifting is just a matter of objectives you set. The optimal way to realize any sort of strength goals are very much similar. Not adhering to best practices in strength training is in all cases just wasting time and just leads to realizing your goals very much slower or not at all.

