

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

6. Exercise or Train – What will it be ?

Disclaimer: When you want to start a rigorous training program – consult your physician beforehand.

Believe me when I say that all trainees that approach me – young or old – male or female have – next to their objectives for strength, endurance, power, flexibility – the desire to “look good” – i.e. the esthetic athletic muscular look (the female or male version of that look). Especially young trainees give up weight training (forever) if no cosmetic changes are noticed in a reasonable amount of time (3-6 months). Every personal trainer should be aware of this.



Many trainees loose the love for being in the weight room due to a total lack of results being brought about – despite the years of putting in “the best efforts they know about”. This is a real shame – as losing fans of any sort of sports is cutting people short in the rest of their life of all the associated fitness lifestyle benefits – mentally and physically. Moreover the people who go through such a time wasting experience get the mental model and belief established that others who do create results must be genetically better off (the “we are all so different fable) or all use steroids – and are usually very vocal about it. Which creates even more of a gap and negative tension between “camps”.

Last week I had a young trainee working out at our gym with my 18 year old sons. It was clear that this youngster - let’s call him Jim – was weak and not in a good shape. He was enthusiastically working away with my sons on some basic movements, but had no real strength and no endurance and was clearly suffering. I assumed he was new to lifting. After a short chat I learned he visited a regular fitness facility since some years, together with his mom. In all these years he had been learning to “move around” at the gym – unaware that something like proper (progressive) programming exists and is key to progress. Result - hardly any significant progress in strength, power and looks – over a period of a few years.

The above situation can be compared to another adaption reaction of your body – tanning. I ask you the question how much of a tan will you get if you go into the sun for 10 min per day – each day? Answer: In the first days you will work up a bit of a tan for sure. In the days and weeks (or months) afterwards you

will stay exactly as tanned as you can get from being in the sun 10 minutes a day. You will not get more of a tan. If you want more of a tan – you will need to extend the time you spend in the sun each day – and probably need to periodize it across the day in “bouts”, use special ointments to protect your skin from dehydration or other fancy approach (combination with sunbeds with less damaging radiation) until you reach the point where your genetic disposition kicks in (i.e. how much of a tan your genetics determine you can get). I would not try this out – as radiation can cause skin problems, but I trust you get the point.

So Jim went to the gym for years to do exactly the same routine with same weights for years – and got the results that go along with that – just as the 10 minute tan per day. Mind you – any type of moving around is still better vs staying on the couch with a bag of crisps, but it is just not very effective and for sure not efficient.

Many fitness centers and fad home DVD programs often seem to depart and base their success on the easy and comforting assumption that for a beginning, undertrained person “anything works anyway”. This is partially true - it is true that beginners do not need fancy periodized and thus complex programming to make real progress. But they do need proper progressive style programming to make any sort of significant progress.

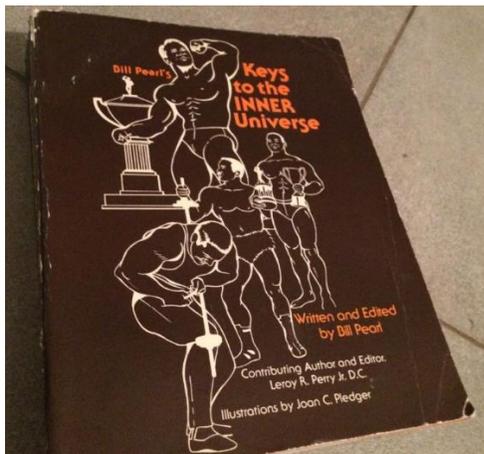
The other side of the “underdoing” it medal compared to fitness centers carelessness is beginners starting out on very complex programs, with many movement (my favorite: triceps kickbacks, reversed dumbbell curls, thigh adductors machines etc...), learned from magazines or from the “big guy” in the extreme gym. And this for 6 days a week – 2-3 hours in the gym. This usually in the hope to find shortcuts and secrets revealed to getting strong and more athletic looking in a short time. Complex programming for beginners is better vs the careless approach – as it will bring about results - but is just not required for beginner to bring about real gains. It is just not efficient.

The simple truth is that a simple progressive 5x5 scheme with basic movements (squat, dips, deadlift, press, bench press..) - With proper form thoroughly explained and coached – and result being tracked - for 12 weeks, loading more weight near every single session will work miracles for any trainee. Yes- absolute progress will depend on your genetic predisposition as well – your body mechanics, your training tolerance – if your are young (many hormones available) or old, male or female – overweight or lean - but this kind of simple straightforward programming will bring about real significant strength, endurance, power increase in an efficient and effective manner in any beginner - young or old male or female. I have beginner trainees that were able to double their strength on the movements like the squat, pull down and deadlift in 10 weeks – coupled with cosmetic changes that start to be visible after some 6-8 weeks and general feeling of well-being (endorphins☺). And this just with 2 strength sessions a week for a duration of 45 minutes. That is effective and efficient. It boosts confidence in people – makes them feel proud and good about themselves and generally make them want to “aim for more”.

The 10 minute “tan per day” story vs the complex approach with periodized tanning, ointments to get a real max dark tan - compares to doing “exercise” vs “training”.

Exercise is what is mostly done in fitness centers. It is based on instant gratification. Sweat a bit, get a pump, do some cardio, jump from one machine to the next, based on what is available at the time - never remember what weight / reps you did last time – so just do “stuff” – and maybe join at the end a “Zumba” or “brazilian buttlift class”. Take shower and feel good about the extra piece of pie you can now eat without feeling guilty. And do near the same again the next time. Of course also skip “doing it” and excuse yourself when it is too hot, too cold, during holidays, when you don’t feel like it – making sure your restart at a lower level again many times per year. And when you restart overdo it so you have extreme “doms” everywhere and run into injuries – so again you cannot train for a longer period.

Training however is based on reaching a set and clearly outlined target in the future. It implies that the trainees has a real goal – which is usually not “being in the gym” – but connected on wanting to reach another lifestyle goal. I have trainees that have as objective to be in a bodybuilding contest, play golf for 4 hours without back pains and keeping their swing, show up lean as a model on swim-ware show. It means that the trainer and trainee work out a program for the next months, years to reach that goal. Each training having a specific target to contribute in the overall scheme of things. Being it speed training, max effort, hypertrophy, flexibility or endurance. It implies that the trainee plans for his own success and pursues it with the required discipline.



In Bill Pearl 1982(!) "Keys to the Inner Universe" he brings it to the point:

The formula to strength and health: "Setting goals, Following personal training programs, Keeping program records and Seeking advice from the best"

So what will it be for you? If you are wondering why you are not making progress?

I bet you have been exercising...not training...

ATC – “We Are Growing”