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*Be not afraid of growing slowly,*

*Be afraid only of standing still.*

*Chinese proverb*

A personal return on experience from over 35 years strength sports experience.

By Mark Notschaele

Simple, Not Easy

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

### Savvy Coaches on the Rise



Javorek

It is just great to see a good deal of increase of popularity of old, savvy coaches in the Strength and Conditioning field lately. I am talking about names like Dan John, Marc Rippetoe, Javorek (image to the left), Litvinov, Ed Coan, Dave Tate, Louis Simmons. Most of them have been coaching 100's or even 1000's of people and athletes over many decades – and it looks like they have just been around in the background waiting for the folly of youtube with all its screaming experts promoting the latest confusing mix of fads and wisdoms - to become so overwhelming that an opposite direction was just overdue.

There is now actually a group of people out there who finally want to experience real results and want to know how this works– after trying many of the “challenges” promoted on the internet, probing all

fashion methods and machines – and have chest, biceps and leg extensions days as the mainstay of their training for years – wondering why nothing real dramatic is happening to their bodies after months or years – after the initial 6 month of success period (where everything works anyway).

These coaches and the books from these people with their universal simple truth about training for real results – based on many decades of experience – which no-one seemed to be interested in for years– because it is so dull, non-fashionable and really never ever has or will change - so you can only write them once - are finally getting an interest.

Enter the rising popularity of experienced coaches and mentors!

Their common message based on decades of experience working with all kind of people is always the same :

# SIMPLE ≠ EASY

## First Contact and 35 years later

I entered the weightlifting arena in 1981 at the age of 18. I did not know or realized it back then – but do now - I definitely had the best first experience and introduction to lifting one could ever have had starting out. Krijn Dobbelaar – the coach of “Sandow”, the then newly started gym in Terneuzen Netherlands – really a dungeon gym with no mirrors and self-made equipment – located in the 1839 Arsenal building with 4,70 m thick walls - taught us – a young group of new lifters all we needed to know (as it turned out for life):

- Show Up (on time)
- Warm Up properly
- Help each other – work as a team
- Greet each other when coming and going
- Do the basics to get big and strong
- Increase weight when you are ready for it
- Proper form
- Compete (set objectives)
- The cosmetics of the gym and type of equipment do not matter – it is all in the will to do it.



The “Bomvrije” in Terneuzen

## Many of a kind

I do not consider myself worthy to put myself in the ranks of the names I mentioned above – but after my 35 years of weight training and in the last years dramatically ramping up my coaching activities having coached over a 100 people or so - I very often get a good grin on my face and chuckle when I read the mentioned gentlemen’s book.



Mark Notschaele 1985



Mark Notschaele 2015

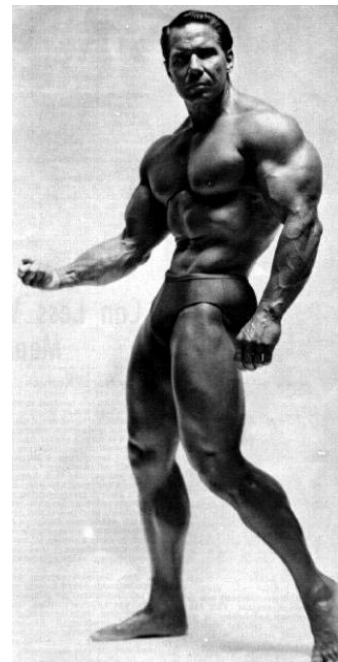
Many of their dogmas, conclusions and wisdoms are just so identical to the ones I keep repeating to my trainees as part of my coaching and storytelling. The root of course of this will inevitably be having lived in the same 80, 90 and 00 years – making the same mistakes, learning the same lessons and seeing the same folly arising around us in the fitness industry.

After some 30 to 40 years in the game one just starts to see the “universal truth” about what works and what doesn’t work – it is the empirical mastery of the strength and conditioning arena that make it possible for old coaches to “cut the chase” and bring on the simple practices that really work.

### Functional training – the rebirth

I observed that over the last decades the way of training has moved from large variations of movements – please study Bill Pearls “Keys to the inner universe if you will - towards using more and more machines – and on the side a very ever more limited catalogue of gym movements. Some aspects – like one arm, one leg movements, combined/compound movements, jumps. Olympic lifts, carrying and dragging stuff – simply do squats – use heavy weights, magnesium and make noise and sweating while doing it seem to be largely lost.

It is good to see a movement towards what in the 2010-s is now labelled “functional training” – and see every commercial gym slowly but surely add a “functional training space” – with usually with no clear idea what now to do with it. I see people squat on a bosu ball or swing a kettlebell standing on a balance board, do kipping pullups – do a hero workout of the day taken from the internet- with no programming for the individual. These people sure get tired and sweaty – but also confused. This is not training – but just moving.



Bill Pearl

Of course our group of old bastard coaches can only smile when we see this “rebirth of functional training” becoming mainstream – Why would anyone want to do non-functional training has always been beyond my comprehension – but I agree that - as the definition says these days – if you are not doing functional training per definition you are doing non-functional training – which is indeed cruel but too often the case. In the “old days” we indeed mostly just “pickup up heavy stuff”.



Functional for me means that it brings something for real life – not only get fit (able to do stuff), but stay or become healthier (no pains) - able thus to be better able to cope with life’s of sport stressors – or just pick up those boxes at Ikea, bring home the groceries or work in the garden without hurting yourself.

Dan John – just writing down what he has been teaching athletes to do over the last 40 years to get ahead of the game - has recently spelled out exactly what the DNA of any good training program should be about:

Dan John

- Push
  - o Yeah, benchpress.. but also front press, one arm presses, olympic lifts)
- Pull
  - o Lifts and rows of any kind
- Hinge
  - o Hips extension - Deadlifts, goodmornings
- Squat
  - o The King of full body excercises
- Carry stuff
  - o yes any type of farmers walks, suitcase walks, sled dragging, waiterswalks, ball lifts and weird combinations thereof.

There is not much more to it – but to put it into a program.

**Real Programs**

The Annual Plan					
Phases of training	Preparatory		Competitive		Transition
Sub-phases	General preparation	Specific preparation	Pre-competitive	Competitive	Transition
Macro-cycles					
Micro-cycles					

Literature on periodization and building real structured programs go back to the early 50-s – books from Bomba and various other writers have spelled out the various compelling reasons to work in training blocks (micro, mesa, macro cycles ) or interweave these one way or another – adaptation, hypertrophy, strength, speed, recovery – in a deliberate planned manner to create real results in a

Periodisation

structured manner. In current gym practice we usually see nothing of this – there is always the magic movements, insane workout, 6 weeks challenge program that will bring huge results

### **My Universal Wisdoms**

The athletes who know me – know (and I am sure get bored by) most of my “again and again” repeating universal true shattering wisdoms and storytelling. (If you were in doubt: yes, there is a plan and concept here – as I know from a friend and psych that if you repeat something over and over again to people they will start to consider it as true)

#### ***Below a listing of my universal wisdoms I keep spouting to my ever so enduring athletes***

The single most important key to success is „show up“. The chances of realizing your objectives are heavily compromised if you do not show up in the gym.

On bad training days – show up do the minimum basic movements, shower and go home. On good days go for it. It is like surfing – some days the waves are great, the other day not. On bad day you peddle around on your board a bit – on good days your “catch the wave”! Showing up and doing “something” prevents you from regressing till the next great training.



I always go in the gym with a minimum program – and agree with myself upfront that I will at least do that. Then when I am there – I see what happens... with this approach I get always 90% of what is required to progress.

About postponing: Bad news - every “Tomorrow” is again a just new “Today” ... that just sucks eh ?

“Wanting” or “doing” – is a difference between being on the couch with a beer thinking about “it” or show up in the gym and doing “it”

Everyone who starts is a great person to me, those who keep at it for longer periods of times are my Heroes

The secondary keys to success are “Train, Rest, Nutrition” – from these three aspects you do either not enough or too much, or the quality is not ok. Very simple as a concept – but not as easy to analyze.

To look like an athlete – you will need to train like one.

The persons that approach me for coaching and did not produce real tangible results their programs look like this: Monday International Chest day and biceps and 1000 sit-ups, Tuesday, back (plus chest and biceps and 1000 situps), Wednesday: Leg day – so we do leg extensions (plus chest and biceps and 1000 sit-ups.) – Thu, Fri, Sat – repeat the previous.

I do not need to program biceps work and bench press for boys and no abs work for girls – since no matter what I program for them - they will do them anyway.

Walk proud – show presence. Now you have (back) strength, there is no logical excuse anymore to walk shoulders tilted forward and look like a monkey and hide behind yourself.

Get Strong / Stay Whole – this is a nasty balance to strike. Lifting is the safest sports you can do - but always manage your shoulders and lower back - warm up shoulders and lower back – if those get injured you can hardly train anything for weeks. Don't do stupid things in the gym – you always hurt yourself when you are un-concentrated, tired and at that time do not follow what I taught you.



Follow your program – proper eating and resting is integral part of your training program

Never train in an anti-pattern – never neglect the main basic movements. Pull up or barbell curl ? Leg curl or GHR, leg extensions or squat, hyper extension or deadlift...?

If you do not want to squat – and are not disabled - go to another gym

No one gets strong without dragging some serious weights around

Complaining that squat is heavy? Squat is only heavy the lowest 10 cm – what are you complaining about.

When you fail at squat you are usually at lowest point – where is the danger ? Just keep tight and dump the bar backward – they are made for it.

Safety in deadlifts: When the barbell does not get off the floor – the likelihood that you will complete that deadlift is heavily compromised – but there is no danger.

Treat light as Heavy and Heavy as light. Always use the same form and routine with any weight. Once it is pattern it will prevent you from doing silly stuff unracking, racking and using heavy weights when you are really wasted from a heavy set.

I do not go into a dialogue with you (inexperienced trainee) – you just do what I say – trust and patience please . When you have trained for a few years, achieved objectives and understand why you achieved them – I am willing to negotiate with you and even learn from you.

Challenging me on the latest youtube training fad ? Is YouTube your coach or me ? Make your choice! If you are not willing to trust me and listen to me – go around the corner to basicfit where it is cheaper and there is no coach who gets worked by you not listening.

“We Are Growing” out ATC slogan – at first members think this is about seeing the biceps growing – which also happens – as anything works at first - but then 6 months or so into their programs they find out it is all about mental strength. Biggest weapon is between the ears. Learn about persistence, planning, enduring, setback, injuries, jealousy to others, trust, discipline...

As long as your “pattern is ok” – cheat days are not a problem (nutrition)  
I don’t believe in “diets” – I believe in “nutrition strategies”.

I don’t believe in putting people on diets – I like them to understand nutrition strategies. Everybody already knows what is good food vs bad food to begin with.

Once you realize you literally become what you eat – things should be very clear

I read everywhere that more Muscle mass makes the body use more Kcal – but extra usage is only some 30 kcal extra per kg muscle per day ...So I think there is a reverse thinking required here. Someone who has a lot of extra muscle mass is spending a lot of energy to get and keep that fitness level in the weight room – ergo his kcal usage is higher and he will lose more fat vs someone who does not move.

You can be fat but strong as hell – that can also be a goal

Fitness lifestyle must be “a” goal in life – not “the” goal ... there far more important things in life – family, friends ...use your active rest in your program for these things – to take care of your brains

Nobody wants to be in a gym – that cannot be the goal. The goal is what you get out of being in the gym – self-esteem.



Many training machines are made because they can be made – ie engineering excellence and wet dreams - not because they are particularly useful.

I get asked a lot what I call the training style ATC represents –and why the gym has no mirrors, cardio equipment and televisions. People want to know if it is bodybuilding, CrossFit, powerlifting, Olympic lifting... ?? I have seen many things come up and go down over the years – and what you see at ATC as equipment and principles is what I picked up and always used since 1981 to get and stay strong – what I never or rarely used and don’t need is just not here.



Methods and Principles get confused – If I understand the principles I can “smell the DNA” of the correct methods and create results. Reversely I can try all methods without understanding any principle – and get nowhere.

Anything is better than sitting on the couch with a bag of crisps – but just moving – burn some kcal and now feel not too bad about eating that piece of pie – is not about creating any significant results – only training according to a plan does.

We are all the same - based on the same formulas – male, female, young, old can train the same way and respond the same to training stimulate. But we all have some different parameter settings in those formulas when it comes to aspects like training tolerance, leverage and even mental strengths. This needs to be considered in your training program.

There is no excuse for a young healthy male – with all growth hormones and testosterone in high levels circulating through his body - to not develop 10k of muscle in a year. I am astonished that commercial gyms – and individual young men all too often are not able to pull this off. Get them to eat plenty and healthy and follow a simple structured program (with squats) - and it always happens.

Men are usually wimps compared to women - women are my most dedicated trainees – they have far more discipline and mental toughness than my male athletes. Ladies have to fight harder and longer to get results – and don't complain.

Life is too short to be voluntarily miserable for longer periods of time – my 3 criteria to stick around a gym or workplace are the presence of: learning, fun and ethics. You can be involuntarily unhappy (illness) and be unhappy for short periods of time – but being unhappy voluntarily and for longer periods is just insane.

Apart from creatine, protein powder, and fish oil there is no supplement that actually works. Spend money on a coach, a barbell set and good food – don't be a supplement junky.

Why do people have no problem spending €50 a week on supplements but want a gym membership for €19,95 and do not see the point to get and pay a real coach.

Some groups of genetically gifted persons team up on youtube and show off /state “see how good we are” – and thus “we know it all” – but that is like the FC Bayern team stating that they all are the greatest soccer players – and so why are you not a great soccer player ? Remember that the coach at FC Bayern does not have to teach the guys to play soccer and be a great player – they are a very selected and handpicked group of genetic gifted soccer players. The coaches of most talented people actually do not have to do very much for them – but master their egos. They just ride the talent wave of their athlete. Making something acceptable out of a very normal person though is a very different matter. That is coaching.

*As to methods, there may be a million and then some, but principles are few.*

*The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods.*

*The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Equipment that breaks up through normal use at ATC is not our kind of material.

Don't live in fear – if you want something, make a plan, manage your risk and go for it. The next time the opportunity knock might just not occur anymore. It is like a train that stops at your station – the end destination might be not completely clear, but the trains direction might be very much ok for you... and you just don't know if and when another train that you like will pass – it might never happen anymore.

Progress is simple as a concept – but mentally brutally hard – because it is so simple, that is difficult to accept. There are no shortcuts - but there is efficiency to obtained – listen to your coach!

### **The Bottom Line**

Putting it all together to create real results can be very confusing – with decades of experience the insight and simplification – which is called “mastery” sets in. It simply means that to short cut this process - it pays to learn from the best – so go and off now, find an experience coach and listen to him – make me proud - and get strong, fast

My personal bottom line is

***Creating results - It is simple, but not easy.***

