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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

Progress – it's simple

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

When I grew up – in the 70's and 80's we had cars and motorbikes with no electronics in them. When it would not run there were basically only three things to check:



1.Does the engine get air ?

**2.Does the engine / carburateur get fuel ?
(yes – no injection systems yet)**

3. Does the sparkplug spark ?

If all this was true there was no real logical explanation why the engine would not run – in 99% of the cases we were able to use this way of thinking to diagnose and fix the problem though – even at the side of the road. Stark

contrast to today where I need to go to the dealer to get a light bulb of my car replaced.

If we look at strength and condition training today vs the 80's I observe a few issues and draw some parallels:

- There is overkill of information available – internet forums, “apps” ...
- Everyone seems to be an expert these days – after 3 month of training or having used an “app”
- Over complex training, fancy machines and nutrition and supplements overkill approach are believed to be the keys to progress success – even with a training life of a few months.

With all the above why do I keep getting trainees reporting to ATC who have followed the above for a year and made no significant progress?

As a caricature – but unfortunately close to reality - Doing split schemes 4-6 times per week – one day biceps, one day triceps, one day chest, one day back, one day shoulders each day 1000 sit-ups – and legs ? Maybe some leg extensions or leg presses – or rather not at all..

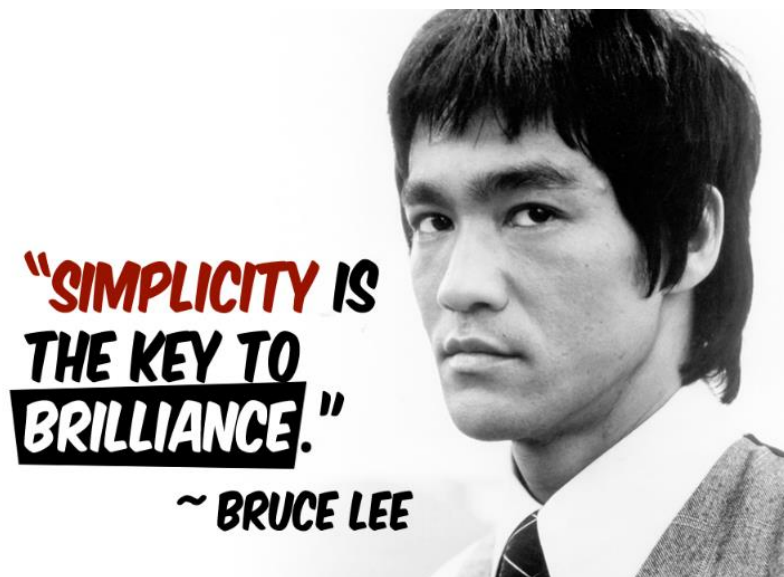
Pre-workout boosters, during workout-boosters, post workout boosters, weight gain supplements, creatine and weird eating habits of only rice and chicken.

Of course need to mention also the quest and secret exchange of magic exercises: 37,4 degrees inclined dumbbell curls with thumbsover and underarms pointing out at exactly 25,5 degrees, for exactly 12 reps and 3 sets – all to be performed 1 minute after you took your workout booster drink – would maximize your results – according to recounts on interne forums - you get what I mean I trust.

What do I think has been lost along the way ?

I must admit that during my journey of over 35 years of training I started out very simple – with a bull worker (remember that ? google it please), and later very simple mentored powerlifting training – with very good results. Then over the years – thinking I was effectively learning – I was going very complex, huge volume, very little rest, changing schedules very fast. And also tried all supplements I could find – and still managed to make some progress somehow.

Now in the last decade I realized a full 180 degrees turn is required to create optimal results. With simple training approach – weighing in at 113kg at 189cm - I am breaking my personal best in my main movements at 52 years old (170 raw bench, 240kg raw squat) – clearly indicating I have not “peaked” at the time I should have – in my 20s and 30s.



I fully feel with Bruce Lee – he stated:

Before I studied the Art, a punch to me is just like a punch, a kick just like a kick. After I've studied the art, a punch is no longer a punch, a kick no longer a kick. Now that I understand the art, a punch is just a punch, a kick is just a kick

Just look at the strong and big guys from the 80's and read the vintage books – and don't forget – I was there as a witness ;-)

Training was simple, eating was simple, resting was simple...and lot of strength and muscle was created.

So taking it back to the “simple car repair” approach and Bruce Lee his statement.

Progress – it's simple.

There are only three factors + stay at it...



On those three factors you need to be aware of two parameters:

- Quantity mistakes - You do either too much or not enough
- Quality is poor – no effectiveness.

Let me annoy you and elaborate below with my person views on these three factors on the next pages...

Eat

- Get off the supplements bandwagon and give eating real food a priority. Real food is fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, nuts, dairy, good bread, rice, potatoes, pasta ...as unprocessed as you can get it for the stores around you
- There are various good eating strategies that work – there are many that are a real bad idea, and we all know them already!
 - Balanced, low carb, logi ..all work well for their intended purpose ...
 - Only fries and pizza, chocolate and coca-cola don't work..of course...
 - A good dose of protein intake after a workout and some carbs are essentials. But not always needs to come from "powders" – there is nothing wrong with drinking (lots of) milk, eating yoghurt, eggs...eat self-baked bread..
- For weight gain or weight loss – note **that in the end only the overall Kcal balance counts (over the type of eating strategy you adopt)**
 - For gaining muscle one does not need to "bulk up" a gentle surplus is enough! Just make sure you have enough "energy" for the workout!
 - For losing fat you should not be under more than 500Kcal per day – to make sure your body does not go into alarm mode and uses muscle tissue and leaves stored fat where it is.

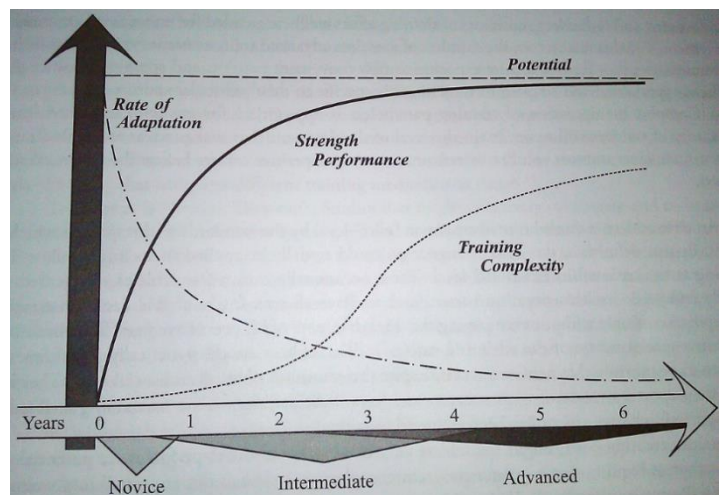
Rest

- Rest is not equivalent of "not working and thus "party and heavy drinking and no sleep".
- Response to training is specific and mostly for all the same, but training tolerance is not the same for all. Some persons can take more training stress vs others and still progress. Being recovered from a previous strength session is key to progress.
- Avoid the "split craziness" when starting out – and just start with simple whole body program start with 1 day training, 2 days' rest, experiment with 1 day training, 1 day rest – and see if you are "rested" for next training.
- Cutting back on training is more often a key to progression vs adding training units. The general tendency is to add movements, training units, volume is one stalls – but mostly too much is already done in the first place. The complex training patterns many times a week which I mentioned earlier lead to exhaustion, but still only hit the main muscles 1 x or max 2x per week.

- Try to do cardio on same day after your strength unit – to allow for a real rest day afterwards
- Rest can be passive (yes lazy buns on the couch, or sauna..) or active i.e. foam rollers, light cardio, stretching..

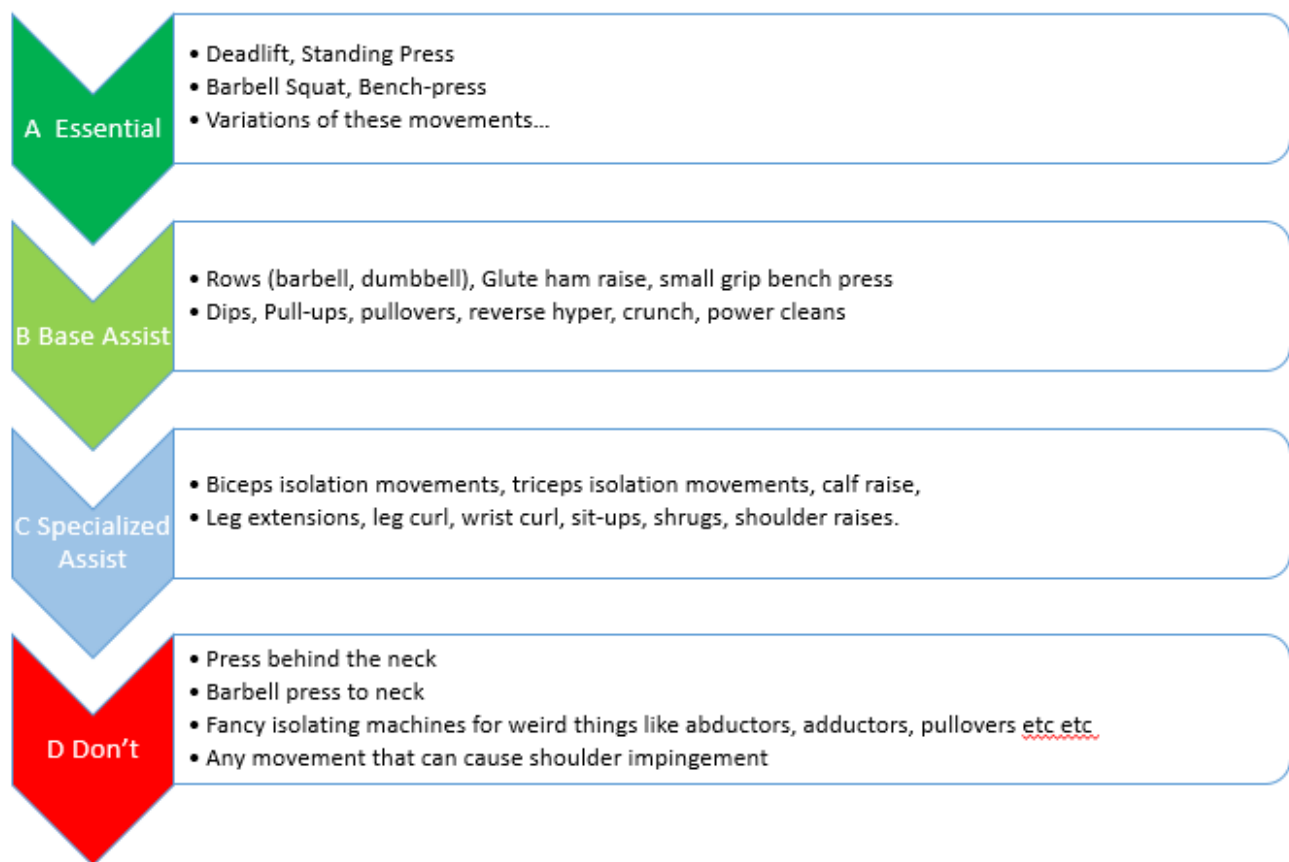
Train:

- Train according to a set program and not just “do stuff” when you are in the gym. The program must be suited to call off the specific reaction you want (speed, power, max strength, flexibility, hypertrophy...).
- Use free weights versus machines. Free weight make you use all kind of stabilizing muscles – and make you strong for your sport and resilient of everyday life. You will be able to pick up a packet at IKEA without back issue if you deadlifts with a barbell regularly. If you use did leg extension– you will hurt your back.
- Following a program means you do not need to train like a comic book hero – no need to go to and beyond failure all the time – screaming around from pain in the gym. Use proper progression and periodization systems – outlined already by Mr. Bomba in the 1960's...
- Respect your training age – start with simple whole body methods – just read “Starting Strength” from Marc Rippetoe (you can google that too!). At first you can easily make 5kg gains on squat per training session, after 12 months or so this will become 5 kg per week and later on (2years of so) it will be 5 kg per month. All this requires an adapted approach overtime.
- Log your results – and analyze before after training. The XPS system (from sideline sports) we use at ATC is excellent for detailed programming and tracking – taking professional approach towards the lifting enthusiasts.
- Strive for progression – everyone can increase strength by some 300% from starting out, but absolute strength level is determined by genetics, mainly by “mechanics” of the body. A short upper arm will allow benching pressing heavier – due to better leverage, a shorter person with long arms will deadlift more. Just compare to yourself – become your best you.



- Use effective, basic multi-joint movements as the mainstay of your training
 - o I see three groups of movements (see picture on next page)
 - A “Essentials” (do always)
 - B “Base Assist” (do often)
 - C “Specialized Assist” (do when required)
 - D “never do / dangerous”
- Never, never, never omit group A, add group B when and if required to create a holistic program. Only use group C to work on apparent weaknesses – or when you can really not suppress the desire to doing that ego-boosting barbell curl anyway.
- So...Avoid to train in an “antipattern” modus – where lot of isolation movements are done (group C), and group A and B are rarely or never done.
 - o Leg extension or squat ?
 - o Pull up or barbell curl ?
 - o Leg curl or glute ham raise ?
 - o Tricep kickback or dips ?
 - o (you get the drift..)
- Oh yeah – and never do group D movements – if you love to keep your shoulders and back healthy – and be able to keep on training...
- Don't confuse “exhaustion” with “being done” with your strength unit. After 45 min or strength training, “Being Done” means you should not want to see another barbell again for 48 hours after your session – but you can still run a semi marathon after it. Ie not exhausted – don't make your strength training in to a full blown low intensity cardio session.
- Don't believe having DOMS (muscle soreness) is a required precursor to growth – it just means you are not in shape or did something silly with too much load of somethings you were not used to. Similarly a “pump” is not a requirement to gauge muscle mass or strength increase. Use proper indicators of progress like barspeed, vo max, 5RM, 1RM in marker movements, and body composition as indicators that something is happening – vs the “no pain no gain” approach.

Priority of movements in strength training



My Conclusion.

Progress – it's simple. KISS applies to training – Keep it Simple, Stupid !

I have trainees – who did not make significant progress for a year on complex machine oriented programs – now squatting 5x5 with 110 kg after 8 month and gaining 7 kg of lean bodyweight in that period.

The books about effective and efficient approaches to strength and conditioning have been written decades ago and principles are still valid.

When in doubt - go see a real mentor and coach with real experience in the field or go for it and seriously do your homework and read the real standard books.

Feel free to contact me and/or see my article on recommended readings!

Mark Notschaele

ATC – We Are Growing