

## BACK TO THE BASICS SERIES: REAL FITNESS RESULTS

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# “Exercising” vs. “Training”

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Earl Nightingale defines success as “the pursuit of a worthy goal or ideal,” regardless of whether you’ve achieved it yet. The corner store clerk who finally opens his first grocery store, is taking the first steps required to achieve his goal of owning his own successful business. This man would be considered successful. A college student is halfway through her program, towards graduating, and getting the dream job she wants. While neither of these individuals achieved what they want yet, they have a set goal, and are working hard towards getting there.

Many of us have goals like these, when it comes to our careers, or other things. However, what about the gym? Whether you’re 20 or 60, having a fitness goal is important, and can help you strengthen your body, your mind and resolve, and become more resilient over time. Having a plan, and working towards it steadily, adds accountability, responsibility, freedom and much satisfaction.

Getting to the gym regularly is a task in itself, and deserves respect and recognition. Anyone who is making a conscious effort to improve their fitness, and manages to get regular workouts in, has my respect. However, there’s a fundamental difference between “exercise” and “training”, and this article will help you figure out which you are most interested in doing.

Exercising refers to physical work that challenges your body, today, either through cardiovascular exercise, resistance training, or a combination. For example - going into the gym, doing a warm-up, stringing a handful of exercises together (maybe some free weights or machines) for a pump in the muscles, and then leaving. While it’s a good thing to move your body, exercise, and frequent the gym, and you might be following a certain pre-determined plan, it would not constitute training, until a specific goal is decided, and certain exercises are practised and improved on, over time. In other words, exercise can be more short-term or perhaps be more randomized, whereas training is much more of a process, over a longer period of time. The workouts, themselves, are part of a bigger plan, so the details become more important to track, and the natural, day-to-day variance in our performance becomes less important, as long as consistent progress is achieved.

Training involves repeated practice of certain movements or exercises, and requires consistent adjustment in the load over time, to continue to disrupt homeostasis, and cause an adaptation. For example, this might mean adding 10 lb per week to our squat and deadlift, and adding 5 lb per week to our upper body exercises, for as long as possible. That might lead to an increase of 120 lb per year for our lower body, and

60 lb per year on our upper body, depending on your level, and this is very attainable. How would you like to take your bench press from 185 to 245, in less than a year, or perhaps your squat from 205 to 325?

It's important to keep certain exercises in your program year-round, in order to improve the motor patterns, and build and "groove" those movements, so they become second nature. While it's perfectly OK to freestyle a workout, or change things from week to week, this wouldn't be considered training, nor would it optimally lead to strength gains in the major movements that typically give the biggest return on investment, when it comes to strength. These movements are the squat, bench press, deadlift, standing overhead press, and to some extent rowing movements, chin-ups, and power cleans (when the trainee's proficiency improves). Technique is very important, since one would be practicing these often. Thus, learning this from the beginning, for most, is elemental.

Strength is the foundation of all other athletic capabilities, and thus causes the most general adaptation. When strength increases, the amount of force production one can produce also increases. This makes everything we do (physically), easier. Thus, the average lifter who simply works on improving their strength in these basic compound movements, notice a significant carry over to their sports, and to their lives, in general. When someone's squat increases by 100 pounds, not only will their jump and sprint be increased, they are less likely to succumb to an injury.

These movements involve using the entire body simultaneously, so they also carry over to each other. For example, when chin-up strength improves, one's bench press strength tends to increase. When your squat goes up, the deadlift tends to follow suit. This allow for the use of "indicators", which are exercises that we can use as a measure of strength improvement, in terms of estimating how much it will carry over to other exercises. All of a sudden, the "program" starts to become clearer, and easier to understand. We want "bang for our buck" exercises, and to be working as efficiently as possible.

The person training the hardest does not necessarily make the most improvement. In fact, it's the person training the smartest, with economy in mind, with a vision and plan that makes the most progress. We may not be lifting the heaviest weight we can that day, or compared to others, but progress will continue to improve each week, until eventually, you're the strongest one in the gym. Many get to a certain weight and then stay stuck there, without much improvement. They have simply failed to plan, and tend to lift too close to their maximum potentials, for too long. Our bodies require work in various ranges of intensities (% of our max weight), and eventually stop responding to all-out efforts, when repeated too often. In fact, for most, submaximal training is the best approach, since it's not necessary to perform 1, 2, or 3 repetition-maxes, to improve strength. For example, using sets of 5 reps with 65%, 75%, and 85% is excellent.

A good indication of strength, in general, is a double-bodyweight deadlift, and double-bodyweight squat, and 1.5x bodyweight bench press, a standing overhead

barbell press equal to your body weight, and a set of 10 strict chin-ups with bodyweight.

Based on laws of specificity, assistance exercises themselves will not be enough to spur progress in these main barbell lifts. They must be practised and rehearsed, weekly. That's 52+ weeks of practice, and thousands of reps per year. Now, certain assistance exercises can be used afterwards to help increase the musculature involved, and to "assist" the main lifts. I recommend rotating these every 4-6 weeks, or keep things in your program for as long as they are improving. If an exercise starts to stall or progress comes to a halt on these, it's time to rotate to a different variation, or something else that is known to help improve maximal strength. For example, DB bench presses can be changed to incline DB bench presses. DB Rows can be changed to barbell rows. Push-ups can be modified or changed to weighted dips.

Deciding on a specific goal, and working steadily towards that goal, by chipping away week after week, tracking workouts, and writing things down, makes everything a bit more competitive. This type of mindset and plan forces you to monitor your progress, think ahead, set standards you want to beat, and actually work harder, every week. However, the payoff is very rewarding, and setting personal records every week is fun, and seeps into other areas in our lives. Before you know it, you're getting more work done at home, at your job, and in everything you're doing. By holding yourself accountable, proving to yourself you can make progress from your hard work, and putting in the effort, you'll soon become much stronger and proficient in the gym, and your body's composition and shape will reflect that.

What is your goal? Do you want to lose 20 pounds, or gain strength and size? Whatever your goals are, making a plan and following it will help you learn what does (and doesn't) work for you, and this is empowering. The nice thing is that the main functional movement patterns mentioned in this article, tend to work for everyone, and can be progressed for 20+ years. Isolation exercises, and machine exercises are great, but they only tend to allow weight increases and progress for 6-8 weeks or less, before they slow down. Based on the amount of neuromuscular coordination and nervous system involvement, barbell exercises provide long-term results, and are easy to program.

If you are interested in changing things up, and embarking on a journey towards a specific goal that you really want to achieve, consider purchasing a program from the YMCA, or perhaps personal training. These options will provide you with the foundation and the framework, within to work. This applies to all ages, men and women, and all levels of training. The only difference in programming will be the amount of volume, intensity, or frequency, based on each individual's background, experience level, and baseline strength levels.

Hopefully this article challenged you to consider your current methodologies, and whether there are potential programs or options available to you, that will serve you better, in terms of your results. If you're already working steadily towards a goal you've set for yourself, keep plugging away!