

The Path of Least Resistance

How come we enter the gym each day keeping in mind the amount of weight we're going to lift, sets and reps configured in such a manner that we're certain by the end of the workout we will be crawling to the bathroom in glorious pain? How come the lifting of heavy things, the pull of the iron hanging from our sinuous limbs, and the burning and fatigue within our muscles from strenuous upon strenuous rep excites us so? And how come we often would not take this same path of such intense resistance in order to develop a level of self-awareness and strength of MIND?

The asymmetry of the bodybuilding community astounds me. Many of us are missing the boat. We swim upstream, make choices to build our bodies in a manner that goes against what many people outside of our sport would view as crazy and diet in a manner that often limits our involvement in what many see as paramount to life, to relationships, and to work and play. Our bodies are healthy alright. What about our minds? Too often I hear of competitors who are bingeing during their competition prep, who are obsessed with food, who are engaging in emotional eating. On the other hand, I work with individuals who won't eat adequately to sustain their body weights and to fuel their workouts. I'm not convinced that we as bodybuilders have it all. Are we as in tune with our insides as we are with our outsides? Why the path of least resistance when it comes to mastering our minds?

What if you could get to a place where competition prep, navigating the challenges of your life outside of prep, and being a bodybuilder with a family and a job is viewed by you as manageable and even inspiring. What about a day when you don't feel like you're wearing the weight of the world on your shoulders? Did you know that that's a choice? Are you aware that each day you wake up and get out of bed, what you think determines how you will feel? Stop for a moment and think about what you think about. I have a friend who right now I have a difficult time being around solely because every other sentence is negative. I feel like I'm being sucked into a black hole around this person. It's exhausting. It's insidious. It's sad. What is it about **me** that gets me into this place of despair. Yes, ME—it does me no good to attempt to change this individual, but since I have a relationship with this person to identify what my behavior is and be whom I determine may help him, I set boundaries in order to maintain my own spirit. You're probably thinking after reading this paragraph- well, she just said that how we think is a choice, so she should think something else besides "dang, this is depressing" when she's around this person. You're right. I do not have to let the behavior permeate my positive nature. I can be supportive and help this person to see the bright side of things. I can take my "glass half full" perspective and give him some ideas for other ways of perceiving what is going on in his life. I can risk being labeled as the "Devil's advocate" and not being a good friend. And when that happens I can say that it's not my intention to be unsupportive but that I am concerned about him. I cannot change him- that's up to

him. I can examine my own behavior and make an effort to separate if need be. That was a lot of work, but you'd do it for your body, right?!

The relationship we have with weights can be viewed as a metaphor for the other relationships we have in our lives, whether with people or with food, our higher power, and our activities. Take for example the "forced reps" that we use during training. We view these forced reps as necessary to our training at times, in an effort to get stronger and provide varying stimuli to our muscles. In relationships we can also force stimulus. The goal is the same- to provide a path toward growth. Force is active. That means we are involved, we exert effort, and we make attempts. Our relationship with food can be modified by the type of stimuli we exact onto it and what we deem its purpose is. Forced reps are to muscle growth as emotional awareness is to peace with food. Are we actively taking stock of the reasons we're eating? Are we in tune with what we're feeling and how it's affecting our desire to eat? As with our efforts in the weight room, when we are around food we need a presence of mind. How productive have your workouts been when you're totally unfocused? When we're underneath the squat bar, if we choose to pay attention to the birds chirping outside, a successful squat is unlikely. How fruitful are your discussions with friends and family when you are mentally absent? Go back to your last argument with your partner. With the friend I spoke of above, if I'm not attune to my own reactions to his behavior, I'm doing both of us a disservice.

The mental edge requires a present-focused awareness, a here-and-now emphasis, and a target-locked attention to the *process* of our behavior rather than the *content*. We must discipline ourselves to become inwardly focused to enhance our outward endeavors. Take the time right now to sit down and actually feel what your body is doing in space. Where are your hands, legs, feet? What does the chair that you are resting on feel like? Is it hard, soft, or squishy? Is your back rounded? What position is your head in? Are your feet planted firmly on the ground? Can you feel them within your shoes? Are you breathing deeply or shallowly? Are your teeth clenched? Is your chest tight? Now what is happening in your mind? What is the thought that has run across your brain? "This is strange," you might be thinking. "Hmm, I just realized my toes feel really cramped in these shoes I'm wearing," could be your thought. "I don't have time for this—I need to get back to work," is possibly what you're thinking. The next time you sit down to eat ask yourself what you are tasting and identify the flavors. Name the textures. Before your meal ask yourself how you know that you're hungry. How is your body signaling you to eat? Are emotions driving you toward food?

The process of becoming more self aware will take time, patience, and energy. You already invest these things vehemently in an effort to build the best body possible. We can transfer the skills you use in doing so toward optimizing your mental edge. Identify the skills you use as a bodybuilder. For example, responsibility, discipline, and time management. Next, identify how you demonstrate these skills as a bodybuilder.

Responsibility: I do not miss a workout unless I am sick or injured OR I plan out my workouts so I can maximize my time in the gym. Finally, define how these abilities may be worked into greater self-awareness. Anticipate areas that you have struggled with in the past and what might throw wrenches into achieving your new mental edge goals. Doing so can help you to plan a strategy and stay on the path of greatest resistance! Throw asymmetry and the path of least resistance out the window. Our best package requires a firm connection between our minds and our bodies.

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