

15 Secret Principles of Training

A guide to optimizing your training



SPORTSPECIFIQ



NEXT LEVEL
PERSONAL TRAINING
& **COACHING**



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About Me

Before you start reading you probably would like to know a little more about me. So here goes...

My name is Stephan Laschet and I'm the owner of Sportspecificq Studio, a strength training gym in the south of The Netherlands.

My background in a nutshell:

- Master of Science: exercise physiology
- Former WPF Bench Press World Champion (-125kg, 2012)
- 18 years of experience in the world of strength & conditioning
- Currently: gym owner & personal trainer
- In the past 10 years I've had more than 600 real life & digital clients
- It is my mission to get people fit, strong, happy & awesome all over the world!

When I started strength training, I was 18 years old and about 61kg's and 184cm's tall (or 135lbs and 6'1). When I won the WPF Worlds I was 118kg's (260lbs) so if you have trouble gaining muscle, this book will teach you how to do it from experience with the support of actual scientific knowledge & research. Additionally, I've had the pleasure to coach hundreds of people to lose weight and get that fit, athletic body they always wished for.

Sports and mainly the gym basically gave me everything in life that I need and wanted earlier in life. It gave me a sense of control over my health and body. This in turn boosted my self-confidence which I lacked for most of my childhood and adolescence. Confidence is the key to a happy life in my eyes as confident people get after their goals and don't quit until they get what they want.

From the moment I gained some self-belief I adopted the mindset to never quit, demand the best of myself, go after everything I want to accomplish and dedicate my life to happiness. If you fail, fuck it and try again.

Your dream doesn't have an expiration date. Take a deep breath, and try again – KT Witten

Use the principles in this book to achieve your fitness / strength goals and I promise you that more good things will follow. Because of confidence I turned my hobby into my job, I met the woman of my dreams (who I married recently), I have built my own gym (my second home), my business partner became a friend for life and I have the financial means to travel the world and live the good life. Success is built because of passion and hard work. You can do this too, so fucking go for it!



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Chapter 1: The 10 best exercises for a well-balanced athletic body

Let's kickstart this book with the most fun part. In the following chapter you will be reading what I think are the most versatile & effective exercises for building a well-developed physique. They will be hard, you will sweat your ass off and you will be sore, but you will enjoy the fantastic gains of your labor in, what we call our second home, the gym.

When selecting these exercises, I looked at what gives you the best bang for your buck time efficiency wise, but also how you can develop an athletic and strong body. Let's be honest: biceps curls are not going to build an impressive and capable body. You need to bring something better to the table.

This book will be concise and teach you what you need to know to kickstart your gains. I will not bore you any longer, so start reading, kick some ass and be awesome!



While you read, my wife Pia and I will have another cockta... uhh.. protein shake

1.1 Turkish Get-ups

Why this exercise?

Not too many exercises have the full body effect the Turkish Get-Up (TG) has. It stimulates just about every fiber in your body. Although it looks rather easy when somebody else does it, you'll soon find out that it's not!

- Combination of isometric & concentric/eccentric muscle action
- Translates to functionality in daily life
- Works the full body and increases strength & stability
- Not for the faint of heart: it takes courage to push your limits with the TG

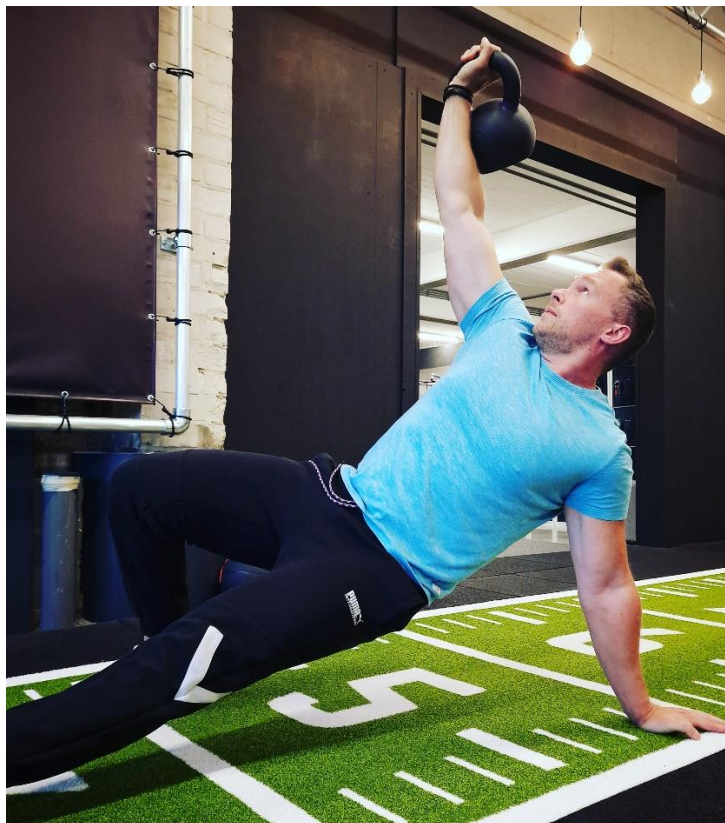
What is the secret to this exercise?

First of all, as with any exercises: start off light. At first you need to get a feel for the movement. If you start with a heavy weight from the beginning, it's going to land on your face and the fun is over.

- Go heavy: most people chicken out and start doing high rep sets as some type of cardio workout. This is strength training so stick to sets of five to eight reps.
- Make sure you perform each part of the movement in an explosive, but controlled manner. If you want to look like an athlete, train like one.
- You should have control over the weight and the movement so that you can stop during each part of the lift. If you can't: you're going too heavy or doing it wrong.
- Each phase of the lift should be completed before shifting to the next: don't rush through it on the way up or down.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiVW2PnBqK4&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.2 Single Leg Deadlifts

Why this exercise?

Regular deadlifts and squats are often a part of the repertoire of the average gym rat. However, unilateral exercises like the single leg deadlift are not that common.

- Improves unilateral strength capacity by increasing ankle, knee and hip stability.
- The above results in less injuries and inefficient tendencies in bilateral lifts and overall daily movements.
- Combines muscle coordination and muscle strength to a larger degree than regular deadlifts as the latter requires less stabilization.
- Increases efficiency in the regular deadlift and squat, resulting in higher numbers on these lifts.

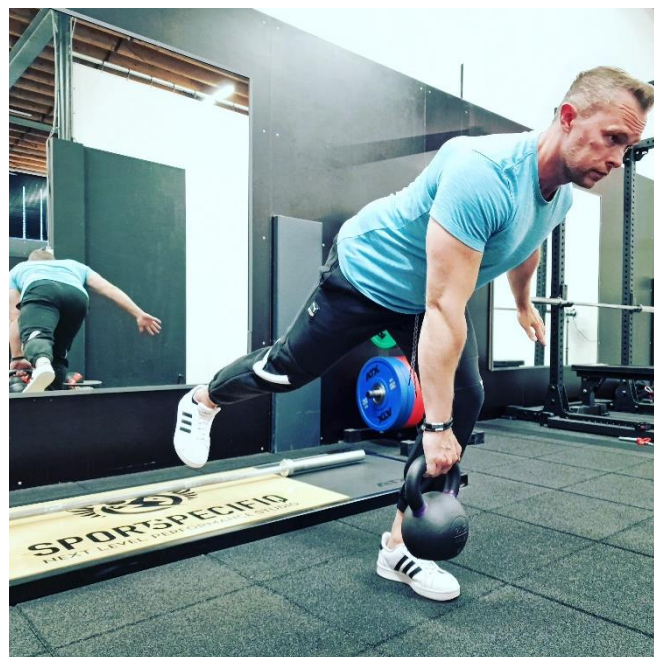
What is the secret to this exercise?

When performing the single leg deadlift (SLD) many people hold the weight in the hand on the side of the stabilizing leg. To fully utilize the SLD you should hold the weight in the opposite hand. This way your body needs to use its core to compensate for the lack of support of your other leg to stabilize. If you hold the weight on the stable side of the body, the SLD becomes a hamstring exercise at best, but it should be so much more!

- Make sure that the leg that goes backwards stays in line with the hip, toes pointing to the floor. This way your pelvis is forced to stay neutral instead of twisting to the side.
- Supporting leg: Hinge at the hip, slightly bend your knee and move the weight towards the floor in a straight line.
- Activate your lats by gently pulling the weight towards the body so it doesn't drift away from you, destroys your balance and makes you lose tension in your upper body.
- Preferably do this exercise barefoot: this way you have more sense of what's happening with your foot and therefore engage the correct muscles adequately.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VY0spCnQdFE&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.3 Overhead Squat

Why this exercise?

The overhead squat (OHS) may be the most straining full body exercise there is! The ultimate combination of overhead, back, core, glute and leg activation. The beauty of it all is that next to working all these muscles, it also improves your shoulder & hip mobility greatly. So, what are you waiting for? Load that bar and get started!

What is the secret to this exercise?

Make sure you warm up with some shoulder mobility exercises:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XcDLWaf7n8&ab_channel=SquatUniversity

After this it's best to warm up with a broomstick or a trainingbar before heading on to the empty bar.

- When performing the OHS it is essential to keep your heels on the floor when descending: many people fail to do so, because of ankle mobility limitations. To fix this try this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILSbK8RnGdl&ab_channel=SquatUniversity
- Use the tripod of the foot: pressure should be equally divided between your pinky toe, ball of the foot and your heel.
- Push your knees out when descending.
- Try to retract and lock in your shoulder blades when you bring the bar overhead, never let them open up, because the bar will fall forward and you will fail the lift.
Easy que: open up your chest, inhale as much air as possible, brace your core by 'holding your pee', try to pull the bar apart and decent in a slow and controlled manner.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaBaoK-LNMU&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.4 Benchpress

Why this exercise?

The answer to this question is easy: everybody wants to know how much ya bench!

The king of the upper body lifts, the benchpress (BP). For pressing purposes one could argue that the benchpress is the most functional exercise, sharing the throne with the overhead press, AND it makes my chest & triceps grow like crazy. It's my favorite over all the other exercises and a lot more complex than most people think. As I always tell my clients: the benchpress is one of the most difficult exercises, because of the fact that you strive to be in a very uncomfortable position for maximum tensions, pressing power and mechanics, opposed to the squat and deadlift where mostly the most comfortable position is regarded to be the best.

What is the secret to this exercise?

If you want to BP safely always do one or two pulling exercises before benching. Lat pulldowns combined with facepulls is what I prefer as this engages my lats, rear delts, traps and rhomboids. Therefore, it's easier to hold my arch and keep my shoulders safe when pressing heavy weights.

- Setup is key: you should be in position before unracking the weight. When the weight becomes heavy it's impossible to adjust your position after you've unracked the bar.
- Drive your heels into the floor for maximum stability and engage legdrive.
- Try to drive your pinky into the bar and squeeze the bar hard
- Engage your lats when lowering the bar and use them as a springboard when hitting the chest: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AomduPliO4Q&ab_channel=elitefts
- Sequence: grab the bar and squeeze it > unrack > stabilize above your shoulders > lower the bar towards the bottom of your chest > when hitting the chest, drive your heels into the floor and press the bar back to the starting position above your shoulders. When pressing you press in a slight diagonal line, not straight up and certainly not away from the upper body.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w55N7vQhzGA&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.5 Overhead Press

Why this exercise?

Only rivalled by the bench press, the overhead press (OHP) reigns supreme in the realm of pressing movements. It builds boulder shoulders, delivers actual strength gains in daily life and is just fun to do! Also, it makes your core work to stabilize the upper body when performing the press, so it's a typical 'best bang for your buck' type of movement.

Many people have trouble gaining strength on this movement, mainly because they don't understand the mechanics of the exercise. Center of gravity, force vectors etc. all play a crucial role in becoming an overhead press monster.

What is the secret to this exercise?

When performing the OHP you need a stable foundation to press from. After you unrack the bar, squeeze your glutes together to create that stability.

- Squeeze & hold glutes
- Breath in & brace your core
- Elbows UNDER the bar
- Grip the bar as hard as you can
- Drive heels into the floor & press overhead
- If you're in the lockout position at the top you should have the bar above the middle of your foot

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnPCZgMErpk&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.6 Single Leg Squat

Why this exercise?

As you've already read, I like unilateral exercises. The upside to the single leg squat is that it builds muscle up like crazy, increases athletic capability, but it does so by also stimulating the quads, glutes, and , although to a lesser degree, the ab- & adductors and hamstrings. Because you need to control the balance of the entire body it utilizes every muscle fiber you have to get you up and down.

- Builds all-round legmuscle development
- Teaches proper knee & hip mechanics > healthy joints
- It's a fun exercise to learn, and not many people are able to do it
- Creates healthier, more agile and all-round developed athletes

What is the secret to this exercise?

- Use the tripod of the foot, like I talked about in section 1.3 Overhead Squat
- Make sure you drive the knee forward in line with the foot, do not collapse to the inside. When your knee bends inwards we call that a Valgus Collapse: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7eVNuNOBTg&ab_channel=MuscleandMotion > This damages the cartilage and knee joint/-cap.
- Try to keep the tension on your leg when you hit the bottom
- If you have limited ankle mobility, you can use weightlifting shoes or a plate under your heel to facilitate the knee going forward. This way you can stay upright and go through a full range of motion

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDYzpj0_U&ab_channel=StephanLaschet

Additional:

Weightlifting shoes: <https://barbend.com/best-weightlifting-shoes/>

Ankle mobility drill: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILSbK8RnGdI&ab_channel=SquatUniversity



1.7 Ab Rollouts

Why this exercise?

Many ab exercises train the rectus abdominis, which are the superficial ab muscles forming your 'sixpack'. However, these muscles are not the only contributors to your core stability and strength. Your internal & external obliques and transversus abdominis contribute a significant portion when you engage your core.

- Ab rollouts (AR) engage your core muscles to a larger degree than for example crunches
- They are performed in a dynamic way, which enhances your performance in deadlifts, squats etc. Static movements surely contribute to core stability and strength, but dynamic exercises are an important addition to a well-rounded training program
- They are hard as hell, hence the gains from them are awesome!

What is the secret to this exercise?

- Squeeze your butt and hold your breath when performing your reps
- Keep your pelvis neutral: if your pelvis tilts forward during the AR, you experience an anterior pelvic tilt, which basically arches your back and puts lots of pressure on the lumbar spine. This is uncomfortable, but possibly can damage the spine over time as well if you keep doing it. Also, your abs basically shut down when you do that as you stretch the muscles out. A stretched muscle cannot contract at the same time.
- Elbows pointing out & slightly bend. If you point your elbows to the floor, your triceps starts chiming in and possibly becomes your bottleneck instead of your core muscles.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK6D9zU5SvE&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.8 Pullups

Why this exercise?

If I need to choose one exercise most people can't do, it would be the pullup. It builds a wide back by mostly focusing on your lats, IF PERFORMED CORRECTLY! Many people tend to perform the lift mainly with their arms instead of the back muscles. If done the right way, pullups are very effective and ultimately enable you to do a variety of harder pullup variations.

So why pullups?

- Build a wide back
- Being able to perform pullups without assistance will set you a part from the main population, because most people are unable to pull their bodyweight up
- Can be performed assisted (with a band) or weighted (with a dip-belt & DB's or plates)
- Will save your life when you have a Cliffhanger moment

What is the secret to this exercise?

- Try to Fold your legs backward & cross them OR straight out your legs by locking out the knees (this is the heavy variation)
- Don't push your knees / legs forward when you pull up
- Drive your elbows through the floor when pulling so your scapula retracts
- Open the chest when pulling: your back muscles should contract, not your chest
- Focus on your lats, not on getting your chin up to the bar

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8Zqggdy0Es&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.9 Dumbbell Rows

Why this exercise?

Dumbbell Rows (DBR) are the perfect exercise to go heavy if you want to shock your upper back and gain some serious muscle. Not too many exercises are safe enough to train with a certain amount of overload. Actually, bent over rows and dumbbell rows are the only exercises I use overload on with clients. In my experience these exercises work best when you use a little momentum from the bottom to the top and then slowly control the weight on the way down. Gains, gains and more gains! Promise!

What is the secret to this exercise?

- When doing DBR's try to use your legs to gain momentum at the bottom so you can use a weight that's heavier than you would normally be able to use when performing it picture perfect
- If you want max focus on your upper back try to use straps so you can focus on pulling with the elbows instead of your hand. Try to row your elbows just past your ribs
- Control it on the way down to increase time under tension, especially the eccentric portion of the lift which is responsible for most of the muscle growth. If you just drop the weight you just missed the most important part for muscle building

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WS34ca-pAIs&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



1.10 Deadlift

Why this exercise?

When looking at daily functionality nothing beats the deadlift. Every time you pick something up from the floor or do daily tasks, you will utilize a deadlift type of motion to do so. However, the benefits don't stop here. It works almost all of your back muscles, but mainly the thick erectors which span from the upper back towards your pelvis. Also, your hamstrings, core muscles and quads are taxed to get the weight to lockout. And lastly, who doesn't want to be able to lift a car like a strongman? Now that's alpha!

What is the secret to this exercise?

- Try to 'legpress' the weight up. Drive your feet through the floor when you start the lift
- Make sure you brace your body before starting the lift and pull the slack out of the bar before fully engaging your muscles to get the weight up. Don't jerk the weight up without tension on the bar. That's the main reason people get injured on this exercise.
- Pull the bar towards you from the moment you pull the bar. This will engage your lats and stabilize your upper back.
- Try to pull backwards instead of straight up. This way your butt is less likely to shoot up shifting the weight forward, making you lose control and fail the lift.

Where can I find a tutorial?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJKuSw0Y_As&ab_channel=StephanLaschet



Chapter 2: Five Essential Tips For An Effective Training Program

In the following chapter we will discuss five must do's for developing your training routine/program. If you abide by these principles you will surely be progressing to the next level with regards to your strength and muscle gains. Many people try program hopping every six weeks when they don't see the (unrealistic) progression they're expecting to make. Basically it's impossible to judge if a training routine is working for you after several weeks. Most would agree that it takes at least four to six months.

My advice for you is: find or create something that seems plausible to you. Don't spend your time reading on forums, magazines and the like. If you actually want to gain knowledge, buy books from people who've been in the trenches for many years and preferably have assisted many different people in reaching their goals. Reading this book is step one, but always keep on developing yourself.

I will not bore you any longer with my infinite wisdom 😊 Check out the next five tips for developing your training routine.



2.1 Progressive Overload

We will start with the definition of progressive overload:

Progressive overload is a method of strength training that advocates for the gradual increase of the stress placed upon the musculoskeletal and nervous system.^[1] The principle of progressive overload suggests that the continual increase in the total workload during training sessions will stimulate muscle growth and strength gain.^[2]

Basically we can say that your training template should be increasing in volume and/or intensity over time to keep progressing.

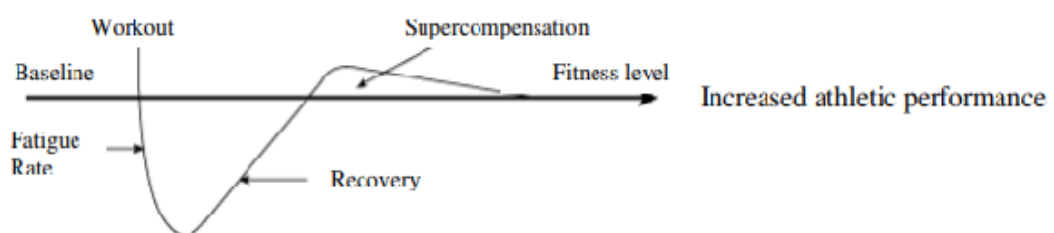
How to implement this in your training routine

When designing a training program you should be starting out 'too light'. Starting off heavy from the beginning will overtrain your body within several weeks. Therefore, to make sure your body can adapt to the training stimulus, we will start off light and slowly progress to heavier weights or more volume in the weeks that follow. Essentially, most of my clients follow 10 to 16 week training cycles in which they peak and then start a new cycle, again starting off 'too light'.

- If you work with a 12 week training cycle make sure that you build up the volume in the first 6 weeks. Keep your weights between the range of 60 and 80% of your one rep max (100%).
- Preferably, in the first 6 weeks I like to train movements or body parts multiple times every week (two or three times).
- From week 7 on try to train movements / body parts once (max twice) per week and build the working weights up while decreasing overall volume. This way your body will be able to adapt. Increasing both training weights AND volume over many weeks will destroy you. This is the reason most people don't progress.
- End your training cycles with a deload week. This week will focus on restoring energy levels, allowing supercompensation (graph 1)¹ to happen and get you fit and strong for the next cycle.

GRAPH I

Ideal workout and recovery situation from single workout

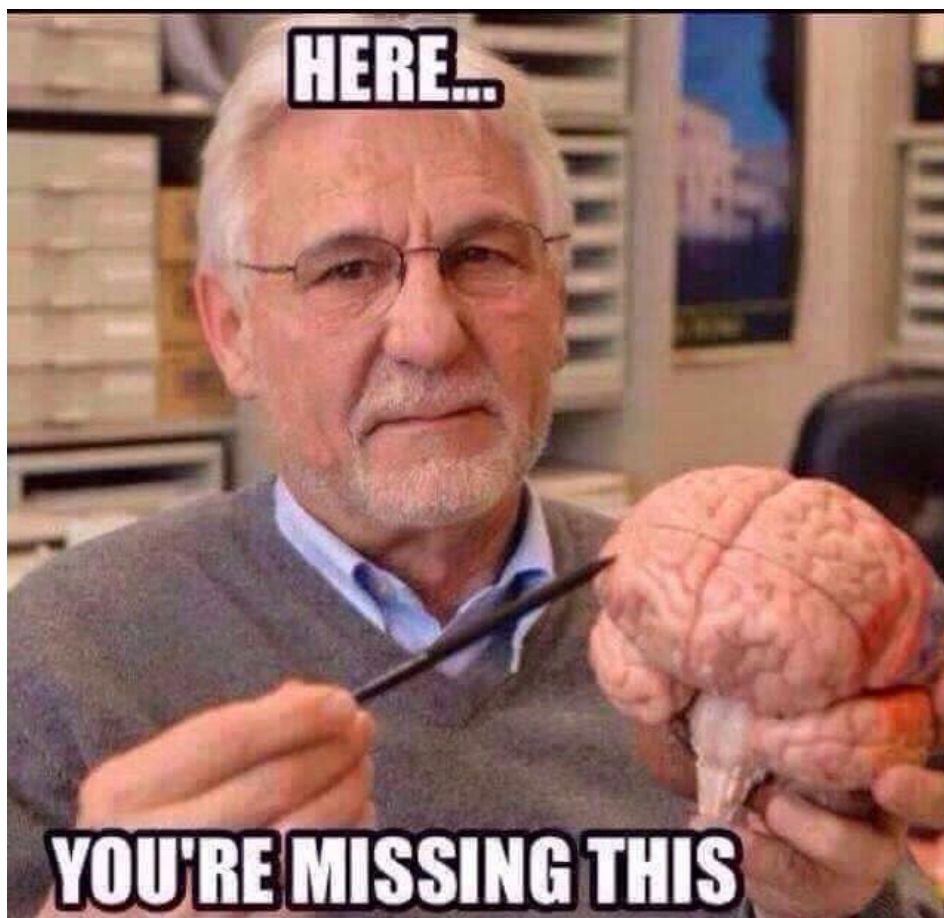


1. Shea, Jason. "Fatigue, Recovery, and Supercompensation"
2. Tylor, Janet L.; Amann, Markus; Duchateau, Jacques; Meeusen, Romain; Rice, Charles L. (November 2016). "Neural Contributions to Muscle Fatigue: From the Brain to the Muscle and Back Again". *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*. 48 (11): 2294–2306. doi:10.1249.
3. Todd, Janice S.; Shurley, Jason P.; Todd, Terry C. (2012). "Thomas L. DeLorme and the Science of Progressive Resistance Exercise". *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*. 26 (11): 2913–2923.

2.2 Don't copy the pro's

Obviously in the golden age of social media it is very tempting to look at workout routines of top athletes in their field and try to copy what they do. Let me tell you this:

- It will fuck you up, because you don't have all the restorative measures they have, for example massages, physical therapy, optimized resting and nutritional programs and professional coaches. On top of that: many (semi)professional athletes use chemical assistance as well. We all know it, but many don't want to hear it. I'm not the type of guy that negatively judges people for using anabolics or whatever. However, it is impossible for 'naturals' to do the same volumes and frequency in training so you shouldn't compare yourself to that.
- Most pro's found out what works best for THEM after many, many years of training and/or working with the best coaches. This doesn't mean this will work for you too. Some people make the most gains on their deadlift by doing the lift twice every week. For me, not so much... I make the most gains by deadlifting once every two weeks! Yes, you read that right.
- Most of the time you will not be able to find out the specifics of their training routine and why and when they apply the part you just read about. Training stimuli are often applied to improve a specific skill or parameter. You should know the full context of something before incorporating in for yourself.
- Obviously the years of training you have under your belt determine whether something is suitable for you. Beginners can't run advanced weightlifting routines of Olympic champions.
- Most of this is common sense, so use your brain!



2.3 Balance your body & training

To develop an aesthetically pleasing physique or a very strong body, you need balance. With balance I mean all-round development of your muscles and strength in different joint angles and force vectors. To accomplish this, you need to focus on your weak points instead of your strong points. Most people hate doing the things they're bad at so they think of fixing their weak points, but they neglect the 'doing'.

I can hear you thinking: 'I'm not like that'. As we don't know each other and you probably don't give a fuck what I think, prove it to yourself. Create a plan and execute.

Some pointers I use for my routines and those of my clients:

- For upper body: use a 2:1 ratio for pulling vs pressing exercises. For every set you push, you pull two sets. This keeps your shoulders healthy, but also makes sure you don't lose yourself in 'training the beachmuscles', namely chest and biceps.
- Your legs don't grow by doing four sets of leg extensions. They are half your body so put some volume in those fuckers to develop your 'Tree Trunk Legs'.
- For most people with a fulltime job I reckon that training three or four times per week is optimal. Most people get trashed doing five or six sessions of strength training every week.
- If you choose to train bodyparts twice a week for growth, **DO NOT USE DOUBLE THE VOLUME**. This means: if before you did 16 sets per bodypart every week, when training it twice don't go for 32. Make it 20 or 24 for example to feel how your body responds to it.
- Don't forget your calves (mine suck, but I keep on fighting!)



2.4 Plan ahead & stick to it

If you train by feel chances are that you're not optimizing your training. This means less gains, more frustration and basically an unsolvable puzzle if you don't progress anymore.

Make sure that you plan your training cycle, including deloads! If you systematically plan your workouts, you will always be able to look back at what you did if something is working really well or you just seem to be stuck.

I like to work with a macro cycle consisting of micro cycles. The macro for me in general is equal to one year. Microcycles can be anywhere between 6 tot 16 weeks.

- Firstly, you think of one or multiple macro goals. What do you want to achieve this year? Write this down NOW! This is where the planning starts. Pick reasonable goals and make sure that you pick a max of three main goals to achieve.
- Dissect the goals you wrote down and decide which goal is most important to you. Pick the most important one and start writing down your first microcycle to work on it. You can dedicate multiple cycles on the goal, but we'll start with the first one.
- When you finished planning the cycle, you start writing down the main guidelines and focus of the following microcycles. You don't have to write down exactly what you're going to do, because in several weeks you will probably have to change things, because something didn't go the plan (which can be positive or negative).
- Now, stick to your plan and don't fuck it up by changing things in three days!

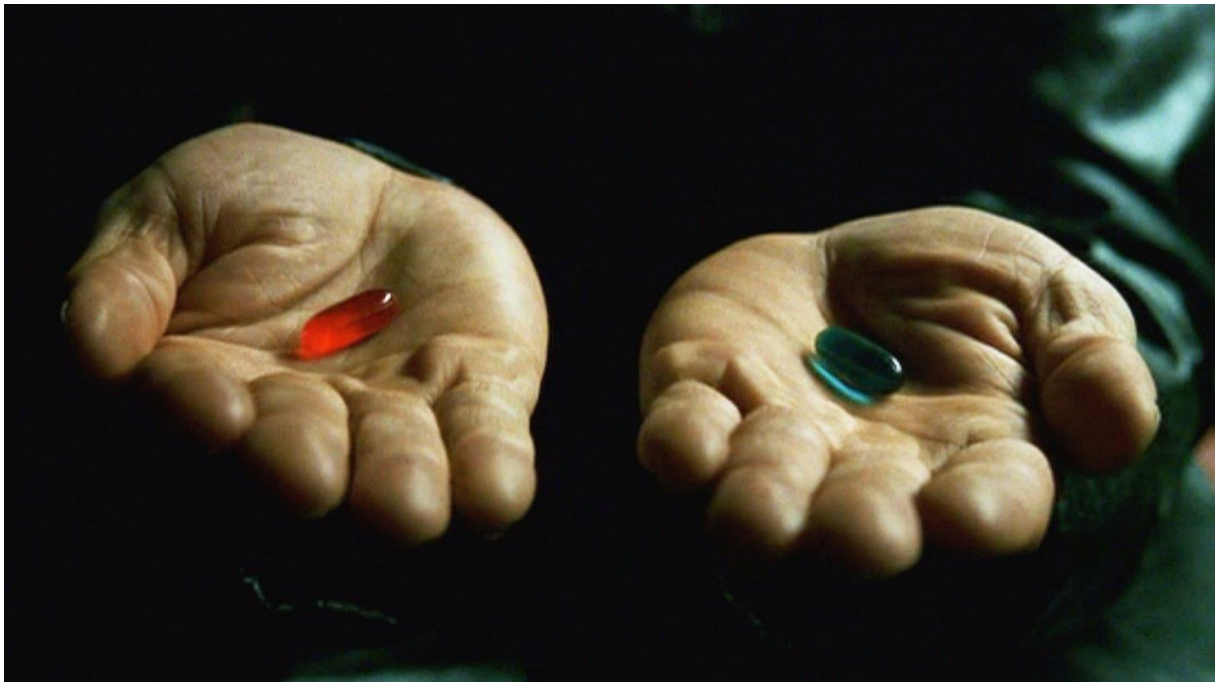


2.5 Focus on one or two parameters

When developing your training routine focus on max two things per training cycle you would like to improve on. It's simply not possible to make huge progress on your bench, squat, deadlifts, size of your arms, lose bodyfat and develop your cardio in one 10-week training cycle.

Like I told you in the previous paragraph: write down the things most important to you in the right order. Focus on #1 (and maybe #2) in the first cycle. Progress comes when you develop concrete goals.

- Don't be a stubborn little shit by thinking this does not apply to you. You are awesome, but you are not Superman or Wonderwoman.
- If you follow this advice you will see gains you never imagined possible. It is very uncommon for people to use common sense instead of wishful thinking. So, like Charlie Munger always says: 'when people refer to common sense, they should say uncommon sense'.



Closing Words

Thank you for reading my first e-book. I hope you liked reading it as much as I did writing it. The information in this book should help you to develop a well-designed training plan, subsequently giving you the results you're looking for.

If you like my content, you can follow me on Instagram. In the future, I will create more content for you to benefit from.

Lastly, always remember this:

Knowledge is a treasure, but the practice is the key to it. – Lao Tzu

Best regards,

Stephan Laschet

Sportspecificiq

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