

Working Hard at Working Smart

by Michael Lipowski, CFP

There is no questioning your dedication or your motivation. You have laid out specific goals that you would like to achieve over the coming months and your level of focus is the best it's ever been. You know how difficult the road ahead will prove to be but that doesn't matter—you are ready for the challenge. You've been training for some time now, but the moment is finally right to make that big push forward. Your heart is in it and your internal drive is at an all time high, it's now or never. You demonstrate unrelenting dedication by putting hours of training in each and every week because of this burning desire to have the body you've always wanted. You lift weights, you run on the treadmill, you lift more weights, you take a class, you push, you pull, you bike, you walk, you can't stop you are a machine. Your hopes are high and you have faith that all your hard-work will soon pay off...but it doesn't.

The reality of having spent the last 3-6 months working harder than you have ever worked before but with little to show for it, leaves you feeling defeated. Your hopes and dreams are in the gutter and your left shaking your head, asking yourself, "what heck happened?" The little voice inside says things like, "If this is the body I'm going to be confined to for the remainder of my life I may as well throw in the towel. At least then I can use my free time to do things I really enjoy, like sitting on the couch watching LIFETIME (for the ladies) or Sports Center (for the guys) and woofing down real cookies. No more of these protein enriched, low-carb, dried out, cardboard tasting cookies I've been TREATING myself too for the last 24 weeks". These are not the kinds of things you are supposed to be saying to your self but you can not help it. No matter what you try to do to get over it, the fact is the hours, the days, the months in the gym did not get you anywhere close to what you envisioned. The body you had always hoped for now seems hopeless and you can't stop asking yourself, what went wrong.

The reason may be a tough one to swallow, but I'll feed you this little jagged pill nonetheless. Besides, it can't be any worse than how you already feel. It has nothing to do with poor genetics or bad luck, it is simply this. Hard work by itself does not get it done. There is in fact one other factor that is just as if not more important than hard work and that is smart work.

Your heart may be in the right place but your mind may not be. By that I'm not insinuating that you lack focus, determination, drive, motivation or shy away from working hard. As a matter of fact, you likely possess all of these qualities. Without them you would not spend nearly half a lifetime in the gym, pursuing your goals.

Unfortunately these assets can also be a liability if you do not know how to control them. That is unless you work hard at working smart. By working hard at working smart, you use your drive, your motivation, your focus, your dedication to not only workout but to make the intelligent, albeit difficult decisions before, during and after those workouts, which inevitably lead to you achieving your goals. This might be the decision to take more days off between workouts, to train with more intensity and less volume, to eliminate certain exercises, to add others, to take an entire week off and so on and so forth. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your body is the hardest thing to do but often times the smartest. For some individuals the thought of taking a day off from working out is far worse than death itself. As if everything is going to be lost over the course of a single day or even a week for that matter. Let me assure you of this, everything you have worked for in the gym up to this point will not magically disappear if you miss a day or two. In fact, in all likelihood the day or two or more will help your body to recuperate and develop further. So you have to ask yourself what is most important—to satisfy your psychological needs or satisfy your physical ones. Both are important but only you can answer which is most. Your answer will have a tremendous influence on the direction you go. You can continue to spin your wheels doing what you've been doing up to this point and keep your fingers crossed that things will suddenly change because you really, really want them too. Or you can seek out a different more intelligent approach, but which will force you to make some very difficult but necessary changes in your training in order to realize your physique and fitness goals.

On a daily basis I encounter people at the gym who are highly motivated and display a great deal of dedication to their training. Like myself, they are at the gym every day and sometimes they are there for hours at a time. The only difference between me and them is that I am only there that much because it's my job! Why is it then that these individuals still look the same when they apparently display much more dedication than the rest of us who do not workout every day, yet continue to make gains? How can an entire year can pass by and these workout mavens still look exactly the same?

Contrary to what many will argue (or use as an excuse) the reason has nothing to do with genetics but rather with intelligence. This is not implying that these individuals are not intelligent, just that they make un-intelligent decisions when it comes to exercise. They have a narrow understanding of what really drives results in the gym. If it was as simple as just showing-up and doing the workouts then 99% of those who frequent the gym would have outstanding physiques. Such is obviously not the case so there must be more to the equation. I was once one who also believed that the workouts were the answer to it all and could compensate for my lack of genetic ability. The only thing I had to do was workout longer and harder and more often than everyone else and everything would fall into place. You can probably relate to my disappointment when this strategy didn't pan out. I began to search for answers and

was not quite happy with the ones I had found even though from a logical and rational standpoint they made a lot of sense. With reluctance I took a new approach to my training. It was a more logical, rational, and fundamental approach, which went completely against the mainstream beliefs that are still followed today, but it worked. Not only did it work for me but it worked for my clients, who were seeing results that they had not seen since their twenties and for others, results that they had never seen before! Mind you, these were not individuals who had never exercised before. Many were people who had been exercising for a number of years and some with personal trainers and most were in their mid-thirties to late forties!

The point is—for me and those I have trained and continue to train—getting results is not just a matter of working out hard. There is no denying that a certain level of effort is essential to achieving your desired results and the greater your effort the greater the return. However it is working smart that makes the hard-work meaningful and brings it all together. It is being attentive to the results of your decisions and honestly assessing whether the impact is positive, negative, or indifferent. It is using that information to help shape your next and future decisions as you move forward. It is using your time, effort, and experience in the gym to learn what works best you so that you may actualize your potential.