Passion & Commitment In Training
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The major thing I have learned from working with Olympic Athletes is the extraordinary sense of passion they possess in pursuing their dreams. Excellence in their sport is the top priority in their life and everything revolves around their training and competitions. This sense of passion doesn’t mean they feel great everyday, but on the “Tough” days they have the discipline and desire to get the most out of their workouts regardless of how they feel.

Passion is critical because it is the inevitable mental fuel that nourishes an athlete’s sense of mission and ability to confront the obstacles that block your pursuit. And it is the mission that 1) provides direction and purpose, 2) gives one feedback, 3) helps in coping with adversity, 4) builds an athlete’s self-confidence. The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of passion and the importance of mission in training for performance excellence, and to discuss how an athlete can develop passion to fuel motivation in pursuing his/her mission.

Most of you do more than just train; you have other responsibilities in your lives: an occupation, a social life, and family responsibilities. This doesn’t mean however, that you are not serious about your training. This article is for the “serious” person who wants to make a commitment to his/her training. As you will discover in reading this article, many of the issues addressed are not limited to just training, but include skills which can be used in all aspects of your life.

The first step in refining and developing your passion is to ask a series of philosophical questions: Why do you want to train? What do you want to get out of it? How much of a commitment (mental and time) do you want to make? I have taught at California State University at Fullerton for twenty years and I have had many students come to me for advisement. These students come and share their concerns with me. One issue that often comes up is “Ken, I am not certain I want to be in school.” For the first 15 years of my teaching career, I would listen and talk with them for hours. And to be honest, I am not certain how much impact it had because they had already lost the passion for school. Five years ago I established a new approach; when they tell me they are confused (lack of passion and/or meaning for what they are doing), I tell them to QUIT. Of course they are shocked, but I ask them why be in school if you don’t want to be there? I also tell them if they are going to drop out, remember these four words “Do you want fries?” Because without an education, you will only be able to get a job in a fast food restaurant. After they go and do that for a few years, then they are ready for school and want to be there.

Thus, the first key question is “Why do you want to train?” It may be for quality of life, or to get in shape; what is critical is that you know why you are doing it. Once you know why you are training, then you have to look at the commitment you are willing to make. To train seriously, you have to change your mindset from “Am I going to train
today?” to “When am I going to train today?” Once this shift is made, it is possible to channel that passion into your mission. We also have to remember that if your goal is a better quality of life, then we are talking about training becoming a part of your life.

Passion Fuels Intensity

It is great to have passion, but you must direct that energy into your mission. The athlete has to refine and develop his/her mental abilities (concentration, control, etc.) as well as his/her emotional state in order to get the most out of training. The person must go beyond just working hard and “whipping the body into shape.” By incorporating the mental and emotional components, the athlete can make a more effective use of his time and energy because now he knows why he is doing what he is doing. It is this type of purpose or intent that stimulates the intensity. If there is no specific purpose to focus on except “I am going to train hard” there is nothing to focus on when adversity strikes or obstacles present themselves.

Mission gives Feedback

Your mission gives you that specific task to focus on and most importantly it gives you immediate feedback on where you stand in regards to obtaining that goal. At times you may “fail” but failure can be positive feedback if you use that information to compensate and adjust. When I work with athletes, I constantly remind them that each day of training they make a choice to take a step toward their goal, remain the same, or take a step back. In any form of human movement, there is direct behavioral and physical results that can not be denied. So when you train, you must do as the ancient Greek athletes did and “stand naked before the gods.” You either complete the lift, set, and/or workout or you don’t. This type of immediate feedback provides the person with a wonderful opportunity to adjust. A step forward is not always being successful and/or achieving your results. We can learn from failure if we use the information effectively.

I want to emphasize that in the athlete’s evaluation of his training they should not compare themselves to others but use their previous performance as a reference point. This is a major psychological “trap” that occurs often in the weight room culture. One person who works full time and has family responsibilities is comparing himself to someone who just trains and has very few additional responsibilities in his life. This is not a fair comparison and it can often trigger frustration. This is why it is important to know why you are doing it and the level of commitment you are willing to make. Let this be your measuring stick.

Mission helps in Managing Stress

When you are clear and committed to your training it helps in coping with the many obstacles that arise in training. A person with a mission has a plan and knows the
direction they are headed and this helps in sustaining the passion. It is like the college
student that I mentioned who quits school, and turns burgers. When that student returns to
school, he knows that in his heart this is what he wants to do. And this type of mindset
completely alters the negative perspective regarding homework and term papers. Once
you remove that negative mindset, learning can become enjoyable.

Mission Builds Confidence

When you have a clear mission and you focus on the specific tasks, you will build
confidence in your abilities. You must learn to focus on the process of your training and
not get frustrated when you don’t achieve your outcomes. The outcomes are important,
but to achieve your outcomes your attention has to remain on the process. For example,
you may have difficulty with a new technique but at least you can feel good about your
commitment to work it into your program.

Putting it into Action

- Establish a specific mission for yourself each day before training. You can do this on
your drive to the weight room or while you get dressed. For example “Today when I
work out I am truly going to take one repetition at a time with my focus totally on that
repetition.
- During your workout remind yourself of your mission for that day.
- At the end of your workout evaluate yourself on how you progressed in meeting that
mission. Make any adjustments that you need to make.
- Keep in perspective that whatever long-range goals you have, you must put them into
action on a daily basis. TODAY, TODAY, TODAY.
- Savor and enjoy the little things you accomplish. On the really rough days you can at
least praise yourself for getting to the weight room and getting through your workout.
There may be some days when your workout is the only meaningful thing you did for
yourself. Hopefully, you don’t have too many days like this.
- Remember that peak performance requires passion and a sense of mission or purpose
in the task at hand.