

Progression. Potential. Patience.

: program design commandments

Putting together training plans and nutting out how to best serve a client in regards to improvement can often be a daunting task. Especially if you have been thinking in the head space of 'constantly varied - just work harder' for a few years. But what if you're working with someone who no longer needs constant variation? What if working harder isn't reaping the same results for them as it has in the past? How do you get out of that head space to figure out exactly what your client needs?

In many cases, in order to best serve your client, you need to figure out how to put aside this fitness instructor mentality in favour of a more considered strength and conditioning approach . It can be done, but takes practice. You need to notice, identify and accept your biases in order to determine the right prescription for your client. Not just a prescription you like. Not just a prescription you seem to default to most of the time.

I can remember spending up to 6hrs at a time just planning 4 weeks of training for someone, just trying to push away my biases and make sure that I had the right prescription for them. It can be endlessly frustrating - driving you and the people around you crazy! Firstly you think you've got it. Then you hit save and go for a walk. Suddenly a wave of creative clarity washes over that corner of your brain that you couldn't quite seem to access before... and BAM! You've got it! Something even better! Eager to utilize this new found wisdom, you re-open the program and alter a few things... Making it a total of 7hrs to piece together a 4 week plan. It's often even worse when attempting to design your own.

I hear about this all the time. I totally understand the frustration. I felt same way until I began stripping things back and implementing some simple program design frameworks. These frameworks are almost universal at every stage of program design, and helped me to come up with my own personal guidelines for approaching program design.

Assuming some basics of strength training principles are understood, and acknowledging there will always be outliers - individuals at extreme ends of the spectrum, here are my personal program design commandments to calm your frustration and help push away the bias.

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1. Progression

It's like evolution. Adaptation can only happen at the speed it happens. Forcing it leads to over reaching and less progression in the long run.

Here are some rough guidelines for how you might progress training from one week to the next:

Strength work/CP system

- 3-7% change in CP volume/intensity per week
- 5-10% change in CP density volume/intensity per week
- 10-30% change in CP muscular endurance volume/intensity per week

Short end work/ AnL system

- 2-8% change in volume/intensity per week

Enduring work/ Aer system

- 5-15% change per week

2. Potential

The concept of creating potential. The concept of strategically training one system to create more potential improvement in another. All energy systems are at play all the time at different %'s, yet prioritising the order of training of systems allows for more potential change across others.

You want to train one system first so that it primes/prepares for the next system being trained in the session, which primes/prepares for the next system to be trained. This allows each system to be trained to most effect. This is the concept of potentiaton. Potentiation applies either during a single session or from session to session (even from week to week if you want to abstract that far). There are basic strength and conditioning guidelines for potentiation.

Consider this flow with EST:

- CP work before AAL work
- AAL work before ALP work
- ALP work before ALE work
- ALE work before Are work

As an example, doing a high amount of oxygen dependent work (e.g. 2km row) just before a 1rm or sprint is not allowing much potential change in a program design. Understanding the client's exercise physiology is key.

3. Patience

Not everything can improve at once and it won't happen over night. But it can happen if program designs are intelligently layered with consideration of commandments 1 (progression) and 2 (potentiation), and with appropriate time and space allocated for change. Patience needs to be understood and practiced by both client and coach.

- Periodisation, day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year.
- Understand that day and night, yin and yang, work and rest frameworks are always at play.
- Programming is like inception.. There are so many layers. Let each layer build on the other.

This approach and these principles are by no means set in stone. They serve as a starting point, a reminder and a guiding light when designing training prescriptions. To master the art of programming takes practice, lots of questions, constant observation and noticing.

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