

Starting Strength

I Have to Train

by

Jim Steel

I have always wondered why some people find such fascination with training, specifically for strength and/or aesthetics, while others never catch the Iron Bug. I am trying to think of the people that I have trained with over the years, and if they are still working out with weights, and I can't come up with any of my high school friends or junior college friends, and only a few senior college friends who still train.

They ask me about it. They ask how I keep training, and I don't say it, but I want to ask: how can you *not* keep training? They must know that I think that way, and they all think I'm nuts. They gotta "get back into it," they gotta "start Monday," whatever. I don't give a shit. It is their loss. And I will keep doing my thing.

Do I think less of people if they don't lift weights? Yes, I do. Everybody should lift weights. Everybody should know that. Who wants to look like Alan Alda or some skinny dude who can't protect his family or needs help with stuff because he's too weak? You get old fast when you don't lift weights. You get old, and then you start acting really old – and I'm not gonna do it. Not dying yet, dammit.

It's a disease for some of us. We can't shake it. Life is incomplete without training. Dare I say that training gives our lives meaning?

I was thinking about how there are things that I *love*, hunting being ranked first, and then there are things that I *need*, like training. You see, I want hunting in my life; I absolutely always want to go hunting. But training, year after year, never missing workouts, getting the reps, making sure that it always gets done, family or responsibilities be damned? It's a need, yeah, because if I don't train, nobody is happy. I can see it, feel it in my being, the yearning for the release. It has to happen or life sucks for myself and everyone around me. I am irritable, distant, and I really just want to go to the gym. That's why I usually train very early in the morning. Get it done, get that release and then I can enjoy the day. That is strange to some, I am sure. Can't you just skip one day? No, I can't. Can't you just do it later? *No*.

You may well get your release gambling, or playing the stock market, or maybe by watching your favorite team play or going to the bar with your pals. Great. Go for it. The weights are it for me. I need that fix.



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Do I always want to go to the gym? Of course not. I just go anyway. I like what former Navy Seal Jocko Willink says about it: that when your mind is being weak about training, decide that your mind doesn't get a vote. It's being weak, so I'm going with the body. The body will lead the way today, and if the mind wants to catch up, great. If it doesn't, the body is going to train anyway.

I have walked into the weight room before and been like, screw this, this is boring, I'll wait till later, you know, *tomorrow*, just skip this one time, all of that inner-softness shit, all the weak voices in your head that try to wreck you. And then, you forget the stalling – let's just get started, let's go, let's go.

And then I'd get started and have a fantastic workout and be so glad that I did it, and then sometimes it's no good anyway, but guess what? I'm always glad I did it. It's necessary, and I accept it. It's sort of like a high school girlfriend – sometimes you hate it and dread it, and sometimes it's the greatest thing in the world.

Looking back at this whole thing, I guess that weights have been my life for almost as long as I can remember. Yeah, I can't figure out why. I just always liked strength and being different and having muscles. I wasn't bullied much, just the usual older kids' stuff that everybody goes through. I wasn't trying to get bigger for protection. I didn't read comic books and admire their physiques and want to look like a superhero. I don't know, I just thought that lifting weights was cool. Dudes benching four plates on the bar, squatting six plates for reps, big quads and traps, veins in biceps. What boy would not think that was cool?

You lift weights for a few months when you are a kid and you look in the mirror every day, a bunch of times every day, and then one morning you wake up and you see a muscle forming or you see a freaking vein in your quads, or you see that vein that runs down your biceps – and your fate is sealed. The first time that you benched 225 or squatted three plates? Pure magic. You are hooked forever, and will never be satisfied with how you look or how strong you are. And that's the beauty of it: training never lets you be satisfied, so it always keeps you coming back for more. It sets its hooks in you and owns you after a while, and the need for the fix keeps getting stronger as time goes by.



At one point, training became so special to me that it's almost like I didn't want anyone to discover it – the secret that lifting weights cures what ails you, makes you feel more alive, makes you more confident, and of course gives you bigger and stronger muscles. And I am at the point in my training that I don't try to convince anybody of the benefits of it any more, I don't try to convert others like I used to. It just wastes time, and I have realized that the true converts to the Iron Lifestyle usually come to it naturally, as they discover the benefits on their own.

If you try to proselytize, you'll get the same stupid pushback as always: "I don't want to look like that," "I will hurt my back," "Weight training makes you fat," "When I stop lifting, the muscle will all turn to fat." Or a woman telling me that she doesn't want to get too big. Saying that you don't want to lift weights because you'll get too big is like saying that you don't want to get your driver's license because you're afraid you'll become a NASCAR driver. Don't worry, you won't get too big. It takes killing yourself with effort, years of lifting weights, super genetics, and lots of drugs for women – or anybody else – to get "too big." But that's okay. All of that crap is okay with me. Just keep making the excuses while you get weaker by the minute.

I'll keep training as the years go on, thankful for discovering one of the secrets to a fulfilled life. Join me, or keep doing the other things that make *you* feel alive. It is up to you. But I will tell you this:

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if training with weights becomes your thing, your need, you will not regret it. And once you get going, you'll wonder why more folks haven't made training an integral part of their daily lives.

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