



it is a common enough question: why do you train like this? why do you do that to yourself? the athletes we have answer these questions quickly and easily - they have their sport, their motivation, their tangible "why" - they do this to win. but what about the rest of us? the new mom? the stressed out lawyer? the veterinary assistant? the gym rat? many of us are "fit enough" to get by, so why? why do we seek out this obvious discomfort?

supposedly, Einstein suggested that we strive to "make things as simple as possible and no simpler" well. here goes.

simply put - the answer is training. training behavior. habit. that old story about the two wolves - about learning how to feed the **right** one. absent stress, in what we at the gym refer to as "sober moments" we - as humans - are pretty capable. we have the ability to think through our problems - we know what we need, we know what must be done and how to do it (and what we don't know we can find online). ninety percent of the time our problem is not information but **implementation**. stress makes us stupid. it makes us shortsighted. under stress we will most often revert to old habits, to whatever is easiest at the moment, regardless of the consequences. our higher functions seem to shut off - we forget promises, we forget what happens next and what happens **after** what happens next. we convince ourselves that "this time its different" that a little indiscretion isn't such a bad thing. we justify bad behavior, we reinforce a narrative that will keep us firmly entrenched exactly where we are. if we accept that stress is what derails our better angels, then the simple answer is to avoid stress - and while that strategy may move us in the right direction, it is incomplete - it leaves us too vulnerable to circumstance. in this world we have very little control over what happens to us, but we have absolute control over what we do in return. new experiences are stressful. consequences are stressful. i would argue that stress is unavoidable - and the worse someone is at dealing with it the more damage it is apt to cause. if the previous assertions are believed, then the one avenue left is to get better at dealing with stress - to change our relationship with it. the things we do - the reps and sets, the weights and meters and rest structures - are simply ways to apply deliberate stress. appropriate stress. just enough stress to become inoculated to it.

let me explain.

we are training ourselves how to argue. how to convince. how to debate and threaten and cajole. the term getting thrown around a lot now is "grit" - the ability to stick with something. the ability to get uncomfortable, to stay that way. to see things through. what people often call grit is that line, the breaking point between what we are now and what we can be. our goal is to win. to make a habit of winning. our goal is right action. deliberate behavior. control. to exert our will on our surroundings. to build our immunity to stress - moment by moment, piece by piece. like patience, like confidence, we

build this new armor in layers. in degrees. tiny victories. the gym is simply a controlled environment, a place where we can fine-tune that stress - set the stage, stack the deck - we can walk right up to the edge and hold it there - watch ourselves unravel, just a bit, just enough to learn something new. the gym, after all, is and will always be artificial - but its impact can be very real. it is a tool, a lens through which to view the mechanics of our failure. to find the problem. to fix the problem. so turn down the pressure and practice your form, respond instead of simply reacting. build your habits, own the behavior. challenge yourself - learn to savor the aches and the fear, the sweaty palms and slightly panicked breathing - get comfortable with the voice that is constantly telling you to quit, to ease back, to stay stagnant - it will always be there - you just have to learn to whisper back - to smile or just bare your teeth - to cope. because it is that inability to cope that causes most of us to defeat ourselves before an opponent even enters the equation. that inability to cope is what keeps us stagnant. it is what keeps us in self destructive habits. it is also why we try and de-mistify "suffering" - why we push ourselves, why we bathe in discomfort and try and convince ourselves that we don't mind. it is about control. about making better decisions. about learning to argue against the voice that deals us the most damage. about learning to tell ourselves a different story.

simple.

not easy.



a minute, under the proper stress, can make for a very long "discussion"



be deliberate, know which voice you are listening to, and why...



edges are, by nature, stressful. the largest part of feeling comfortable is realizing how uncomfortable you can be and still survive.