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Self-evident Truth

Pointing to a short statement in my Bulletin No. 1, Ellington Darden, of the Florida State University asked me, "... what is the source of that quote?"

I looked at him a moment, said nothing, and tapped myself on the chest.

"How can you justify it?" he asked me.

"Self-evident truth – common sense; call it what you like – nothing else is even possible," I told him.

All of us make common use of knowledge gleaned from self-evident truth –as we must in many instances, since a large number of obvious facts are supportable in no other way; but as any good judge clearly understands, circumstantial evidence is frequently the best kind – since it does not depend upon the opinions of witnesses, and can be supported on the basis of pure logic.

But we must, of course, be extremely careful to distinguish actual self-evident truth from apparent self-evident truth; ". . . oh, everybody knows that," is a common expression – but usually an invalid attempt to support an untrue (even if common) belief.

"They say," is another such common remark – and I frequently ask people who THEY are.

So there are two sides to the coin; on the one hand, all of us frequently make good use of knowledge that we can't always support – but on the other hand, most of us fall prey to common belief that is not valid and certainly can't be supported.

The quotation which Ellington Darden asked me about, and which I supported only as self-evident truth, was this; " . . . for the production of best-possible results, maximum possible growth stimulation must be induced – but this must be done without disturbing the existing recovery ability any more than necessary." (or words to that effect)

So let us look at that statement carefully, logically; in the first place, it should be obvious that there will be no growth without growth-stimulation, and that maximum-possible stimulation is required for maximum-possible growth – and secondly, it should be equally obvious that the muscular structures cannot grow if there is no recovery ability available to make such growth possible, and that a greater store of existing recovery ability will at least make a faster rate of growth possible, if perhaps not produce such growth in the lack of the required growth stimulation. Logically, then, both factors are required for growth – and there must be a reasonable balance between these factors; the body WILL NOT grow without growth-stimulation, and CAN NOT grow without recovery ability. No amount of growth-stimulation will produce growth if the body cannot supply the requirements for such growth – and the body cannot supply the requirements for growth if they are unavailable; unavailable, perhaps, because they are constantly being used up as fast as they are being produced in never ceasing attempts to compensate for too much exercise.

There it is logically; now let us look at it from a purely practical standpoint. Let us assume, for example, that you have the ability to run a distance of one mile before becoming totally exhausted. Without proper exercise – in this case, running or something very similar – you will never increase your running ability; year by year your ability will decline.

But if you do make a regular practice of running, then one of three things will undoubtedly happen; if you run only a little, you will maintain your existing ability far longer than you otherwise would have done without such exercise – if you run a bit more, then you will gradually increase your running ability – but if you run too much, your running ability will actually decline.

If you constantly increase the length of your runs, always trying to run as far as possible, you will increase your ability – up to a point; but eventually the amount of running will become so great that you will start exceeding your recovery ability, you will not be able to totally recover between exercise periods – and then losses in ability will occur. Nothing else is even possible – it is obvious self-evident truth.

This same self-evident truth can be applied to any form of exercise; but it should be clearly understood that the factor of importance is the "amount" of exercise involved – the body can withstand any possible "intensity" of exercise, so long as the amount of such exercise does not exceed the limits of the recovery ability. In fact, it is the intensity of exercise – and apparently ONLY the intensity of exercise – that regulates growth stimulation; thus intense exercise is an actual requirement for inducing growth – but it is also true that the amount of exercise must be decreased as the intensity of exercise is increased.

When the actually involved factors are thus viewed logically, the rule becomes obvious – obvious self-evident truth; in this instance, we need to stimulate as much growth as we can, and we need to leave the system in such shape that it can respond to this stimulation.

Previously untrained subjects – particularly men in their mid-twenties to their late thirties who are healthy but underweight – frequently experience rates of growth that are almost fantastic, when they first start progressive weight-training; because, at the start, "any exercise" is "intense exercise" – to them, as individuals – and thus growth is stimulated. And because their systems have not been exhausted by too much exercise – and thus their recovery ability is able to respond properly and provide the requirements for the growth that is being stimulated.

In fact, there is no slightest reason why such a fast rate of growth could not be maintained right up to the point of individual potential – whatever that might be in a particular case; but in practice, most such trainees usually fall into a rut of training too much – while not training hard enough. Exactly contrary to the generally-practiced rule, advanced trainees should actually train less than they did earlier – but much harder.

But just try telling that to a bodybuilder with ten years of experience –a man who has been doing as many as sixty sets of curls in each workout, when he would have been well-advised to do only two sets in each workout.

Or just try to convince a man who spent ten years building his 18-inch arms that he could have done so in less than two years if he had trained much less during each workout, and if he had trained less frequently.

The signs are all there, in plain sight for anybody to see – but most bodybuilders choose not to look; few if any of them, for example, ever wonder why they always experience such fast response after a prolonged layoff from training; but then quickly fall back into a rut where their progress is almost nonexistent. Yet the answer, of course is again a self-evident truth; during a layoff from training, their system is able to rebuild the recovery ability to a point where some reserve exists – and thus, when training is started again and growth is stimulated, the system is capable of meeting the requirements for such growth. But when this reserve is exhausted – as it quickly will be in most such cases – the system is no longer able to meet the requirements for growth; so no growth results, regardless of how much growth-stimulation is being provided.

Back on the treadmill – running and running, and never having enough common sense to notice that they are getting nowhere. And as a result of such non-thinking, the whole field of body building has been marching backwards for the last twenty years – at an ever-increasing pace, until now it has almost reached the point of a rut.