My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

ArthurJonesExercise.com

67

While it is certainly true that specialization, concentrating all or most of your attention and efforts upon a very narrow field of interest, has in at least a few cases resulted in scientific breakthroughs, it is nevertheless my opinion that such a narrow focus has, overall, done far more harm than good. In the real world it is probably impossible, and is certainly very difficult, to determine in advance just how or when a particular bit of knowledge may help to solve a problem in an apparently unrelated field of interest; thus it follows that you should attempt to learn anything you can about literally everything that you become aware of. Many of the things, probably most of the things, that you learn probably will not help you in any way, but, here and there, now and then, an apparently unrelated bit of knowledge may provide the key to a problem that would otherwise remain unsolved. That, at least, has been my experience.

Unfortunately, I have also learned from frequently bitter experience that it is usually impossible, and always very difficult, to convince anybody that a particular but apparently unrelated bit of knowledge has any significance in relation to the subject being discussed. Most people cannot, or will not, even consider the relevance of something that is new to them; never having considered it themselves, and probably not even being aware of it, they tend to reject it out of hand, and this emotional reaction occurs most frequently when the new, new to them, bit of knowledge tends to contradict their own opinions. Every scientist that I ever heard of was quick to state that they were interested in learning and cared only about the truth; but, then, having made that claim, the majority of them immediately put the lie to that claim by their actions when confronted with anything in the way of knowledge that is new to them.

Having been very interested in, and closely involved with, large numbers of exotic (foreign) wild animals throughout most of the last seventy years, I learned a lot of things that are directly related to human muscular function; but things which, in general, are not even suspected by many, if literally any, of the scientists now involved in the field of exercise physiology. One thing that was obvious to me and should be but usually is not obvious to many other people, is the fact that many wild animals are far stronger, pound for pound, than even the strongest men; and they have this almost unbelievable level of strength in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that they perform almost nothing in the way of meaningful exercise, generally spend most of their time sleeping and the rest of their time sitting around doing almost nothing. Just how much stronger they might become if they did perform much in the way of meaningful exercise is a question that will probably never be answered, but it is obvious that they do not require such exercise in order to perform their normal functions; and when you become convinced that you are really very strong, try jumping over a ten-foot fence with a cow in your mouth, as a male lion can easily do. Or try running in excess of seventy miles per hour, as a female lion can do. Or try wrestling with a python that weighs as much as you do, or even half of your weight. Lots of luck.

Having had quite a bit of experience with a wide variety of explosives, just about everything from firecrackers to nitroglycerin, I also became aware of a factor that is directly related to both explosives and exercise: no amount of light blows (force) will set off an explosion, and no amount of light exercise will increase either muscular size or strength, while only one hard blow will set off an explosion and very little in the way of hard exercise will stimulate increases in muscular size and strength. So it is not the amount of work but rather the intensity of the work that stimulates results; and, kindly note, I did not say “produces” the results, but, rather, “stimulates” the results. When dealing with explosives you will be well advised to proceed with both great caution and careful consideration of just what you are involved with, and the same rule applies to exercise. Handled improperly, explosives are very dangerous, and the same thing is true in respect to exercise; and while not many people would be dumb enough to suggest that you pound on a stick of dynamite with a hammer, there are a lot of people who strongly support styles of exercise that are almost equally dangerous, things like so-called plyometrics and any other style of exercise that involves sudden movement, so-called “explosive” exercise. As I have stated many times before, the next time somebody suggests that you move suddenly during any form of either exercise or testing, smile and walk away, because you are talking to a fool. And do not overlook the fact that a very long list of fools have large muscles, and another long list of fools have all sorts of academic credentials.

Long before I ever saw another one, but being aware that they existed, I designed and built a functional machine-gun when I was twelve years old, and, at the time, although in fact I did not do so, I could easily have designed and built a full-scale airplane that would fly. And I did in fact design and build a submarine that performed exactly half of its intended functions: it went down like a rock, but did not then come back up worth a shit. Fortunately, the damned fool who I talked into testing it was quite good at both holding his breath and escaping from the submerged submarine. Since those early days I have both designed and built just about anything you can think of just short of a moon rocket or a nuclear submarine, and many of them performed exactly as well as I hoped they would, while quite a few others did not work at all or worked very poorly but nevertheless taught me a great deal about the actual requirements for building such things. As somebody once said . . . "We learn, when we learn, only from experience, and then only from our mistakes; our successes serve only to reinforce our superstitions." Which statement, while not totally true in absolute terms, is nevertheless true in most situations.

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in both "how" and "why," with an emphasis on "why." In effect, do not tell me how to do something, but, rather, tell me why we should do it; just what are the cause and effect relationships that are involved in the situation? Having adopted and seriously applied that approach, you will probably be surprised to learn that a very large part of all the things that you have been taught are simply not true, and the fact that everybody else on the planet continue to believe them is irrelevant. As somebody else once said . . . "Just where and when has it ever been demonstrated that the majority are right about anything?" Education, using the term very loosely, as it is practiced today, primarily leads us to believe all sorts of things, but actually teaches us very little, if literally anything, of real value, certainly does not produce much in the way of rational thought. Even the so-called "hard" sciences, things like physics and engineering, are still highly controversial. Many of the things that we use that obviously do work do not, in fact, work for the reasons that we have been taught; so that while the practical results are very close to those that were desired the theory behind those results is utterly wrong. In the end, almost anything that actually does produce any meaningful degree of the desired results is a product of simple trial and error. In effect, you must first build something that does work and then try to figure out afterwards just why it works; and, in practice, your theory will usually have very little in common with the actual cause and effect factors that are involved.

Having been the principle speaker during hundreds of scientific meetings during the last thirty years, the most important thing that I have learned from that experience is that meaningful communication even with supposedly interested people is all but impossible; members of such an audience will always go away with firm impressions about what you say, but their impressions will seldom have much, if literally anything, in common with the things that you were trying to communicate. Why? Because, primarily, most such people come there with their minds already made up, with firm opinions that they are unwilling, or unable, to change. For all practical purposes you would produce much the same results if you delivered your talk in Chinese to an audience of people who understand only German. And, in many cases, doing so would produce better results, because, then, you would not piss off your audience by putting the lie to their opinions; thus, at least, while they would learn nothing they would not go away convinced that you are a fool.

Having been raised speaking both English and German, I have, as a consequence of having lived for long periods all over the world, been forced to learn at least a working knowledge of a total of eight languages; most of which I have since lost because, as they say, if you don't use it you lose it. Unfortunately, much the same thing has also happened to my muscles, since I have not been very consistent about practicing what I preach.

It is not only possible but highly desirable to be closely involved with a rather long list of apparently unrelated activities simultaneously; contrary to rather common belief, it is not necessary to devote yourself entirely to any one subject in order to become truly well informed in that area of interest. As I said above, specialization is almost always a mistake.

Having now been a pilot for nearly sixty years, having flown as pilot in command a total of more than 30,000 hours in everything from helicopters to four-engined, intercontinental "Jumbo" jets, and damned near everything else that is capable of flight, I have almost unavoidably been forced to learn many things that are directly related to exercise. Also having been directly involved in film production for many years, having filmed, directed and produced more than 300 films, I have also learned a lot from that experience, much of it, believe it or not, very directly related to exercise. And now having written and published more than a million words on the subject of exercise, hundreds of articles and several

books, I have also been forced to figure out quite a few things as a consequence of my attempts to explain them to other people; in effect, in my case at least, the author learned a lot more from his writing than the readers did.

I am now convinced that one of the most troublesome obstacles standing in the way of meaningful education is simple fear, a fear of appearing foolish. The best possible approach to avoiding mistakes is to do nothing, which is a mistake in itself. Perhaps the best approach is, as somebody once said . . . "Don't just stand there, do something, even if it is wrong." Long experience teaching people to fly made me clearly aware of the fact that many people, when first exposed to a new experience, simply freeze, do nothing; perhaps believing that a problem will go away if they ignore it.

Difficult as it may be for you to believe it, it has been clearly established that a majority of trained soldiers never fire their weapons even when being fired upon by an enemy; following one major battle during the Civil War, literally thousands of guns were afterwards found that had never been fired. Many of these guns, being muzzle-loading rifles, were found to have been loaded repeatedly but never fired, one load after another having been rammed down the barrel. The soldiers using those guns probably believed that they were firing them, but never actually did. So-called "buck fever" is also common among hunters, a man will stand motionless and watch as a deer wanders away and then afterwards claim that he fired at it several times when in fact he never did fire.

So just what, if anything, of value about exercise can you learn from any of the above? If you are typical of the majority of our race, probably not much, if anything; but if, by chance, you happen to be one of those rare individuals who is not afraid to think for themselves, you might learn to believe nothing that you read or hear; to consider it, perhaps, but not believe it.