

The Future of Exercise (1997 and Beyond)

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Lessons From Our Mistakes

When I first started exercising there were at least three possibilities:

ONE; I would produce little or nothing in the way of the desired results, in which case I probably would have quit, wrongly convinced that exercise offered me no worthwhile benefits.

TWO; instead, I might have produced enormous benefits, in which case I would probably have been convinced that I already knew everything that I needed to know, and would never have tried to improve my exercises.

THREE; or, as actually happened, I might have improved some of my muscles quickly and to a marked degree, while producing far less in the way of the desired results in other muscles.

In my case, I did quickly produce very good results in my arms and legs, which made me clearly aware that such good results were possible; while failing to produce a similar degree of results in the major muscles of my torso, the large muscles of the back and chest. Which led me to form the opinion that something was wrong with my exercises, a conclusion that caused me to devote years of thought and effort to attempts to improve my exercises.

To the best of my current knowledge, the subject of differences in genetic potential had never been considered, certainly not by me. But I now clearly understand just why my arms and legs benefited greatly while my torso muscles did not improve to a similar degree: my genetic potential for greater muscular size and strength in my arms and legs was far greater than it was in my torso muscles. Just as Blacks usually find it impossible to build large calf muscles because of relatively poor genetic potential in those muscles, a point covered in an earlier chapter, I had a similar problem related to my torso muscles. But, not even suspecting the real problem, I set out to design and build exercise equipment that would bring my torso muscles up into proportion with my arm and leg muscles.

In the late summer of 1948 I was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for the purpose of investigating the possibilities of becoming directly involved in the then ongoing Jewish/Arabian war (yes, they have been fighting that long); then having almost nothing in the way of political opinions, I was prepared to fight on either side, all I wanted to do was to fly fighters in combat, and I decided in advance that I would go with the side that was using Messerschmitt fighters, since I considered them to be the best fighter from the Second World War. The leading German Ace shot down 352 allied planes while flying such planes, while our best pilots scored only about 40 victories, a difference which I attributed to the differences in German and Allied fighters.

Both Arabs and Jews were then in Tulsa recruiting fighter pilots, and I met with representatives from both sides; but, in the end, I did not go with either side, because, quite frankly, I did not trust either side. Which was one of a relatively few wise decisions that I have made; that being subsequently established by the fact that the pilots who did go with one side or the other never got paid.

Both sides were offering a monthly salary of \$500.00 plus a bonus of \$50.00 for every combat mission flown and an additional bonus of \$500.00 for every enemy plane that you shot down. With any luck at all, a pilot might have earned a total of \$2,000.00 a month, which was a fortune in those days. Years later, when he first flew faster than sound, Chuck Yeager was being paid \$250.00 a month by the U. S. Airforce. In 1948, a senior captain for American Airlines was paid \$1,000.00 per month. During the war, a general, whether he had only one star or five stars, was paid \$1,000.00 per month. So the financial opportunities of the Jewish/Arabian war appeared to be enormous by the standards of the day.

During the time that I stayed in Tulsa I was living in the local YMCA, and was training in their gym, a facility that was worse than pitiful by any standards. I was then in very good shape, both my arms and legs being huge, and all of the other people using that gym were very favorably impressed by my muscular size and strength. One such man, Percy

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Cunningham, was a senior captain for American Airlines, was earning \$1,000.00 per month, had a new Cadillac convertible and more young and attractive airline stewardesses than he knew what to do with, although he was certainly trying. So, when he came to me for advice about his exercises, he had a lot to offer in return for any help that I might be able to give him. The result being that we became close friends for a period of several weeks.

Having been long concerned with poor results in my torso muscles, I had come up with an idea for an exercise machine that I hoped would greatly improve my results in those muscles. I designed and built the first such machine and installed it in the YMCA gym, while Percy paid for the required materials, a total investment of less than \$10.00.

And just how well did it work? Very poorly, if at all. This poor outcome being a result of the fact that I did not then really understand the problem that I was trying to solve. All of the exercises then being used for the development of the torso were limited-range exercises, did not provide resistance throughout a full range of possible movement, so I was trying to design an exercise machine that would provide full-range exercise for the torso muscles. But this first attempt was an outright failure.

During the next twenty years I designed and built later models of that first machine all over the world, built a total of about fifty of them. Built them in Alabama, in Louisiana, in Texas, South America, Africa and a number of other places, built at least one such machine nearly everywhere that I went, but was never satisfied with any of them; until 1968, twenty years after I left Tulsa, then living in Central Africa, where I had already built the latest in a long line of prototype exercise machines, I did not understand the problems that I was trying to solve.

Then, suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, I believed that I did understand the problem, and even believed that I had a solution for the problem. I had finally realized that the torso muscles do not directly move the hands; instead, they move the upper arms; so I decided that the resistance in the machine had to be imposed against the elbows instead of the hands in order to provide full-range exercise for the torso muscles. So far, so good, I then understood the problem; but my first attempt to solve the problem was another in a long list of outright failures.

This breakthrough in my thinking occurred in the middle of the night, at about 2:15 A. M.; nevertheless, I immediately called one of my employees, a man named Graham Hall who had a welding shop in his garage and was also a very experienced gunsmith with a good understanding of mechanical things. Over the phone I described a part that I wanted him to make, a part to be installed on the machine that already existed.

About six hours later he arrived at my home, bringing the new part with him, and we immediately installed it on the machine. Results? It failed miserably, simply did not work. Yet another mistake.

But it failed in such a dramatic fashion that I clearly understood what would be required to make it work properly. But the required solution would involve a complete redesign of the entire machine, something that I never got around to while in Africa. I left Africa and returned to this country a few weeks after this mental breakthrough; but by then I finally understood just how to build a machine that would work properly, and one of the first things that I did after I moved back to this country was to build such a machine, and it worked like a charm, provided full-range exercise for the major torso muscles, something that had never previously been possible. Thus Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries, Inc. was born.

Prior to that point in my life it has never entered my mind that there might be a market for such machines, I had been building machines only for my own use; but such a market did exist, and during the period of the next sixteen years, from 1970 until 1986, when I sold the Nautilus company, tens of thousands of Nautilus exercise machines were built and sold, with resulting income in the hundreds of millions of dollars, outcomes that I had never anticipated, or even hoped for.

But, believe it or not, I have seldom done much of anything merely for the purpose of trying to make money; instead, I usually did things that I wanted to do, with no slightest regard for any potential profit. Nevertheless, in spite of my attitude about money, I produced enormous profits from several of my projects, while failing miserably in several others. I made a lot of money by producing more than 300 films for television, a lot more from importing and selling animals and tropical fish, and quite a bit from operating an international airline. But, as things happened, having made a lot of money from one project, I would usually turn right around and lose all or most of it on a different project.

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And, having been rather violently opposed to taxes throughout my life, I did everything I could think of in attempts to avoid paying taxes, not to evade taxes but to avoid them. So any profits that one project produced were immediately invested in some other project in order to avoid taxes.

For a period of about thirty years I did not pay a dime in taxes, and I was not hiding out in a cave during that period, the IRS was clearly aware of what I was doing, and while they certainly did not like it they could not do anything about it because it was all perfectly legal. Eventually, after I clearly expressed my opinions of the IRS on national television, they decided to make an example out of me; then, having devoted more than four years to a detailed investigation of my lifetime activities, they could find nothing in the way of evidence that I had evaded taxes. Then, in an attempt to justify the time and money invested in investigating me, they charged me with three misdemeanors, and took me to Federal court in Orlando, Florida. A trial that really smeared egg all over their faces, since I won, beat them in court. Near the end of that trial the judge stated . . . “At this point I do not understand just what this trial is all about; maybe I will be able to figure it out later.”

During that trial, Special Agent Jack Martin of the FBI testified on my behalf; testified in support of me in spite of the fact that he had been ordered by the Justice Department in Washington not to testify.

And, immediately after the trial, one of the IRS agents who had devoted four years of his time to investigating me, came up to me and congratulated me for winning, shook my hand and later asked me for a job. This IRS agent, by the way, refused to testify during the trial; told the criminal investigator that he worked under throughout the investigation . . . “Listen, Steve, I might lie on your behalf, and I have, but I am not going to get up on that witness stand and commit perjury; if you end up in prison as a result of your own perjury, which appears likely, then I am not going with you.”

Shortly afterwards, the criminal investigator, Steve Favis, did the smartest thing he ever did in his life: went into the hospital for minor surgery and died on the operating table.

We had clear, undeniable proof that Steve Favis perjured himself during the trial, which is a Federal felony, and he knew that we had this evidence, and he would have been in very hot water indeed if he had not died.

But, years earlier, when profits from the sales of Nautilus machines started to roll in, I decided to spend all of those profits on the development of much more sophisticated machines for medical purposes, thus avoiding taxes entirely while developing things of enormous value; a decision that led us to where we are now with the MedX Corporation. In addition to my own expenses for research and development I donated many millions of dollars to the School of Medicine of the University of Florida, in order to fund additional research to be conducted by the School of Medicine. Then, later, several million dollars were donated to the School of Medicine of the University of California, San Diego. But it should be noted that all such research in these medical schools was totally independent of my activities, I was in no way involved in their research, was usually not even aware of it until after the fact, until it was finished and published in a scientific journal.

We first developed testing machines that were capable of accurately measuring human functional abilities, strength, muscular endurance and ranges of joint movement about ten years ago, and as a result of the use of these machines with more than 1,000,000 subjects, we have learned more about exercise during that period than we did during the preceding forty-eight years.

Eventually, what we are doing now will be the only acceptable method of testing human functional abilities and for the rehabilitation of musculoskeletal injuries.