



What is Active Life?

By Dr. Sean Pastuch

Active Life is personal development that combines education, exercise, and mentorship to empower a life of freedom, without compromise.

If Active Life is to be successful at influencing culture at scale, it will be the result of the work of Active Life Professionals becoming the primary care connectors, trusted guides, educators, and mentors to the marketplace at large.

By best available data, there are close to 100,000 independent businesses where people can go to exercise, and that is not inclusive of local recreation centers, hotel gyms, or gyms in organized communities. On top of that, access to fitness programming is omnipresent. You can find it on streaming networks, you can find it on YouTube, and every magazine has a column dedicated to it.

We have more access to equipment, information, and convenience than ever.

Before Jack Lalane hit the TV scene in 1951, fitness was influenced by the demands of military service and sports performance. People were not concerned with exercising for weight loss, or to more easily navigate the world and age gracefully because generally speaking people were of appropriate weight and they were aging with dignity.

The problems of today did not exist in the 1950s.

In fact, in 1950, the concept of a gym where a person would go to exercise was outside of the Western consciousness completely; it was YMCAs and YWCAs leading the charge, affording the space, and minimal equipment to allow for physical activity.



This leads us to a perplexing and frustrating question: **why, in 2023 is the Western world fatter, more diseased riddled, and more injured than it has ever been?**

73% of Americans are overweight, more than 40% suffer from obesity, 18.5% of children and adolescents aged 2 through 18 suffer from obesity, and 50% of all Americans suffer from daily musculoskeletal pain.

We can use statistics to further the point, or you can use the eye test. Go to an amusement park, ride public transportation, hang out in a supermarket, and observe the health of the people you see. You're going to see dangerous body composition, knee braces, compression socks, ambulatory assistance devices, labored gait, and all of them, plus more, in abundance.

What you're not going to see is the compromises these people, the majority of people, are making with regard to how they live their lives. You're not seeing the missed quality time with family and friends, you're not seeing the vacations they're skipping, you're not seeing the loss of purpose, you're not seeing the sadness.

We have yet to meet a person who wants to *increase* their reliance on medication, eliminate more activities in their life that they enjoy, or keep working the job that sucks the life out of them.

We have searched for the answers to our most vexing lifestyle questions, only to find our options overwhelming, incomplete, unreliable, and lacking empathy.

After exhaustive search, attempted collaborations, and endless trial and error, we decided the solutions we are all looking for simply do not exist. **So we decided to become them.**

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At Active Life, we believe there is a functional difference between education and information.



Education is the cornerstone of personal development. It is acquired through a variety of modalities including and not limited to intentional study and life experience. Today, the marketplace is bombarded with information and is expected to put it to good use. The human body is more complex than a car, and most people today wouldn't know how to change a tire if it went flat on the highway despite the information necessary to do it being both in their glove box and in their pocket.

Education must be paired with timing if it's to be effective. It must be immediately applicable, tested, and efficacious. A mistake that is consistently made in fitness education is that it waits for approval from the scientific community, and so innovation cannot occur.

The very nature of innovation is to create, and creation can only be tested *after* it has occurred. A new idea cannot be tested before it is theorized, and it cannot be fully theorized until it is taught and practiced at scale.

There was a time when Active Life was criticized for suggesting that a person should have a minimum of 80% of the strength and stamina in each extremity by comparison to the other because we lacked the scientific studies to prove merit.

If we become so dogmatic about our approach, we throw out the scientific method altogether; make an observation, ask a question, form a hypothesis, test the hypothesis, analyze the data, report the conclusions.

Our position at Active Life is that we got tired of observing with everyone else who was refusing to ask questions that challenged the status quo, so we stepped away from the fitness community and blazed our own trail, innovating and changing the way athletes trained, and ultimately the marketplace at large.

We have combined third-party researched and validated principles with our own questions and innovative ideas to create an education for all three stakeholders, the gym owner, the coach, and the individual.



Until Active Life, it was believed that the individual did not want education. They simply wanted to show up, get sweaty, work hard, and go home having checked the box for the day. At most, teach them what to do inside the gym, not why to do it, and definitely not outside of the four walls of the gym. We bucked that.

Our belief that **for anyone to take any action consistently the incentive of the action must be worth it**, and the action must be likely to lead to the incentive. This is human nature. If we want people to decide something is worth it, they must understand why, and how. Educating the individual is at the core of what Active Life values, and it's what will lead to mass market adoption.

The education we provide meets the learner where they are, providing a mix of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning opportunities to meet the needs of each person. We have written our own text, filmed our own curriculum, and recorded our own podcasts. We focus on the didactic content that builds the foundation, and the soft skills of communication and empathy that make the foundation worth building upon.

When the client shows up for a training session without having completed essential education prior, the focus of the day must be the delivery and comprehension of the educational content first, then, and only if time permits, exercise. The sweat is easy. A third grader could pull exercises out of a hat, then roll dice for the rep schemes, and the client can get a good workout in.

We have to go beyond good workouts to create sustainable results and resiliency for the client.

We have to deliver *unexpected* value in the form of organized education until the marketplace begins to demand education, and the coach who does not provide it can no longer survive.

When Active Life was founded, the only client in mind was the person dealing with aches and pains who wanted to eliminate them without going to the doctor or missing their activities. Frankly, the work we were doing felt like it needed to be executed by a medical



professional, not a coach. We knew the education that existed for the fitness coach, and it left a lot to be desired. We were in no position to lean into the fitness marketplace for assistance with this kind of client. It was only after demonstrating effectiveness thousands of times with clients from around the world, both in person and remotely, that the fitness coach started inquiring about how they could learn what we were doing for clients. So we dove in. Starting with a 13-hour program that was revolutionary for the industry, and since replacing that 13-hour program with a 13-month-long candidacy that truly creates a new type of professional who can carry the torch of what we did, and help millions of people via the ripple.

The overwhelming success of the coach who went through our education, both in regards to the income they generated and the results they helped clients earn led to the adoption of our mindset from gym owners around the world. These gym owners were used to seeing fit people enroll in their services but longed to help the people they felt responsible for every time they left their four walls.

They understood that they were failing to reach the people who had the most to gain from working with them – ***everyday people who care more about living life on their terms than having six-pack abs.*** These gym owners wanted to employ full-time, professional staff who provided inspiring service and earned financially freeing income. They wanted to help people who felt like they needed to get fitter before they could join any of the other gyms in town. They wanted to make a difference and needed education of their own to do it.

Less than five years after we started teaching our mindset and methods, there were over 50 locations and 300 coaches from around the world who were opening their doors and their arms to help those of us who the fitness community had left behind and who the medical industry had no answers for. They're financially successful because *they consistently deliver on the promises they make to their staff and their clients.* The delivery of those promises is deeply rooted in education, something the marketplace will only receive superficially anywhere else.

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A critical element of what is taught in the education at Active Life is a new paradigm for **exercise**. Today the landscape is dominated by the term “functional fitness”, and what has been up for debate is the appropriate intensity with which functional movements should be performed. This is too small of a question and too myopic of a focus.

In a quest for elegance, the fitness industry has oversimplified the human condition and spawned a marketplace of methodologies that must defend themselves against all criticism, at all costs, so as to preserve the claim that their methods are complete and beyond reproach. This has been the fundamental mistake that has stunted the innovation of fitness to reach an audience who is not inspired to participate with any fitness entity.

The push for elegance and simplicity became a war of ideas.

The ideology that seems to have the most efficacy as a solution for the demise of healthy society has been functional fitness. Strength and conditioning programs that vary intensity, and use implements and movements that emulate life have proven to be more effective to improve overall health and fitness than any other concept to date. And the results are supercharged when a healthy diet is aligned.

The question we have been asking ourselves and anyone who will have the conversation with us is "Are the goals of a functional fitness program aligned with the human experience?"

The answer is “sometimes”.

The scale of human task diversity as it’s applied in functional fitness has been taken for granted, and what has resulted is a result with an unintended side effect of a tradeoff we never wanted.

People are getting fit, in too narrow of a dimension. This is leading to emotional fatigue, mental boredom, and aches and pains that "come with the territory". These conditions lead to physical and mental decay and ultimately become the reason people decide to stop engaging in functional fitness in pursuit of something more practical for their lives.



We believe we can find balance; we just need to drop dogmas.

Functional fitness has over-indexed on power output. The movements used in a functional fitness environment look more like life than the bodybuilding that came before it and function less like life than alternative options that advance the objective of emulating life, further.

If we reverse-engineer the constructs that contribute to our ability to perform a wide array of tasks, we are left with a new paradigm for what we have defined as “practical fitness”, the advancement needed from functional fitness.

Practical fitness consists of three constructs and with each construct, associated principles.

Today we have clarity on the physical elements and acknowledge that this concept is incomplete as we have not yet developed the constructs and principles for other areas of fitness that need to be codified.

Construct 1: There is an order of value.

What this means is that certain movements are more valuable in pursuit of physical fitness generally than others. As we get more specific for each person’s practical needs, the order is likely to change to meet the demands of the specific lifestyle one leads. The principles of how to prioritize movement value for the general human condition are outlined below.

Principle 1: As it pertains to practicality - training with a dynamic spine is more practical than training with a static spine.

Almost every human task outside of a gym requires a dynamic spine, a spine that is moving as we perform the task. When we pick up an object from the ground in the



real world our spine moves, when we walk and run our spine moves, when we load things into a truck our spine moves, when we engage in physical combat, our spine moves, yet in the gym setting where we are supposed to be training for all of these things, we focus on moving with a static spine while we perform tasks. This is backward.

The first peer-reviewed article published on this topic is titled “A Hypothesis for the Role of the Spine in Human Locomotion: a Challenge to Current Thinking”, by Serge Gracovetsky. This article was followed up in 1986 with another, titled “Energy Transfers in the Spinal Engine”, also written by Gracovetsky. Functional fitness improved on bodybuilding in large part by moving away from machines and isolated exercises towards multi-joint lifts with free weights. One way practical fitness improves on functional fitness is by prioritizing a dynamic spine.

Principle 2: As it pertains to practicality - training compound movements is more practical than training isolated movements.

Almost every human task outside of a gym requires a sequencing of muscles and muscle groups, not an isolated action of one. When Greg Glassman introduced the concept of function being linked to the amount of force produced by a movement, he made a cogent argument for the priority of compound movements when compared to their isolation-based counterparts. The neuroendocrine response generated by compound movements leads to significantly more intersystem adaptation than what is found in traditional bodybuilding movements and exercises done on pivot point machines.

Principle 3: As it pertains to practicality - training unilaterally-dependent movements (asymmetrical loading included) is more practical than training bilateral, symmetrically loaded movements.

Almost every human task outside of a gym requires each extremity to function independently of and cooperatively with the other. This means that even at maximum expression in nature we load the left and the right asymmetrically to



perform a task, leaving it to the trunk to create balance and direction. Mike Boyle described in detail the value of unilateral training in his article “The Case for Single-leg Training” in 2007 on T-Nation. His findings were a result of working with athletes using traditional means and evolving them to better meet the demands of sport. The way we train in functional fitness today does not account for this often enough. It is the exception when included, not the rule. To this day, Boyle has his devout followers, and his detractors, there are not many who fall in the middle.

Principle 4: As it pertains to practicality - include forward intent.

Almost every human task outside of a gym includes forward intention, not a purely vertical one. We walk, run, press, punch, and throw, in a forward direction, but in a functional fitness setting, especially with regards to pressing, we do so with an emphasis on vertical directionality. The principle of forward intent is best articulated through the findings and methodology put forth by David Weck (Weck Method) and Alex Kanellis (Landmine University).

Construct 2: Excellence indicates deficiency.

There is so much diversity of tasks in the human experience that at any time we are unquestionably deficient in many. Some of this is from a lack of skill acquisition, some of it is neglect, some of it lives in our blind spot, and much of it is intentional. Excellence in a singular or group set of skills indicates a priority of practice in them and therefore a de-prioritization of something else.

Principle 1: "Strong enough" is real. And the practical strength requirement for each person is uniquely dependent on the life we choose to live.

Shaolin Masters living in the temples of China, for example, do not train with the equipment that the world uses for strength development, and yet they seem to have no problem getting on and off of the ground as they age.



Principle 2: Create a stable starting point of general capacities, then specialize.

Back squats might be imperative for your strength training routine, they also might be frivolous and an unnecessary risk. The appropriateness is completely individualized.

We need to begin by considering our basic needs, accomplish capacity to perform them with reserve, and specialize thereafter.

This might be the most broad of all of the principles. Capacities have to span physical demands inclusive of strength, range and control, mental, and emotional needs. More on this next.

Construct 3: Body and Mind are synergistic parts of a system, not isolated parts of a machine.

The medical and fitness industries have come to serve the patient and client as if we had broken pieces that when fixed improve everything else, but that's not how people work. We believe that it is this construct that can best explain the explosion of pharmaceutical use, surgeries, and injections. Each of these interventions considered the symptoms, and the "broken parts", but seldom do they address the root cause or come without unwanted effects.

Principle 1: Education before exercise.

If we want people to take consistent action, two things must be true. The reward of the action must be worth it, and the action must be likely to lead to the reward. People need to know who, what, where, when, why, AND how, before we will take consistent action towards anything.

Furthermore, if we want people to earn personal freedom, we need to help them understand how they lost it, how to get it back, and how to spot the signs that it's



slipping away again. The alternative would be like telling a child they can eat certain things, and not others, without explaining why, and the consequences of each.

Principle 2: The internal pain point is the starting point.

Even when people understand the benefit of an action, or inaction, in order to do anything with it, the pain of the problem that could be alleviated must be the greatest pain point of the moment.

We do not move towards pleasure as a species; we move away from pain.

People will push through physical pain if it will help alleviate mental pain, and we will push through mental pain if it resolves the physical, this is more rare and more difficult, but it happens, and a great example is spending an uncomfortable amount of money to have a medical procedure done that will improve our quality of life.

Principle 3: The plan needs to adjust to the problem.

We need to be nimble enough to adapt to changes that reveal themselves as necessary through the execution of our process. When we begin anything we are doing so with our best guess and intention. As we progress through our process, it becomes obvious to anyone agnostically paying attention to what is working and what is not, that changes need to be made to the original plan so as to achieve the desired outcome.

After reading the three constructs and associated principles to practical fitness it's reasonable to ask how it can be measured. Our position regarding measurement of practical fitness is different than current standards in the fitness industry where a series of tests would be applied to all participants in the industry, and the best scores indicate the fittest among society.

Because we believe fitness has a practical element that is unique to each person, **we believe that fitness must be measured for each person.**



When making a determination of a person's level of practical fitness we must take into consideration the entire person. Practical fitness is no more physical, mental, or emotional than it is emotional, mental, or physical. It is all of these states and it is how all of these states interplay with one another. To define fitness in terms that would imply otherwise is severely limiting, and it is those limiting beliefs that have led to the dysfunction of the fitness industry at the time of this writing. It has led to a pursuit of physical capacity at the expense of mental, emotional, and spiritual completeness.

Today the proclamation of "fittest", because of the definition assigned to it, is potentially bestowed upon people with chronic aches and pains, infertility, depression, broken relationships, and a myriad of other dysfunction that is disregarded.

We believe that the fittest person on the planet today is a name we do not know. It is a person who has enough depth in their relationships, enough clarity and meaning in their purpose, enough capacity in their physical expression, enough acuity in their thought, and depending on how you believe, perhaps enough faith in their spirit.

We can measure practical, physical fitness, by defining the task and evaluating the capacity for one to complete it.

The fittest person on the planet is the fittest person on the planet because *they do not need any more.*

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Even with the necessary education to inspire action to start the perfect exercise program, without **mentorship** to navigate the personal transformation of becoming a new version of one's self, burnout and failure are highly likely.

Motivation is fleeting, and discipline is the result of a strong enough purpose marrying a trustworthy process. Trust for the process is challenging when you're the person going through it and you're stuck in "the valley of despair". Without mentorship, setbacks are



potentially catastrophic and final. With mentorship, setbacks are necessary for the learning experience and the development of resilience that leads to true, personal freedom.

The primary role of the mentor is to believe in the mentee so intensely that they are forced to believe in themselves.

To do this mentorship has to be personal, specific, and custom. The mentor needs to listen first to understand, then the mentor needs to question to gain deeper and wider context, then the mentor needs to listen again, then the mentor needs to empower.

When executed at a world-class level, the mentor plays the role of “Alfred”. Today, the coach seemingly prefers to be Batman. It was Alfred’s role to help Batman be the hero, the mentor is never the hero. *It is never about us, and it is simultaneously always our responsibility to make sure it gets done.* The power we provide by standing beside the client, entrusting the client to do what is best for them when empowered with the thought, and freed of the fear is immeasurably impactful.

Mentors are people who have failed and evaluated their failures so as to help others experience the same struggles. The mentor can empathize; the mentor was once the client.

Mentorship within Active Life means we are in the doctor’s office with the client when need be, it means we know how many kids they have, how those kids influence their lifestyle, and how their lifestyle influences their priorities. The Active Life Professional *meets the client where they are* and makes the client’s priorities their own instead of imposing their priorities onto the client.

Mentorship within Active Life is connection. It means having a robust, valuable network of professionals from many disciplines to connect the client with when need be. The mentor, since not the hero of the story, is agnostic as to who gets the credit for helping the client. They are world-class at making sure the client gets the help, wherever it comes from. This earns trust, and *trust is the foundation of the relationship between Active Life and the client.*



The day will come when sociologists, psychologists, and scientists study what is done at Active Life. They will scratch their heads to try and understand the motivations to start it all. They will wonder why for years people believed Active Life to serve a niche clientele when in reality it's the overwhelming majority of people who need and enjoy it. They will debate why Active Life made decisions in its founding and early development to forego immediately profitable strategies in lieu of excellence at any cost. And they will build careers giving public talks about how Active Life built a corporate and client culture that aligned incentives for the company, the employees, the clients, and the clients of the clients.

What will **never** be debated again is the efficacy of Active Life.

Our methods and mindset have been tested, and they are ***undeniable***.

<https://activelifeprofessional.com/general/active-life-is/>