

Strength Hacking Course Day 12

Stuff you would never think works (but works like crazy)

“Absorb what is useful. Discard what is not. Add what is uniquely your own.”

- Bruce Lee

Of all the important things to keep in mind in your workouts, probably the most important of them all is to trust yourself, your experiences, and your judgement. There is a lot you can learn from others on the path forward, obviously, but there are some things that experts, coaches, and other specialists just can't tell you about yourself, and you have to figure out on your own.

This lesson was driven home for me by one-of-a-kind coach Mark Reifkind, a former competitive gymnast, bodybuilder, triathlete, powerlifter (and powerlifting coach), personal trainer, and master kettlebell instructor. In a StrongFirst workshop I assisted him at a few years back, he made this exact point to the instructor candidates, saying “if the science says that back squats are the best for building muscle but your personal experience shows you that front squats help you put on more muscle, then go with what worked for you, not what a scientist says” (I'm paraphrasing, but this was the gist of it).

Looked at another way, consider this: Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't become the greatest bodybuilder of all time by pulling a workout out of a bodybuilding magazine. Paul Anderson didn't become one of the strongest men in history by doing a cookie cutter program that all of his friends were doing. Men like these learned from those who had gone before them, and then experimented to find what worked best for them.

In short, you have to know how to follow for a while, but eventually it is up to YOU to take the reins and drive yourself boldly forward.

Now, before you get too big for your britches, keep in mind that the best way to do this is through patience, consistency, and a solid training program.

Once you have the benefit of enough momentum on your side (in the form of time spent working out and NOT missing workouts), you can start experimenting to see what tactics help drive your strength and stamina up higher. It can be as simple as adding an extra workout per week, or it could be as specific as using one of the following tried-and-true strategies to boost your strength, plow down plateaus, and kick start long-stalled progress.

There is really no end to the number of strategies and tactics used by some of the greatest iron legends of all time, but there are definitely a few that stand out for their effectiveness and efficiency at building strength and power in short order. Let's take a look at a few.

#1: Practicing assistance exercises with your main exercises

The aforementioned Paul Anderson was a big fan of this one. “The Wonder of Nature” (as he was called) would often throw in a set of good mornings (a barbell exercise where you lean far forward while supporting a barbell on your upper back) between his sets of barbell squats. Not between every set necessarily, but every few sets. So a workout might look like this:

Set 1: Squat

Set 2: Squat

Set 3: Good Morning

Set 4: Squat

Etc.



Paul Anderson clearly knew a thing or two about what he was doing

The reason for this?

Assistance exercises are meant to help enhance your performance in a main exercise – they hit the nooks and crannies that often go understimulated by your main exercises. In the case of the good morning, it helps really strengthen the hamstrings, glutes, and low back, and adds immediately useful strength toward your squat. Because these muscles are being trained together, they learn how to work together.

In neurology they have a saying: “What fires together, wires together”. And when you teach surrounding muscles to get in on the action, thus recruiting more muscle toward your favorite exercises, you set up the perfect condition to get stronger.

Best of all, it works with just about anything. Case in point: not long ago, I was looking to improve my performance in my wide-grip pullups. I could typically get a few reps in while getting my chest all the way to the bar, but as the set wore on, I wouldn’t be able to pull as high. I started throwing in sets of Face Pulls between sets of pullups and nearly doubled the number of wide grip pullups I could do with my chest touching the bar at the top (from 4 reps to 7 reps)

#2: Doing Original Strength resets before or between sets

This is the one I have done the most throughout the past few years, and with the greatest increase in strength.

The premise is simple: Before your workout begins, you do an Original Strength reset that you find improves your strength in a given exercise, and you do it for a prolonged period of time. For example, super slow commando rocking increased my military pressing strength noticeably within one session.

Likewise, you can do shorter sets of Original Strength moves in between sets of your regular strength movements. For squats, I used to rock on my hands and knees or hands and feet for 5 or so reps between sets of heavy front squats. Typically at the end of my workouts (when I was most tired) my technique had actually improved despite the fatigue and I left feeling stronger and more capable than when I started.

Probably my favorite example is that of SFG Team Leader Lauren Pak, who took her Turkish Get Up from 24 kg (53 lbs) to 36 kg (79 lbs) in 3 weeks – just by practicing lots and lots of segmental rolls.

#3: Explosive movements before slow movements

Kinesiologist Paul Chek believes strongly in practicing different types of movements in a certain order so as to get the most out of them. For example, speed work should come before strength work, since you're bound to go fastest when you're fresh. Take boxers, for example: at the beginning of the first round, they are extremely quick. By the 10th round most often their punches have devolved into shoves. We are naturally more explosive when we are fresh, and less explosive when we are fatigued. So from a logical standpoint, it just makes sense to train for speed/explosiveness before strength if that matters to you.

What might NOT be so obvious is that explosive training before strength training gives your strength moves a massive boost. Doing even just a few fast reps of an explosive movement before a slow movement makes a huge difference on your performance.

For example, John Grimek was known to do a few sets of fast barbell cleans before pulling a huge deadlift off the floor. He pointed out that it helped him get the deadlift up when it most wanted to stay down.



John Grimek could squat 600+ lbs even in his mid-sixties. His methods might be worth investigating.

Same goes with upper body work. Try doing a few sets of clapping pushups before your presses and watch how much more energy you have to send even your heaviest of kettlebells sky high.

Now, all of this takes finesse and testing to determine which is best for you – remember, even though the experience of others can be illuminating, it is no match for your own experience. I can't tell you what will work best for you, but I CAN tell you how you can do a few easy tests to find out which of the above strategies works best for a variety of your favorite movements. That is what we will focus on finding out in today's map.