

Strength Hacking Course Day 13

How to make last-minute changes + how long to stick to a single program

“The best made plans of mice and men often go awry”

- *Robert Burns*

There's a big stigma amongst the strength training crowd about starting a program and not finishing it. It's almost like a scarlet letter; a mark of shame indicating that you lack discipline, focus, and time management skills, and that you're not REALLY dedicated enough.

The truth is that regardless of your level of dedication, you will eventually encounter road blocks that no amount of time management, discipline, or focus can help you surpass (without shirking your more important duties, that is, such as being an attentive parent, a supportive spouse, or an industrious worker). Unless you're an absolute fanatic about your workouts and have scheduled your life around them, you can pretty much expect some hiccups along the way toward your goals.

For whatever reason, most recreational lifters tend to hold two conflicting ideas in their heads:

- 1) “Something is better than nothing”
- 2) “Go big or go home” (i.e. less than 100% is not worth doing)

The first one is far more productive, and the second one looks better on a shirt.

Strength coach Dan John (who gets quoted a lot in this course) has pointed out that as an adult, you'll be lucky to have ONE period throughout the year where you can go full-on, no-holding-back in your workouts. Such a period is likely to be when the kids are away at camp, your job is on cruise control, and you have no major responsibilities. When times like this occur, then by all means, pile on all the work you can handle!

For all the other times, you have to be able to act fast when the unexpected happens.

There are two basic categories we can look at as far as unexpected events are concerned:

- 1) **Scheduling conflicts**
 - a. **Your job requires more of your attention and longer hours**
 - b. **An appointment or sudden change of plans comes up**
 - c. **Your duties as a parent or spouse suck up your extra free time**
- 2) **Training related issues**
 - a. **Your recovery can't keep up with your workouts**

b. **You have to work around a tweak or an injury**

c. **Your workouts are just too long**

All of the above circumstances may differ from one another, but they all have one thing in common: they are a real downer when they happen and tend to put a damper on your training enthusiasm.

This is natural, so you're not alone in feeling bummed out about annoyances like this, but you have to keep a few things in mind:

- 1) **Just about everything in your life requires you to adjust your pace.** Could you imagine if you told yourself "I'm not going to bother driving my car if I can't gun it to 100 miles per hour the entire way to my destination"? I don't think so. Instinctively we know that traffic may be heavier at some times, we may hit every red light along the way, we may have to slow down for people to cross the street, etc. but we keep moving toward our destination. The same goes with your training.
- 2) **Consider your overarching goal and the reasons behind it.** Are you mainly focused on getting stronger? Improving your stamina? Becoming more resilient? Why? Is it so you can be a more involved parent with your kids? Is it so you can reclaim your youthful vigor and make your life more vibrant? Are any of these things important enough where you can find a Plan B for them when your first plan goes out the window?

Not losing sight of these two things can make sudden, unexpected changes much easier to handle. Combine them with mission #1 on this lesson's map and you'll be in business.

Next thing to focus on is the question, how long should you stick to one program?

The answer (as with anything) is "it depends". My general recommendation would be at least 8 weeks, and possibly 12 if you can swing it.

Can you go any longer than 12 weeks?

The short answer is "yes" with a "but".

Yes you can, but you start to run into a few problems, namely:

- Burnout
- Strength imbalances from such a narrow focus on a few exercises
- Greatly reduced progress

One great way to work around this while maintaining your balanced development and overall health is by doing short interludes of 2-4 weeks of something way outside of what you've been doing for the last 2-3 months. For example, if you've been focusing hard on your pure strength (i.e. 1 rep max strength), spending a few weeks working on conditioning or hypertrophy work, then going back to your regular

strength workouts will give you just the boost you need to continue moving forward toward your strength goals while mitigating the very real likelihood of burnout, tweaking something, or just losing interest in training.

This last bit is no joke, as the primary indicator of long-term success in achieving your goals is simply sticking with it in some way or another. Many people mistakenly believe that means travelling at the same speed and on the same road the entire time. The reality is that sometimes you'll need to slow down, take side roads, and go over some bumps. But as long as you are planning for those things (and have your expectations set realistically) you can excel in even the most adverse of circumstances.

So how do you plan for such a thing? Check out mission #2 in today's lesson and get a move on.