

# The *High Intensity* Mind Set

By Rick Sullivan

When we talk about strength training we typically refer to the physical nature of the activity. Strength training places great demands on our physical body yet it is the mind that ultimately determines whether we experience success from our efforts. It is the intense concentration of focus that allows us to take our body where it has never been before.

The importance of concentration can not be overlooked when it comes to safe, effective, strength training. Whether your goal is simply to stay in shape, or you have aspirations of bodybuilding grandeur, you must master the art of concentration. The level of intense effort you are willing to put forth during an exercise is in direct proportion to the results you will achieve. However, your mental focus will determine the level of intensity you can ultimately achieve. Effort is not merely working hard; it is the relentless, undaunted determination to get the absolute most out of your muscles.

There are many factors involved in safe, effective exercise. Banging out 10 repetitions without regard for the details will not cut it. Such a practice is dangerous and ineffective, although I'll admit easier. You must concentrate! There are numerous technicalities and distractions vying for your attention. Your ability to center on the task at hand will play an integral part in the safety and efficacy of your workout.

## ***Maintain Meticulous Exercise Form***

The key ingredient to your success will be your ability to execute every repetition of every exercise correctly. You will never achieve the optimal levels of intensity if your exercise form is not in harmony with proper muscle/joint function. While preserving "good" form may not seem like an arduous task, it can become particularly challenging when coupled with the unyielding intensity necessary to maximize your results. It may take some learning, but once you have an adequate grasp on how to move a weight (and the various forces that affect movement) you are ready to begin the formidable task of pushing your muscles to their limit.

Exercise form is essential during every repetition. Nevertheless, as the momentary pain and discomfort of demanding high intensity strength training increases, our commitment to proper exercise performance deteriorates. Without concentrated focus, a clear concise goal, and a relentless determination, the burning muscles are likely to overwhelm us. A sense of panic will set in. We will begin to focus more on the sheer movement of weight rather than muscle stimulation and our recipe of productive exercise will be ruined.

Never allow yourself to become preoccupied with the sheer movement of weight. Working a muscle and moving a weight are by no means synonymous. The movement of some weight does not assure muscle stimulation. In fact, lifting weights haphazardly can guarantee that you do not achieve the muscle development that is possible (not to mention that you will eventually injure yourself). You must remain in complete control. There should be no extraneous movements; flailing your feet wildly or whipping your head back and forth will only result in an injury. Excessive facial expressions or holding your breath can prove to have severe ramifications (including the possibility of stroke or death). And, naturally, all exercises must be done in a slow, deliberate fashion. There should not be any abrupt movements at any point in the exercise. This may seem like an inordinate amount to concentrate on during an exercise, and indeed it is, but the alternative carries with it some dismal consequences.

## ***Anticipate and Resist the Temptation of Distraction!***

There are an infinite number of possible distractions that can create an ineffective and dangerous exercise environment if you allow them to. Perhaps Bob wants to share the tawdry details of his Saturday night date. Maybe Mary wants to tell you what a pig Bob is. And, of course, there is inevitably going to be some Neanderthal next to you slamming the weights around in concert with some sort of primordial

screaming. Regardless of the type distraction I assure you one will find you if you allow it to. You need to direct all your energy and concentration into each and every exercise. Nothing but the exercise you are performing and the desired outcome (muscle stimulation, right?) should be allowed to enter your conscious awareness. Strive to obtain a concentration that sets the stage for a level of intensity that almost becomes frightening to onlookers. Such intense focus will put you into almost a trance like state leaving you completely absorbed in the uncompromising task of achieving your goals (and you will).

***Do Not Allow the Muscle to “Turn Off”***

Have no mercy in your quest for physical excellence. Having the discipline and concentration to endure the burning exhaustion of deep muscle penetration will pay tremendous dividends. Your muscles are ever adapting physical entities. The effort that brought you to today is not enough to bring you to tomorrow. Your body may be willing and ready to take the challenge but your mind must let you go there.

Once you “turn the muscles on” and begin your set you can not let them “shut off” until they are thoroughly exhausted. Your muscles should be going, non-stop until no further repetitions can be performed. What often happens during a set of high intensity exercise is that we inadvertently look for ways to rest as the demand increases. We may pause at the lockout position. One might unnecessarily unload the muscle at the bottom-out position (when the selected weight comes in contact with the rest of the weight stack). Perhaps we begin to stop and start or segment our way through the final repetitions. All these little idiosyncrasies constitute some degree of rest. Our goal should be to minimize and eventually eliminate turning off the muscle (even for a moment) until that muscle has truly reached failure.

Continuous physical improvement will come from your ceaseless efforts to journey deeper into yourself and reach for that little extra that will make all the difference. This level of intensity requires tremendous discipline and determination to accept nothing less than the very best you have. Such concentrated focus is not some innate quality that you are born with. It requires continuous practice. You have to have the discipline and the desire to channel all your energy to the task at hand during every single

exercise. Motivational guru, Jim Rohn, once said, “wherever you are be there”. Be there with every ounce of yourself and such efforts will give rise to many fulfilling accomplishments.

**EVOLVE EXERCISE**

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