

## Fine Tuning Your Fitness Goals for Safe, Efficient Progress

If you decided to improve your fitness level over the last month I hope you were able to start your work. In this month's column we will address working smarter towards your improved fitness levels of the future.

It is often said in business that, time is money. If this is true, then efficient use of time means more money, more profit. Fitness programs demand efficiency in the much the same way. Like a successful business, fitness programs also demand efficiency. The efficient fitness program maximizes progress and minimizes time expended and injuries incurred. To achieve efficiency your program must address issues such as flexibility, stability, mobility, balance, strength, power & recovery. If your program is lacking in any of these areas you will pay a price in either lack of progress or injury. Listed above was a long chain of issues to address, and it is important to remember that other goals such as posture, endurance, speed, agility, stamina, and even weight control will be "pulled" by this chain. Like any chain it is only as strong as the weakest link, and the weak link in your chain, irregardless of which link it is, will limit what you are capable of doing or worse yet be the cause of failure or injury.

In order to maximize your fitness "profit" an assessment of this chain must take place. With a realistic assessment your short-term goals may have to adjust to insure that long-term goals are met in the shortest time possible. This does NOT necessarily suggest that you should stop or do a total overhaul of what you are doing, only that weak links do not fix themselves and often require outside assistance to identify and address.

You should address the weakest link first. The more severe the weakness the more attention it will require. An example in a workout situation if you were an athlete would be the inability to keep the heels flat on the floor while body-weight squatting past the point where the thighs are parallel to the floor. This would be an indication of a lack of mobility in the muscles & joints involved in the squat movement and would constitute the first item/s to address in a training session. The rationale here is that a lack of mobility is a sign of something neglected perhaps because you don't like doing it. Working this area of weakness first will ensure that you get it done. Then the rest of the workout can be your reward for working on the weak link. Working mobility first, especially the squat, will also have positive carry-over effect on your ability to perform other exercises in correct technique during the rest of your training session.

My next column will address how the characteristics of your life style should affect your workout structure & exercise choices.

Steve Howard owns & operates The Steve Howard Fitness Studio at the Weight Room in Rapid City. He is a Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) by the National Strength & Conditioning Association since 1998. He is also a USA Weightlifting Certified Sports Performance Coach through certification programs taken at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO.