

229 – How to Grow a HIT Business in a Big Box Gym

Lawrence: Lawrence Neal here, and welcome back to highintensitybusiness.com.

Lawrence: This is Episode 229. Today's guests are HIT enthusiast Simon Costello... Simon, I didn't know how else to introduce you, so I figured "HIT enthusiast" was a suitable label... and high intensity personal trainer, Nigel Lyons a.k.a., The Irish Contingent. We are the only people in Ireland, plus one of my friends here in Galway, who I know of, that are actually into high-intensity training. So if there's any other people out there, reach out to us, because we're trying to grow the popularity in Ireland.

Lawrence: Guys, welcome to the show. It's great to have you.

Nigel: Thanks, Lawrence.

Simon: Thanks, Lawrence.

Lawrence: You're welcome.

Lawrence: So recently, we had a really awesome day in Dublin. I took the train up there to see both of you. It's always really cool to meet people who've listened to the show and obviously meet people who have a common interest in high intensity training. And we had an awesome day, we had some great conversation, we had a great workout, a really nice dinner, talking about all things HIT and HIT business. And one of the things I wanted to get into first in this podcast, is just understand the genesis from both of you? Because, I'm always fascinated to learn about how people get into high intensity training because it's still such a niche community.

Lawrence: So Simon, tell me, how did you first get into high intensity training?

Simon: It was probably about six years ago. I would have always been into weight training from teenager years, maybe 15,16, doing the dumbbells at home,

sort of thing. And then into barbell type stuff, into the gym doing various sorts of workouts whether three by ten, five by five, whatever it might have been over the years.

Simon: And then it was probably through Doug McGuff, a YouTube of him, and I got the Body By Science book. From memory, that's how I got into, specifically, HIT. It just made so much sense to me, reading the material and the science and then the type of workout just really mentally, suited me. The efficiency of it. Doing the one set and really just being able to push yourself to failure. Just suited my mindset, so I fell in love with that type of training. And probably as well, hopefully the injury-free style of it because at that stage I'd a couple of thin bruises [inaudible 00:02:59] on my shoulder and my hip, so I was looking for something a bit more safe and away from explosive weight movements.

Simon: That was probably it, so yeah, about six years ago and I've been pretty much doing it ever since, once or twice a week.

Lawrence: Do you remember what caused you to come across Doug's stuff on... because I think we might have spoken about this in Starbucks. I can't remember if you told me it was his 21 Convention presentation, but I'd just be curious, do you remember what you were... where you were at in terms of your head-space at the time? How you came across Doug's stuff?

Simon: I think, I'm trying to remember, there was a blog post actually, with a guy ... I can't remember the name of the blog now, but he was into it. It was some American or Canadian guy maybe, I'll try and think of the name, but I know he's finished his blog posts a few years ago now. But he was into it and he referenced Doug McGuff and it was from there I got, I think it

was, nearly a direct reference to Body By Science. So probably more that route. I can't remember what, if it was The 21 Convention or where exactly I saw him on YouTube. But I remember getting the book then, soon after that, and really enjoying it.

Lawrence: Yeah, that's very interesting. It seems like that is the most common way that a lot of the, let's say the younger generation... not younger generation sorry, but those that have got into high intensity training in the last ten years, that seems like the common route is via Doug's work online or Body By Science. So it's cool to see that that's obviously really getting a lot of people, on the bandwagon, so to speak.

Lawrence: Awesome. Nigel, what about you? What was the genesis for you getting into HITT?

Nigel: Yeah, for me, I think it was similar to Simon actually. It was back in... I was looking back in my emails because I remember actually inquiring about High Intensity Training Certification back in... and that was back in 2012. So that's... what's that...? seven years ago now, or something like that. I was probably into it before then as well. So, I was always interested in exercising, and I was always looking online and researching different areas, and I had initially qualified, I think, as a Personal Trainer at around 2011, or around that time as well. That was obviously more of a mainstream qualification.

Lawrence: What was that? What qualification was that?

Nigel: I did that qualification, initially I did that part-time over 18 weeks, so that was probably just after I had left. I used to work in financial services, so I left. When I finished in that, I decided to become a Personal Trainer and it

was a national certification with that place in Dublin called the National Training Center. So I just did that part-time over 18 weeks. So yeah, but with in regards to high-intensity training, I think I probably come across... I remember listening to Drew, seeing stuff on Drew Bray's blog and Doug McGuff as well. I think I had probably come across his video on The 21 Convention as well, and then obviously purchased his, Body By Science book, then as well and read that. I think it was then that I really started actually practicing it. Practicing on myself and then, as Simon said, I've been pretty much training that way ever since now as well.

Lawrence: Well what made you, because obviously you'd qualified as a kind of traditional personal trainer from what it sounds, so what made you move towards high intensity training? Do you remember? Was it just you were Googling one day, and you came across Drew's stuff or... and then obviously started going down that rabbit hole and then it was very convincing or...? Can you talk a little bit more about what made you switch and what was happening around then for you?

Nigel: Yeah, so thinking back, I think when I did my certification I think I was still kind of aware of high intensity training but not that much, so that the certification was obviously the mainstream stuff like more of the higher volume training. I think when I came across high intensity training it just made sense me as a personal trainer and from a business perspective.

Nigel: If I could get people the same results in 60 to 90 minutes a week as most people could do in two or three hour-long sessions, that just made sense to me. And then the science seemed to back it up then as well. When I did an actual certification in high intensity training it just made sense when I was looking through all the stuff and all the literature and that. Even just

practicing the workouts myself, when you do your first one or two high intensity training workouts properly you actually feel the difference, and you notice the difference, than when you're just doing a normal workout.

Nigel: So that's probably what convinced me to get started and then obviously it made sense from a business perspective to try and stand out, I guess, from other personal trainers. To build my business around high intensity training. I had gotten a little bit of help with that from the guy who I got certified through as well, Chris [Lutes inaudible 00:08:35], and yeah, that was pretty much how it started.

Lawrence: And what was his certification called?

Nigel: His one was... there were three different levels. It was a junior one, but it was inspired to high intensity training certification.

Lawrence: Is that still available now, as well, do you know?

Nigel: As far as I know he sold the certification on to someone else.

Lawrence: Ah yes, I think it's Mike Lipowski, is that correct? Who now lives here?

Nigel: I'm not 100%. I know they have certification as well, yeah.

Lawrence: Okay.

Nigel: But yeah, that was who I initially got an actual certification in high intensity training. Because there wasn't that... when I was looking around to see if there was any certifications, there was very little available to actually get certified in high intensity training, so I didn't just want to go and start training clients without having the full knowledge behind me, you know?

Lawrence: Yeah, of course, makes sense.

Lawrence: So I wanted to talk about our workout, which was really fun. Well, fun may be the wrong word. No, it was fun. It was uncomfortable, but it was still fun. And for those listening to this, when this is published, there will be a video of the workout, which will be produced by myself, and I'm a proper novice when it comes to any video production, but I'll try and make it as interesting as possible, with some nice fade-ins and all of that.

Lawrence: But that was a really interesting experience. It's always really cool to get together with people who are into high intensity training and obviously is a real treat to be trained by you, Nigel, someone who's got, obviously, a lot of experience doing this.

Lawrence: So I wanted to walk through some of that workout. Talk about it a little bit, and see what comes up. One of the things, both surprised me and Simon, at the start, was you had a little warm up for us. So do you want to describe why do you add a warm up... why did you decide to add a warm-up to your overall programming?

Nigel: Yes, the warm-up is just something I started doing over the last while. I know the high intensity, rigid advocates might probably, generally might say that you don't need a warm up. That the first one or two sets is a warm up really, but I just find sometimes, if I'm training myself, or sometimes for clients, I think psychologically, it can be good to have a small warm up just to start training the muscles that you're going to be training that day. And then if you're doing legs, and you're doing a very heavy leg press, I think psychologically it can be useful just to do even a lighter set first. Just to prepare yourself almost mentally, for a heavier set.

Nigel: So yeah, that's generally, I just do one leg exercise, one pushing exercise, and one pulling exercise. Obviously, you're not taking the warm up anywhere near full failure, but it's just a quick kind of warm up. Generally, I'm chatting to the clients, and asking how they're feeling and stuff like that when they're doing the warm up.

Lawrence: Yes, that's quite funny because when Simon and I were doing the push-ups, I was like, "Yeah, I can probably do like two more", so I was almost at failure. Which I wasn't expecting.

Simon: I was getting worried during those push-ups.

Lawrence: So what Simon..., if somebodies been... obviously you've been training yourself for quite a while now. How did you find?... Would you typically do a warm up like we did, or what would you normally do and how did you find that?

Simon: No, I probably haven't done a warm up for a while now. I used to do probably very similar. A bit of push-ups and maybe some lunges and a bit of dynamic leg swings or arm swings just to get the blood flowing. I probably still do maybe a little bit of a lunges and leg things before doing a leg press, just to... more as Nigel says, really more to be mentally prepared as well. But typically I just start straight into it and take the first exercise near the abs to warm up.

Simon: But I felt it was quite good doing the warm-up with Nigel. You did feel a bit a little bit more prepared to then get into the real workout itself. So yeah, I enjoyed it.

Lawrence: Yeah, I can certainly see the value in it especially if, one, you're working with someone who's a real novice and secondly, if you're doing a certain

workout for the first time, which we effectively were, in terms of priming the body. Maybe like you say, if you're doing a certain leg press or a certain machine for the first time and you just want to understand how it works and the movement pattern and things like that. It does seem to make sense to me that you would perhaps put someone on a lighter load just to feel it out, before you do that set to failure.

Lawrence: So yeah, I think it definitely has a place in programming and it's completely up to the trainer whether they think it adds value or not. Maybe it's more nuanced than that, maybe if you had access to really good machines, and really good kit, maybe there'd be less requirement.

Lawrence: I know it was quite funny when we all got together I asked you guys if you'd ever used the Nautilus or MedX and neither of you had ever used that stuff and I was like, "You haven't lived!" Because those machines are just awesome and it did make me think that on something like a MedX where the strength curve is so good, and the friction's so low, that maybe it enables a trainer to skip the warm up because it's a much safer and smoother machine, easier to use, perhaps. So, that's quite interesting to know, but, it just shows as well, obviously, you don't need this advanced stuff to be able to deliver a really effective workout. We were using all sorts of machines that are available everywhere. We were using resistance bands, body weight, so again any mode whether it's free weights, body weights, machines, will yield the same results essentially.

Lawrence: So let's talk about the workout for a second. I pinged it over to you guys just to give you a quick... try to jog your memory about what we did as it was some time ago now. And so, Nigel, from a programming perspective, what made you decide to design it that way for us?

Nigel: Yeah, so generally if it's a new client or someone who hasn't trained that much before, then I'd give them... generally go with full body workouts to start off, just because I feel like if they're hitting the full body two to three times per week, they're going to start to feel the muscles working and that's going to get them the desired results. Obviously for you guys, you're used to high intensity training but I still think doing a full body workout, high intensity training style, if I wanted to work you guys hard, that's probably the best way to do it. Full body workout. Doing it HIT style is always going to be very challenging but... it's just good. I train that way a lot of the time myself. I do full body workouts and you are pretty much covering the whole body, two to three times per week and for most people, that's all that's necessary to get great results.

Lawrence: And I just wanted to... obviously there will be a video, as I say, the blog posts for reference if people want to see the workout highlights. But one of the exercises, and I am not sure if I got this right, was the first one, following the warm-up, with the resistance band. Was that a pull-over? How would you?... Have I described that right? Is that called something else?

Nigel: Yeah, a pull-over with the resistance band was a variation of the pull-over with the dumbbells that you do lying flat on the bench, which I've used that one as well. Yeah, I just find that one with the band, I've kind of been doing that on the last one myself and with some clients over the last few months. I've seen it somewhere, I think, before. Don't know. Was it one of Marcello's videos or something like that? I've just seen it and then practiced it myself and I found it quite good. The resistance on it and obviously with the resistance band, you can change the resistance depending on where you place your hands on the band. You can go

higher for more resistance, you change the band [inaudible 00:17:30] resistance as well. Yeah, I just found it quite a good exercise. I think you guys found it quite good as well and challenging, that one.

Lawrence: Oh, yeah. Definitely. Is that Marcello Mastracco[inaudible 00:17:44], you were referring to?

Nigel: Yeah, that's right. Just trying to make sure my guy knows that. We need to link that up in the show notes. And so, Simon, this was your first, if I'm not mistaken, this was your first supervised high intensity workout, right?

Simon: Yeah.

Lawrence: Yeah. So, we both kind of know it, during and at the end. We probably had a more productive workout because, one, we were sort of competing, although you thrashed me at anything that was pushing or [inaudible 00:18:19] and secondly, we had Nigel shouting over us. Telling us to train harder and throwing in some advanced techniques. I found it to be far more productive than training myself. What did you think?

Simon: I definitely thought the bit of competition was pushing us both a bit more than you normally would. I was thinking as well, in a way, I don't know, I'm probably quite good when I'm by myself, at pushing myself, with the exercise, and which I know not everyone is. But I seem to really be able to push myself when I'm on my own. But definitely, the competition, upped it. But also the few advanced techniques, I found really good for Nigel's. Just even a slight assistance, you know, just pushing for your last rep or two, helping you then to get the negatives into the equation. I think, was it on the chest press? When we did maybe three negatives and I was just

dead after that. I could barely lift my arms. But that was great. I haven't been able to, you know, you can't do that by yourself.

Lawrence: That's true. And also one of the things that was cool was, we were talking about, when Nigel would do like an assisted rep. In some cases he wouldn't use much force at all, right? And because you're seeing his hand help, it gives you that psychological, kind of edge that you'd think, "Oh, I'm getting help here, so I should be able to complete the rep," and then you do, despite the fact that he's not actually helping that much at all.

Simon: Yeah, you probably think he's helping more than he is.

Lawrence: [inaudible 00:20:10]

Simon: I thought the band pull-over, we were talking about there, I thought that was a great one because I'd never thought of doing it like that before and I have bands at my house here that I use for certain things but it's just a great exercise to be able to do even if someone doesn't have access to a gym and they have some bands. It's just a great way of getting that pull-over movement. I never thought of doing it that way, where you're standing and doing it instead of the usual lying down version.

Lawrence: Yeah, totally. What else was poignant for you? Whatever kind of learning opportunities do you think had in that environment?

Simon: Let's see. I think definitely the bands, I mean even the reverse belt band we did, was interesting because I do that fairly regularly, maybe once a week, but very much as a bit of a... just a separate HIT workout, a bit of a rehab or prehab, whatever you want to call it, because I do have a slightly dotty shoulder, but it's okay, but I like doing a bit of band work on it but I haven't done it the way Nigel was doing it with us where you're actually

doing it to failure. And I think that even for the arms the next day, that made a difference, right in between my shoulder blades, so certainly working well for the muscles there. So I thought that was good and I definitely thought that doing the negatives, I think we did negatives on the digets[inaudible 00:21:50] as well, which was good, and that needed a little bit of assistance. Yeah, like you were saying, you think he's probably assisting you more so you like, "Aah, I can get this." But if you look back at some of the videos, he's actually barely touching it. So it does show, you probably have one more rep that you don't realize, that you don't realize,[inaudible 00:22:15] in the tank. Yeah, it was good.

Lawrence: You know, we used quite a lot of advanced techniques and I think it was partly, sort of, Nigel showcasing the skill set, with the negatives, assisted rounds, we had a few rep pauses, drop sets. It's interesting, there was some research that came out, I think Luke did with James Stills[inaudible 00:22:35]

Simon: He is still trying to show us.

Lawrence: Yes, it's a point to note that in this because that's part of the context, it's more of an event than an actual workout. But the research that Luke and both of the James's did, I think showed that there's no advantage in terms of strength or muscle hypertrophy above doing just a single set to positive failure versus doing advance techniques. I could be wrong now, in the outcomes, I can't remember exactly what they measured but what Luke did say too once, he said, "You know I don't care, even though there's no [inaudible 00:23:13] benefit, I like the fact that it provides some sort of novelty and I think as a trainer, when you're trying to keep the workouts interesting to your clients, these advanced techniques can really be

helpful in taking what is a very safe, in principal, in terms of a HIT workout, and making it a little more interesting at times. Nigel, just wondering if that's the case for you. Have you found that using advanced techniques has been really helpful in your business in terms of making it more interesting for your clients or are you using those quite sparingly?

Nigel: Yeah, I would definitely use them sparingly because obviously if you doing negatives and stuff like that, it's quite intense on the body and if someone is training two or three times a week, that's going to be quite intense for them to try and recover from that. But, yeah, definitely, people do need some variety. You get away with doing the same program sometimes for at least six weeks and some people will get good results and be happy enough to do it but after a certain amount of time you need to change it up. Even just for the client themselves, so they don't plateau. Also, for that bit of variety, I think it's good to spice things up and use some of the advanced techniques. I think they're useful to use, but as I said, some of them you'd just have to use sparingly and not beat the client down so they've got to the point where they're not recovering in between workouts.

Lawrence: Yeah, I totally agree. And one of the things you started doing with me, I know, is when I was training, which is really beneficial and interesting, was you would make me speed up during a concentric. A little bit faster, because I think, maybe it's a habit, maybe it's something that is better suited to better designed machines, that you can get more productive slower concentric. But where we're using machines that are not quite as good, in some cases, it felt like, when the concentric was faster, or the positive... no, the concentric is, it just felt more productive.

Lawrence: I just felt more fatigue and whereas otherwise, if it was slow, it's like you can kind of use it to try and get some kind of cheeky recovery in there and rest a little bit. So, did you notice that Simon? Was... did you notice that... I don't know whether or maybe you were moving faster than me, or was Nigel getting you to move faster during a concentric, during some of your movements?

Simon: Probably... well, maybe nearer the end, was getting near the last couple of reps, I definitely remember him saying, "Go fast, go faster." And then you're trying, you're trying to go fast but you're... in reality you're actually going very slow because you basically can't go fast. But, I remember as well, on the row, the sort of seated pulley type row, and I asked him afterwards and he said, sometimes with his own training he'll, maybe in the last rep or two, he'll go a bit quicker, using a bit of momentum, just to get the last couple of reps where you can't really do it slowly maybe again because of the piece of machinery and then it lets him do a nice slow negative on it, which probably wouldn't be possible without just getting the momentum drive for that, getting that last rep or two in the positive. If that makes sense?

Lawrence: Yeah, no, it does. So, Nigel. Do you want to talk about that. Why you made me speed up a little bit on the concentric and your thoughts about that.

Nigel: Yeah, so generally, I know you're used to doing them, I think, like a 10, 10 cadence. Is it?

Lawrence: Well, I've kind of moved to doing... I don't count it... so I kind of make sure... basically, my rule is, I want to have very smooth turn arounds at either ends and then I don't really care about the middle, as long as it's

not a jerky movement. Right? So then what that tends to do is express itself organically, as probably somewhere between four and six seconds on either excursion so like a four, four or a six, six depending on the exercise obviously.

Nigel: Yeah, I mean generally, I would do... probably the slowest I do is a four, four tempo. So four in the positive and four in the negative. I think that set, we were probably doing more of the two to three seconds on the positive and then one second in the contracted position, on some of the exercises but yeah, generally speed up on the concentric is generally more towards the end of the set. Like if you are... if the person is fatiguing and they're almost reaching fatigue towards the end, this can be useful to tell them to go a little bit faster towards the end and as Simon said, it generally ends up being a fairly slow repetition anyways but when you're trying to reach that point of fatigue sometimes it can be useful just to try to... imagine as if you are trying to drive it down upon and do the concentric bit faster and then obviously do it, keep the negative control then as well so you're still getting the negative part of the workout as well.

Lawrence: So, I wanted to... when we were out, you were talking about your own progress in training, you were in great shape, and you said that's probably the best shape you've been in. I would love to just hear what you're doing for yourself in terms of workouts. Maybe touching your diet, other factors, that you think have contributed to where you're at currently.

Nigel: Yes, so, over the last while I've switched in between full body workouts and then a split workout over the last while I've been doing kind of [inaudible 00:29:10] Before that, for a good while, for probably, two, three months I was doing full body workout and that was probably two days a

week and there was no real specific days, it was just whenever I thought like my body was recovered enough to go again. I think I made a lot of progress on that one. I haven't obviously measured... I'm not measuring my muscle then, except for looking in the mirror, and seeing visual progress. Do you want me to go through the full workout, that I was doing?

Lawrence: Yes, sure.

Nigel: The full body workout I was doing was.. the first exercise I was doing was the pull-over, I was doing that with either a dumbbell or a resistance band as well. And then I was doing weighted chin-ups. That's where I would touch... obviously, a place... and try do some weighted chin--ups. I was doing the weighted chin-ups to fatigue, on the concentric, on that one, I might have been going a bit faster than four seconds just because you have a 15, 20 kilo weight hanging from you as well, but slow negatives in that one as well. And then I was doing some negative only reps in that one as well. So I would go to, pretty much positive fatigue and then do some negatives as well and then I would go into cable fly. The cable fly was like a pre-exhaust of a cable fly and then an incline dumbbell press, so that was for the chest. Then do a leg extension followed by a leg pressure squats. That was again pre-fatigue, pre-exhausting the quadriceps and then going straight into a leg press or a squat, barbell squat, as soon as possible. Then I'd do weighted dips with obviously a weight attached to you as well. The band extensions of the tricep extension and the last one then, just a lateral raise, for the shoulders and that was pretty much it actually. So there's probably about nine or 10 exercises there.

Lawrence: Now was that like a routine, full body.?

Nigel: Yes, that was the full body routine. I would repeat that on the second day as well. It didn't really get you that much. I may not do the negatives... sometimes I'd substitute the weighted chin-ups and just do a pull-down, an under-hang reverse grip pull-down. But the workout pretty much stayed the same.

Lawrence: Okay, so you would do that twice a week and typically your recovery period would be variable and based on when you just felt ready to workout again but on average, it would be twice a week, full body, that workout?

Nigel: Yeah, if I would train on a Monday and then probably train again on the Thursday or Friday.

Lawrence: And how has that now changed because you hinted at doing a split more recently?

Nigel: Yeah, I've been doing... splitting up a little bit more, just doing a three day week. So I'm doing leg day and then I'm doing a push day, which is more just chest, shoulders and triceps. And then I'm doing a pulling day when I'm just doing back and biceps.

Lawrence: And have you found that to be more productive or just as good? Hard to say probably?

Nigel: It's probably harder to say, to be honest. I do find the grid.[inaudible 00:32:35].. I like sometimes splitting it up just to focus a bit more on the muscles you're trying to bring up a little bit, like if I'm trying to bring up a certain muscle group, sometimes I'll hammer that one a little bit more, especially the back and biceps day I tend to go bit more of the arms and

the biceps. I just find it good to sometimes... again for my own variety and just to switch it up a little bit as well.

Lawrence: Got to prioritize the bicep curves.

Nigel: [inaudible 00:33:12]

Lawrence: Simon, what about you. You've been training for... in this fashion for six years, you mentioned, I think. And then before that, I see all sorts of different stuff. So where have you come to... your own journey? What is it... what does your training look like now? What have you found to be most productive to you?

Simon: My current training is pretty much now once a week. I'll tend to go to the gym and use machines once a week and maybe a second day, say that's usually a Friday, by the next maybe Tuesday, Wednesday, I might do a bit of a workout at home, because I have some weights here but I'm getting more to the once a week at this stage but part of that is just down to timing and having the time free to do it. And it does... I change [inaudible 00:34:09], and some of it's your fault, listening to your podcast because then I'll get an idea off one of your guest and then I'll, "Aah, I'm going to do that now."

Lawrence: Story of my life.

Simon: I've done the vari... like Nigel's saying, split routines, similar enough to that. I've done maybe two by two. Two a week, full bodies, but currently, I'm not sure... I haven't noticed one making a big difference over another, to be honest. I think some of it is just down to the variety, keeping it interesting. Maybe in my head, I'm thinking, well if I tweak this I 'll get the [inaudible 00:34:52] extra pain [inaudible 00:34:56]like quite a few things

and you're trying to talk about these days. You think maybe I'll actually get a little bit more, whether I do or not, I'm not sure. It keep you motivated and it keep you interested in just tweaking things. I do enjoy them anyway. Yeah, probably once a week, at this stage, maybe a second, and that's probably machines.

Simon: The second workout, if I do one, at home, is more of a barbell type workout, which I do enjoy but it's probably not a full... a lot of maybe HIT people, stick more to the machines but I think you can do [inaudible 00:35:40] depending on what equipment you have. I have the safety bars, so you can fairly much go to failure without getting yourself in trouble.

Lawrence: Awesome, and it's interesting because you seem to me to fit in a way, the HIT kind of democratic quite well. You're a management accountant by trade so you're clearly a smart guy, a family man, time short... time starved, so HIT does really suit you in that sense. So, that's really interesting.

Lawrence: Cool. Nigel. I want to talk a little bit about... what's it like being a HIT PT in Dublin? So you mentioned earlier in this conversation, you saw... when you started learning about high intensity training, you could see that it was perhaps, it made sense because it was more efficient from a earning perspective. You could fit shorter workouts in, more clients and still charge premium prices for getting people great results. Tell me what made you start a business specifically in terms of becoming a personal trainer in HIT, in Dublin?

Nigel: So, I guess, initially, I always had an interest in health and fitness. I was in an [inaudible 00:37:06] job. I ended up working in financial services because I wanted to do something in sport science and didn't have the

points to do that, so I ended up studying business studies and that took me on different route. Then working in offices and stuff like that, I... even myself, I started to kind of fall into unhealthy patterns where you were working late and you were consuming the wrong food and you weren't really looking after yourself...

Lawrence: Going out for pints...

Nigel: Yeah, that's a big part of the Irish thing as well, obviously going out for drinks and stuff. It's easy to notice the weight coming on. For most people time is the main factor. So the attractive path for me, when I learned about high intensity training was taken the way that... almost excuses, for what a lot of people have, is that they don't have time to work out because there's such a misconception that you need to have... if you're going to exercise... you need to have... train three or four days a week and need to do four, five hours a week in the gym. So for me it was just about being able to have the opportunity to first of all, dispel that myth that you need to spend loads of time in the gym to get results and then obviously to set up my business[inaudible 00:38:34]in that way, I was able to set up my business in a way that my workouts were safe, effective and efficient.

Nigel: All my website and Mac theme[inaudible 00:38:47] was based around that as well. And then the area that I'm in. I'm in a corporate area as well so it's very much people that don't have much time to exercise and don't maybe want to spend tons of hours... most people don't want to spends hours in the gym if they can get the same results in 60 to 90 minutes a week, as they can by spending three or four hours in the gym, then they're always going to want... everybody wants the faster option. It's not easy... high

intensity training isn't... it's far from easy. I guess that's why I started and the reason why I set up as a high intensity trainer.

Lawrence: And you've got a great spot. You're obviously currently working out of a gym in Ballsbridge, isn't it? It's the area in Dublin?

Nigel: Yeah, that's right. [inaudible 00:39:42]

Lawrence: And there's a business estate right, practically circling the area, so it's perfect for your clientele obviously. I was just interested, how many people from... the sort of people that you tend to work with who are crème [inaudible 00:39:59] probably hiring, come individuals, business types, executives, people whose time is obviously very precious... how many of those people do you find, will try something like high intensity training and go like, "I don't like this," and will not really buy into it?

Nigel: I guess I've been lucky, in a way. I've never really had anyone that's flat out not bought into it. Obviously, you'll have some clients that may come and go. Not everybody... sometimes people will do a tryout session and maybe they don't sign up for whatever reason, but in a way you want clients that are going to be willing to work hard and some people will come in with a false expectation that this is going to be easy and they are putting the responsibility on you, as a trainer. It's all in your hands now, and they don't take any responsibility themselves.

Nigel: So I always try and... it's like a kind of learning curves. When I started off, I might have taken on clients, the wrong type of clients for me because they weren't willing to put in the effort but now I kind of set the expectation, up front at the start that this is going to be hard work and you're going to put in the effort and work at it if you're going to get results. Most people when

they realize what it's like, they realize that when they put in the effort, that they're going to get results then, they'll be 100% on board.

Lawrence: It's part of the learning curves isn't it? Because, it is probably quite a lot to expect new trainers to be experienced enough to filter out clients at the beginning and maybe that's something you learn as you progress. But I think, it's like you say, it's important to understand the people that you want to work with, the right fit for your service. Those individuals that you mentioned there, who get exposed through you, for the first time, and they get great results, I would love to hear. Do you get any really interesting feedback in terms of people that are just like, "Wow, I never knew this was even possible. I didn't know you could do HIT, or strength train or exercise, whatever you want to call it, once or twice a week, and all that stuff you see outside where people are doing running six, seven days a week, is certainly for getting better body composition, probably isn't that productive." Do you get feedback like that from people? Do you get kind of shocked responses to this at all.

Nigel: Yeah, definitely. I've had a lot of clients that have come to me initially and they would have been used to training with high volume of exercise. I remember one guy who was doing German volume training, which is massive. It's like 10 sets of 10 and doing that a couple of times a week. But for him, it was a big shock. When we had finished the workout, he would realize that this was the real deal. He'd feel the fatigue in his body. I think when people actually experience the workout... the workouts themselves make them believe that something has happened in the body and feel the muscles and feel things that they haven't felt before.

Lawrence: So then it come back to that experience. You can articulate until the cows come home but really you need people to experience this stuff and that will do, perhaps, all the talking for you. Once they've felt their muscles training to a certain level of fatigue, which they may not have felt with a higher volume, lower intensity program or some sort of aerobic thing they were doing in the past. Right?

Nigel: Yeah, exactly and for most people it's just about, even without going to fatigue, even just slowing done the movements. So many people come in to me and they are used to training themselves, or seeing other people in the gym training and even just the simple act of slowing down the movement and taking it three or four seconds on the positive and four seconds on the negative, even just that, makes them feel their muscles more and feel the difference then as well.

Lawrence: Have you got any things you have learnt in terms of talking to people about HIT. I get questions from people. Listeners and members who always sort of struggle with trying to articulate this kind of service especially if they start talking about high intensity training, when they start maybe using those words, which don't always need to be used and when they start talking about working intensely, working infrequently, they might struggle to convince the client as they are so used to hearing the opposite. Do you have any tips on the kind of messaging you would use when you're talking to people for the first time, in order to try and convince them to give this a go?

Nigel: Yeah, that's the thing with high intensity training, it can be hard to articulate it sometimes to a person. People think that... I had someone last week, just on the phone, that thought... when I said that my philosophy

and training methodology is high intensity training, they thought it was the high intensity interval training. So, you have to explain that it's kind of the opposite.

Lawrence: How do you explain that?

Nigel: How do I explain that it's the opposite to...?

Lawrence: No, I'm not asking you to necessarily do it verbatim, how you do it but I'm just curious because I say... let me just give you an example. If someone says to me, "What training do you do?" I generally will say, strength training or resistance training because if I say high intensity training, it's so highly ambiguous now and clichéd, that people go, "Oh, yeah. I do that." Always give me, "I do that." And I'm like, "No, you don't. What do you do?" And then they obviously do some kind of version of high intensity interval training, or Tabata or, fill in the blank. Then I say this, "I do a form of strength training that was popularized...", obviously, I only say this if I have to, "that was popularized in the 70's, by the likes of Arthur Jones and a few others, which is effectively resistance training." You see, this is already too long. "Done to failure, typically a single set, full body workout." I will say something to that effect hoping that that might make sense. But I'm just curious, when someone says to you, how do you answer that question? What is...?

Nigel: Yeah, it's generally... I have something I say... I basically say high intensity is a type of training that is progressive resistance training and it's characterized by a high level of effort whose focused on the intensity and it's progressive nature and it's a[inaudible 00:47:00] an effective method of training. It is characterized by... you're not training for a long time so a lower frequency of training. That's pretty much it. Try not to... trying to

keep it as simple as possible because you complicate it too much then people are getting lost.

Lawrence: Yeah, that was already 10 times better than I do it, so I'm going to steal that from you probably. Simon, what about you? Do you get people... obviously, people see your incredible physique and they must ask you, what do you do for training. So how do you reply to that? Just curious.

Simon: I usually just say, weight training. There are times if I mention... if they ask a further on question and I mention high intensity training, they immediately think of the HIIT and then you have to go, "Well, no." And then they're like, "Oh, yeah. I've done a bit of that." And you're like, "I don't think so." Or they'd say, "I've heard of that on the radio the other day." And I'm pretty sure you haven't because [inaudible 00:48:03] especially here like you'd say radio [inaudible 00:48:05] that we know of [inaudible 00:48:05] that are training this way. Yeah, so you just have to explain, no, it's different, it's high intensity weight training, blah, blah, blah. The [inaudible 00:48:19] your type. Sort of a one liner and then they generally lose interest [crosstalk 00:48:27].

Lawrence: Yeah, lose interest. I just want to take a moment to say, I think this podcast, obviously called, high intensity business... but one of the things I learnt from Skyler, was probably the best way to sell high intensity training is never actually mention, high intensity training, for the most part because it's not really that relevant. Obviously, I don't want to sound disrespectful, the founders of this, I have enormous respect and admiration for and have done great work, but in terms of how we sell it today, it probably doesn't serve us that much to actually talk about HIT. And I know that, for instance, I remember James Fisher saying to me, or Steele, that they

prefer to use evidence-based resistance training, or something to that effect. So, I think it's important to have some flexibility and not be dogmatic about some of this terminology because you might find that people are more likely to be open and listen to you and you will be able to sell more effectively.

Lawrence: One of the other things that was interesting, and I kept asking you about it, Nigel, during dinner, was how do you make this work in Dublin? Dublin right now, correct me if I'm wrong, is one of the most expensive cities to live, the real estate is higher than London, I think right now, on average. Maybe it's a simple answer, but I am just curious to know from a financial point of view, business model point of view, how do you make it work in Dublin? You don't even necessarily go into specific numbers. I just want to say that upfront.

Nigel: Yeah, exactly. It can be challenging because as you said, Dublin is an expensive place and it's getting even more expensive now. Generally, if I have, without going into massive numbers, generally if I have generally 15 to 20 clients training on a weekly basis, that's more than enough for me without getting too kind of bogged down so that I'm just spending all my time in the gym because I want to have... you have to have a kind of balance as well, because it's easy to burn out and lose the passion sometimes yourself, as well. But generally, I try and have anything from seven to eight clients a day. I don't always have seven or eight clients a day, but generally if I have that, some in the morning time and some in the evening. It can be split up like that because it's people that are training in the morning before work or in the evening. You get some people that are more time flexible, they can train at 9, 10 or 11 o'clock, which are good times to get. Generally, if you can do it that way... I guess the first step is

to just kind of get into a comfortable... where you have 15 to 20 clients training on a weekly basis, that should see you kind of earning, at least, up on, close to 4,000 to 5,000 a month, fairly comfortably.

Nigel: So you can [inaudible 00:51:27] them once a month, people who weigh in and stuff like that but I am trying to set up my business in a way that I have people on direct debits, it's automatic recurring billing and they pay on a month to month basis and if they miss sessions they have to make up the sessions themselves. Because otherwise, I used to have people just pay, whenever they had finished a session, pack and people would drag out sessions with that as well. But it's a little something that you kind of learn as you go along. You learn from your mistakes. You have to change the way, your business has to be set up obviously for you to be able to be profitable and then obviously to benefit your clients as well.

Lawrence: What software tools do you use to manage that?

Nigel: So at the moment, I am using Strive. Just for payments, I used to use another one called Authorize.net but some of the fees were quite high in that one so I use Strive for payments and then [inaudible 00:52:28] software for email, marketing and that's [ActiveCampaign](#). That's one that I use. It's quite good and it's not that expensive either.

Lawrence: I can't... I didn't remember you saying you use that actually. I think you may have mentioned that when we met the other day but no, I use [ActiveCampaign](#) and it's just amazing. I think, I don't often recommend it to HIT business owners because I think they're using something like [MINDBODY](#) or one of those complete fitness management suites that they might not need [ActiveCampaign](#) because, for those don't know, [ActiveCampaign](#) is basically an email service provider, so you put all your

customer emails in there and then you can do all your email automations through there. So if you need to send a weekly newsletter, or have certain triggers in place, so like if for instance, a credit card fails, you can have it send an email sent out that says, you might have to update your credit card details, so that you don't have to manually do all of this stuff and [ActiveCampaign](#) is the software that pretty much automates all of that, which is why it's so, so valuable. But I'm not sure if [MINDBODY](#) covers some of that. I know it covers some of those features and so basically, what I'm saying here is, it might not make sense for people to invest in both platforms, but it's just to bear that in mind. So cool. So those are the main tools.

Lawrence: From your perspective, you're currently operating out of a commercial facility. I was sort of trying to probe you, over dinner, about your long term plans. Now, how do you find working at a commercial facility? Do you think that's a good move for a high intensity personal trainers in Ireland, or just generally?

Nigel: Year, for me, it was just... I guess, I needed a place to train my clients and I needed it in an area that was going to have a good flow of people and that so I think, if you're a person who's starting off, in order to make sure that you have a good flow of clients, you are probably going to need to start off in a commercial gym at some point because it's a lot easier when you're in the gym to get clients from there, obviously if you have a studio and that, you have a lot more marketing involved and you're obviously relying on the foot flow and traffic around the area. See, it has its pro's and con's.

Nigel: Sometimes it can be difficult when the gym is quite busy, and you have a workout plan. It doesn't always go to plan and you have to change it up on the spot and go to different exercise and stuff like that. But for the most part, I find it okay. I have a good client base and you get to know the members, so I think it's a good place to start off. Obviously, at a certain point it would be nice to scale up or to employ people and set up as an independent location and have your own schedule as well.

Lawrence: That drives me bloody mad, that does. When people are on the machines when you're trying to do your program, especially when they're doing like 10 sets or something. It's just like... I know you should never do it, and I've never had people come up to me and I would probably never go up to someone else and say, this is what you should do or not. I'm not likely to do that, but it's just ever so tempting. You know, when they are doing such a redundant number of sets. You are just re-tracing the same steps. It's just complete wastage for the most part, in my opinion. And I think you and I, Simon, both shared a similar sentiment around that, didn't we?

Simon: Yeah.

Lawrence: We were working out in the gym and...

Simon: Or when people are on their phone for 10 minutes in between their sets.

Nigel: Yeah, that's the other thing. Yeah.

Lawrence: Although, I have found, it does usually work, in Ireland anyway, maybe just because people are more friendly in Ireland, I don't know, to just go up and say, "Hey, look, I'm just doing a single set to failure, do you mind if I just jump in?" And they're usually more than happy, unless there's like this real kind of body-builder type who is so anal about, the perfect recovery

interval, and they don't want you to mess with their machine. I think that's the only exception to that. You might upset those people.

Lawrence: So, in terms of your... you mentioned there a long term plan, Nigel, potentially, open up a studio, or something like that. Which would be so cool, that I would definitely be down there to try out for sure. What's your thoughts on the opportunity in Dublin right now, I'm thinking, it's my hope to, part of the objectives for the podcast, is really to promote this way of training, in terms of obviously getting more people to do it, but also getting more trainers and then having more people trained by them. So what's your thoughts on there in terms of the opportunity, in Dublin, I guess, in Ireland, right now, for this type of trainer?

Lawrence: You mentioned earlier about how one of the reasons, you decided to do it, was because obviously one, it was very logical but also it differentiated you, which was really interesting. So do you think there's a lot of opportunity for trainers right now to start doing this kind of business?

Nigel: I think there is. Yeah, because it's just so, not main stream, in Ireland, at the moment that there's definitively an opportunity there for more people to get into... more trainers to get into this type of training but I think it's just... I guess people, when they're trained by the normal certification for personal trainers they don't go through anything like this and people aren't generally, quite that open minded. I think you have to be open minded towards this type of training as well and if you're not then you just kind of stick with the mainstream kind of advice and the stuff that's popularized by the mainstream and that's why I guess, high-intensity training isn't that big of a thing in Ireland yet.

Lawrence: That's interesting, I guess that's the same in a lot of places, isn't it? And have you got any tips? Sorry Simon, you were going to say?

Simon: Sorry Lawrence. I was just thinking, as well, probably weight training in general, is very low down on people's... I'm thinking of people I know or there's probably three or four of my friends who are actually into weight training. But literally, outside of them, no-one else I know does weights. Even out driving the streets today, there's so many people out there training for marathons and things like that. So a lot of people think running is the number one thing to do or they'd be doing various gym classes, which can be great, but like Doug McGuff has said before, that no matter what weight training you're doing, sort of strength training should be the basis of your training even if you are doing other things, at least get in once or twice a week and get the bases covered with your strength training.

Simon: It's probably a huge educational gap maybe, on that in general in, I don't know, in Ireland, probably around the world where a lot of people just think of weight training as power lifters or Olympic lifters or big, strong guys in the gym and they don't think it's something they can do and that's probably a huge increase that's there if people were more... if they knew the benefits and they were more willing to give it a go maybe as opposed to just going out for a 5K run.

Lawrence: Yeah, it's obviously still a very niche thing. I remember Doug saying, I think it was on someone else's show, or it might have been mine, just lift weights. He'd say to people, "Don't worry about going HIT, don't worry about doing, fill in the blank, like resistance training protocol, just lift weights."

Lawrence: And I also think that, and I'm not the first to say this. I think that one of the ways we can grow the awareness and get more people doing this, is just demonstrating and hopefully, and I'm sure you've done that during this podcast, Nigel, and I've done on other podcasts, is hopefully just demonstrating to people the enormous opportunity there is, in this kind of business. Because effectively you're doubling your earnings because you're taking what is typically an hour PT session down to half an hour, and in Nigel's world, you're not changing your price for that, and so you are doubling, in that sense. And because you're delivering such enormous value and so many people tie in, there's a real kind of justification behind that and so I think... it's my hope that more personal trainers will come on board because this is the most efficient, effective and safe way, we know how to train.

Lawrence: The evidence supports that, and so if you can show people actually, you can make a good living doing this and build a great business, which has been evidenced over and over again, then hopefully that will grow and we will see this business become more popular in the fitness industry than the likes of some of the alternatives, you know, CrossFit, OrangeTheory Fitness. Clearly they're great business models, clearly their people are highly profitable, on the scale that they have, it's certainly my sense, and I know a lot of us in here are just driven mad by that because a lot of what they do is incomplete or dangerous and so that's my hope. And hopefully, people like you, Nigel, well all of us here, can have some kind of impact in our own way and try and improve that.

Lawrence: But I'm just curious on that kind of theme, Nigel, what would be your tips to young trainers. Let's maybe keep it... this is obviously universal, but if we talk about young trainers in Ireland, who are starting out, getting into

high-intensity training, what might your advice be to those people starting out, trying to build a business?

Nigel: In high intensity training, is it?

Lawrence: That's right yeah. Just high intensity personal training.

Nigel: Yeah, so I think, if you're a personal trainer in high intensity training, the first thing you need to look at I guess is where you're going to set up and what your location is going to be. What gym you're going to be in. So obviously I started off in a commercial gym but it was in an area where I knew there was going to be good footfall. There was a high membership base as well. So I think, ideally, when you are starting off, you want to be looking at a place that has up on 1,500 to 2,000 members probably, just starting off.

Nigel: And the rest of it is, regardless if you are high-intensity trainer or not, the rest of it is really just getting your name out there. You're going to have to start... you're going to have to offer a lot of free trials at the start. I did free trials and free consultations just to get people in the door, and get people experiencing the workouts and then if you deliver the goods... the main thing is you're delivering a good service and you're getting people results and people are seeing the changes themselves. Once you do that, then it's just getting people to know about it's you doing the good job and getting them to tell three or four of their friends and then all of a sudden, then they come long and then you have more people on board and it's keeping people there, consistent as well. And setting up your packages in a way that its designed to retain people rather than just having people come for a month and then leave. I generally set up my packages in a way that I have people for a minimum of 12 weeks so that they have good

results in 12 weeks and then most of them stay on after that because you've developed a good relationship with them so you could be having clients for anything from six to 12 months.

Nigel: I think a lot of it is just how you develop with the client and how you build the relationships as well. I think a lot of it is if you are doing one to one training it's... a lot of it is your personality as well. Some clients just kind of gel well but other people is... some of the best, most successful personal trainers, their workouts might not be anything special but they get on well with clients and they can retain their clients.

Lawrence: Absolutely, awesome. In terms of your marketing, is it practically all word of mouth for you now? How do you acquire new clients at this time?

Nigel: Yeah, would be word of mouth referrals. I have a thing where... if my clients refer two people they get free sessions so it's like incentivized referrals. I get the odd bit from the website. The last client I just got there last week, came from the website. She was just new to the area and she was just Googling, personal trainers in the area. I meet people from the gym then as well. People who would see you in the gym, where you can do a small bit of marketing in the gym, not that much. I've also done seminars before as well in the area, just to educate people and that gave clients as well.

Lawrence: Awesome tips there, cool. Guys, this has been fun. So any final thoughts, anything that I didn't ask that either of you would like to mention about training, the workout, HIT business, fill in the blank.

Nigel: No, I don't think so, just in regards to training, I think a lot of it is consistency. If people are consistent, even if they are not doing high

intensity training, if you consistently training two or three times a week. If I even take myself, as an example. I've been training consistently now for a long time without... I might take a rest for a week or two, or two weeks or something like that, but you may get a way with it. But if you take... most people end up going heavy or going hard for eight to 12 weeks and then they're gone. They burn out and they take a long time out of the gym and that's what stops people from making progress, if they're not staying constant enough.

Lawrence: Well said. What's the best way for people to find out more about you, Simon. Do you have... I mean... I didn't know... I should have probably asked this before we actually recorded. Is there anything,,, you don't have to... is there an email address or any kind of online website or anything like that that you want to leave for the listeners.

Simon: No, probably not really.

Lawrence: This is your chance. No worries, no problem.

Simon: I would just maybe add in about the training in general.

Lawrence: Go for it.

Simon: Just to try for... for different people out there, to just try and enjoy it. Enjoy the journey, you might be tweaking things or as Nigel is saying, consistency. If you enjoy it, you're going to be consistent, so have a bit of fun with it and the progress will come. People might take different paths but we'll all end up in the same place.

Lawrence: I think that is actually great advice. Simple but really effective. Nigel, what's the best way for people to find out more about you? What's your website and any other contact information you want to give at this point.

Nigel: Yeah, so my website is www.specialisedpersonaltraining.com. It's a bit of a mouthful, and then my email is info@specialisedpersonaltraining.com. I am still doing trial workouts and stuff like that for people local to Dublin and I am doing some online coaching and going to start setting up a membership tab for online training as well, and that's on my website as well. And you can go in and inquire about online coaching as well. That's pretty much it.

Lawrence: That's awesome. Thanks for leaving that. Cool, was that slightly inspired by our conversation over dinner?

Nigel: Yeah, that's right. Actually, yeah, it was because I have kind of the tools for online coaching, but I don't really have... I need to start doing more videos and actual demonstration videos and that then site that you mentioned seems they're quite good actually so I'll be talking to you about that.

Lawrence: I'll be happy to help. That's awesome. Damn it. I was going to mention something but I totally forgot. Never mind.

Lawrence: And to everyone listening, to find the book post[inaudible 01:09:34] for this episode, please go to... Oh, that's what I was going to say. I was going to say, "Who says www, before a domaine.?" I think that's the first time, I've heard someone say that in like 20 years.

Nigel: Yes, this was now www, days.

[229 – How to Grow a HIT Business in a Big Box Gym](#)

Lawrence: Anyway, that's what I was going to say. It's not really that interesting and probably not even worth saying, but there you go. So anyone listening, to find the blog post for this episode, please go to highintensitybusiness.com/dublin-hit that's H-I-T and for all episode please go to highintensitybusiness.com/podcast, that's www.highintensity... and until next time, thank you very much for listening.

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