

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Lawrence: Lawrence Neal here and welcome back to highintensitybusiness.com. This is episode 241. Today's guest is Luke Carlson. Luke is the Founder and CEO of Discover Strength, a fast growing personal training business based in Minnesota with five facilities currently.

Lawrence: Discover Strength offers a variety of strength training sessions facilitated by educated and expert trainers. Their personal training facilities are among the highest volume and revenue training facilities in the United States.

Lawrence: Luke, welcome back to the show.

Luke: Thanks for having me, Lawrence.

Lawrence: You're welcome. You've been on this podcast so many times now, I probably don't need to do the introduction. But you just never know if someone is listening to this for the first time.

Lawrence: We are having a conversation over email about some of the challenges you see in the high intensity training business industry. One of the things, one of the comments, you said comes up quite a lot is that there are owners out there who are struggling to find materials to use to train there and develop their trainers.

Lawrence: We had the Super Slow Exercise Guild back in the day, I'm not sure if it still exists. I did see that Ken Hutchins had a, I think it was a super static exercise certification on his website, that I think people could do.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Lawrence: But it does seem to me that we're a bit light on the ground, in terms of options out there and maybe some people need to do a better job at marketing what is available.

Lawrence: I guess just to start this one off, do you want to just talk about, just to give people context, what is the Super Slow Exercise Guild and what did it provide trainers with in the beginning?

Luke: Well, wow, you're probably asking the wrong person, because I was never a member of the Super Slow Exercise Guild. Let's just preface the conversation with that.

Lawrence: Sure.

Luke: I have immense respect for Ken Hutchins and immense respect for the Super Slow Exercise Guild, but it probably predates me. I'm going to throw out dates with the understanding that I am not an expert on this topic whatsoever and so many of your other listeners know more about it.

Luke: But this is mid 90's to the late 90's when I think when the Super Slow Exercise Guild was really at its peak. I met Ken for the first time in 2002 and bought the Super Slow Exercise manual at that time and read it. I probably read it in the first week after I bought it. I'm familiar, but I'm not a Super Slow certified or expert by any means.

Luke: But Super Slow Exercise Guild was a certification, but then it was also essentially a group of like minded practitioners that came together and there was a publication, and I thought it was a really powerful way to further your understanding of how to apply that protocol that existed for

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

over a decade, maybe 15 years. Maybe it started to diminish when the Super Slow Zone, the franchise, moved forward. But that's kind of where it is, from my understanding.

Lawrence: Okay, cool. Yeah, I mean, just to give people more context, if they want to learn more about the history. I did do a round table with Ryan Hall, Skyler Tanner and Drew Baye, and it's a two-parter.

Lawrence: I believe it was either the end of the first part or the end of the second part. I believe end of the second, where we talked a lot about history of the Super Slow Exercise Guild. But I did that so long ago, that to be honest with you, I can't remember much of the detail.

Lawrence: Do you know? Okay, so you weren't part of the, I guess you kind of answered that question, in terms of what it provided people, what it gave. Why do you think, at the time, in terms of for the high intensity trainers out there, why it was so popular and why people still kind of go on about it today being the thing that everyone needed to do and it hasn't really been, in some people's minds, replicated today?

Luke: Yeah. Well, I mean, I think Ken Hutchins became the leader of a movement, and so he was the one that was putting out new information, he was the one that was teaching. Then his students, his disciples, continued to further that message, and it was a chance to come together and share best practices and share ideas and kind of advance the protocol. And if you are a part of that group, I mean, that's where you had to be, because that's where the thought leadership was.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: I think that happens in a lot of different fields, and I don't think there was any equivalent to that in our field or in our really small little corner of our field.

Luke: Everybody knows this history, but Ken Hutchins and that movement, forget who created Super Slow, if it was Ben Bocchicchio or if it was Dave Landau suggested that it was somebody else, was doing Super Slow well before that.

Luke: But regardless of who founded it, Ken is really the person that's responsible for advancing the entire protocol and there just was nobody else doing anything like that at the time. I mean, you could read all of the Nautilus material, but this was a more specific precise application of Nautilus principles if you will.

Luke: It was the next step in the Nautilus principles. I think is what most Super Slow practitioners would suggest. There was a void and the Super Slow Exercise Guild absolutely filled that void for knowledge, for continuing education and for community, to feel like you were a part of something.

Lawrence: And so let's bring it forward to today. People are kind of confused with, "Okay, how do I find that kind of material? How should I develop my trainers in the best way possible?"

Lawrence: What are the work arounds? What do you think people should be? How do you think business owners should be addressing this?

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: I hear this all the time, is "How do we develop a trainer? How do we onboard a trainer? How do we teach anything with there not being Super Slow certification or Super Slow Exercise Guild anymore?"

Luke: That's a fascinating question, but I actually think it represents a great business opportunity for us. Now the issue with having everyone becoming Super Slow certified and being a member of something like the Super Slow Exercise Guild, and I'm not picking on the Super Slow Exercise Guild or a Super Slow certification. I'm very pro Super Slow certification.

Luke: The limitation is that everyone learns the same way. And then all of our businesses essentially have the same product. And from a business standpoint, that's bad. Let's be honest, Super Slow Exercise Guild was we were learning Ken Hutchins' approach to resistance exercise.

Luke: Every business that was involved, and frankly these are all businesses. Everyone that was attending was a business, was a part of a business. We were all learning the exact same thing. Imagine every car manufacturer going to one central body that was disseminating information and that's how you had to build a car. Every car would be the same car. Every manufacturing standard would be the exact same.

Luke: And of course that's not how you compete as a business. You need to be differentiated and your product or service needs to be a little bit different. And so I think we now have a great business opportunity to understand, "Well, what's our application of high intensity training?"

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: It doesn't have to be Ken Hutchins' application of high intensity training. And this is probably the fourth time I've said this, but that is not a knock on Ken Hutchins. It's just a statement of how we could actually make our business differentiated and have our own take on these different things.

Luke: And my goodness, that's the autonomy and the professional freedom that I think we all want. I can understand the material and then I can understand how I want to apply the material. And if you don't believe that there's different applications of the material, go back and listen to a hundred of your episodes.

Luke: You don't have to listen to all what? 200 some. Listen to a hundred of your episodes. And you have really smart, really, really great guests that all do things a little bit differently. And I think that's what we should do in our businesses.

Lawrence: That's a great testament to the variety and the fact that, like you said, every guest I've had on here has slightly nuanced and different approaches to things. Okay. With that in mind, what are, aside from my podcast obviously. What are the resources out there that you lean on to develop your trainers at Discover Strength?

Luke: Yeah, the qualifying statement at the beginning is you piece all of these things together and I think you don't make one of these elements your Bible. All right, so you put them all together. If you have a Bible, it's a manual that you create yourself. That's this is how we're doing it within the business.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: But you up-skill people, you educate people by having them consume all of these other different things. But none of them by themselves is the Bible. Here's some of the go-tos.

Luke: Number one, you listen to your podcast and you can formalize this, you can listen to podcasts and you can schedule discussions where you're discussing what you learned and discussing how we apply that to a client. What do we agree with and what do we not agree with.

Luke: Number two is you pick the books or articles. Let's just start with books, that you really think people need to read. For us, everyone's going to read a number of the classic high intensity training books. It might be The New HIT by Ellington Darden.

Luke: I think that's one of the best books to start with. Because I think it's written in a way that, my goodness, it just gets you excited about high intensity training. But it also really covers all of the basics. But then you take a quiz. You have to take a quiz, in my opinion, of all of these things so that you're retaining what you're reading.

Luke: New High Intensity Training and then a quiz, Nautilus bulletin one and then a quiz and Nautilus bulletin two and then a quiz. We have the Super Slow Exercise Technical Manual, and then a quiz. We have Congruent Exercise, Bill DeSimone, and then a quiz.

Luke: We have Moment Arm Exercise, and then a quiz. By the way, Bill wrote Moment Arm Exercise first and then he wrote Congruent. But we have them start with Congruent because that's actually written in a more basic

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

language. Moment Arm is a little bit more advanced. We do Moment Arm second. They're going to read that and then they're going to take a quiz.

Luke: Putting all of these things together, I don't think any one of these sources has the final answer, but you slowly put it all together. A book by Matt Brisky, maybe a book by Wayne Westcott, a book by Ken Hutchins. And over time they're exposed to all those different thought leaders in high intensity training.

Luke: And they can start making a making sense of all of it. I think if you have just your manual, just your way of doing it, it becomes a little bit dogmatic. It becomes a little bit, "Learn this, then regurgitate it and this is how we do it." And they don't understand it and make it their own.

Luke: The most important thing for a high intensity training practitioner is they have to make it their own. When we hire someone, at first we say, we're going to shove this down your throat and you're going to do it because we have to do it. You've got to go serve this client in a few weeks, so you've got to be ready.

Luke: But you're going to become effective. You're going to become wildly successful when you make this your own. And I think the only way you can make it your own is to have them consume all of the content and all of the information that's out there.

Luke: And then you can start having interesting conversations as a staff. "What do you agree with?" "Well my goodness, I totally disagree with Al Darden on this." And "Why I think Arthur Jones had it wrong here." And "I really

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

like how Ken Hutchins says this, but my goodness, I completely disagree with what he said right here."

Luke: Those are the rich conversations that we eventually need to have. I think the classic books are the second step. And you could just have the freedom, when you read those books, to say, "I don't have to say everything in this book is a hundred percent accurate."

Luke: We can read High Intensity Training The Mike Mentzer Way and understand that maybe we're not going to agree with all of it. We're not going to subscribe to all of it.

Luke: Then I think the next big thing, Lawrence, is reading journal articles. We have a compilation. I think it's probably 20 journal articles. It's been so long since I've dealt with it. Maybe it's 30, maybe it's 18 journal articles that we think are the foundational research studies that people need to read, to really understand all things high intensity training. Some of them are strength training.

Luke: They're like the classic James Fischer, James Steele, evidence-based resistance training for muscle strength. Then there's evidence-based resistance training for muscle hypertrophy. Those are classics that, of course, we have to cover. But then there's the landmark paper challenging the ACSM's position stand. What an incredible paper.

Luke: Some of Ralph Carpinelli's research, some of it's motor learning and control, so we understand skill acquisition. There's a few great journal articles around that. These are just our library of great journal articles that

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

someone has to read and of course, we'll retire some of those if new research comes out that we think is a better synopsis or a better paper.

Luke: But that way our trainer hasn't just read the books now, they've read the latest research on all these different topics and then we have, we don't do a quiz on the research papers. We do a discussion, so you have to read the paper. Then you talk with your manager and you discuss the key take-homes of that research paper. We're learning it from an author, a lay author, and now we're learning it from the scientific literature, that standpoint would be a a second huge vehicle.

Lawrence: Awesome. Yeah, just to add to that, if people are interested in, obviously all the books and resources Luke mentioned, we'll enter as many of those as possible in the show notes, but there will be a button, a call to action on the post where you can enter your email to get the resource PDF, which shows the different tiers that the trainers progress for at Discover Strength and all of the chronology and the order of which each book or journal or what have you, is checked off along that sort of progression.

Lawrence: That's a useful reference for people. We'll have that there. That's great. You've covered there a lot of the theory, in terms of, well, the theory of the practical, in terms of reading books and reading journals.

Lawrence: Now I'm guessing, in your particular context, a lot of your trainers have already got a background in anatomy and physiology, because they would've probably studied exercise science or something similar. I guess that's one way to tick that box, is to hire people who already have that foundation.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Lawrence: Otherwise, I've noticed in one of your, in the slides I believe, you have the [HITuni certification](#) in there and so [HITuni](#) can obviously check that box in terms of providing some of the physiology, anatomy background, as well as the practical aspects of actually implementing these learnings into a personal training session in high intensity training context.

Luke: Yeah. And let me get to that. The last thing that I think is kind of the foundation. The foundation is some books early on and some quizzes and journal articles and discussion. I think the last foundational component is you've got to still have your manual, your system for how you do it.

Luke: I don't care if it's a two page document or a hundred page document. Ours is about a hundred pages of how you're going to apply all this. There's all the different material and there's all the different stuff out there. But how are you going to do it? What do you expect in your business so you're all on the same page.

Luke: Philosophically, so many of us are relatively on the same page, but our application might be just a little bit different. Okay? When you do a standing barbell bicep curl, are you coming to full extension at the elbow or using a congruent approach and you're keeping a tiny, tiny bend in the elbow at the bottom of that range of motion? That needs to be quantified. There's just a million things that need to be clearly delineated.

Luke: From there, as ongoing education, I think you do exactly what you said. For us it's a [HITuni certification](#). And here's how this frees me mentally from making these decisions. I think a [HITuni certification](#) is awesome and

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

I do not get lost in the weeds, is there one element, did Simon say one thing in there that I disagree with? I don't care.

Luke: Because we understand we're going to come across a lot of material that we might somewhat disagree with, but we want to be open minded and absorb all of it and we still have our way, our manual that we're going to go back to. But we want to be exposed to all of these things. I think the [HITuni certification](#) is absolutely phenomenal for the practitioner.

Luke: And I've had tons of trainers take it, who have been really experienced trainers, because we started implementing it and we've been open for many years before [HITuni](#) came out. I had really experienced practitioners take it and they still got something out of it.

Luke: And then we have all of our new people take it now and they get so much out of it. We do a [HITuni certification](#). We also do an ACSM certification. Now ACSM certification is kind of just playing the game. You want to get the ACSM certified exercise physiologist.

Luke: They're really not learning how to be a practitioner there, but they're making sure that they're playing kind of, I don't want to say playing the game, but they're essentially playing the game. That credential is highly regarded and highly respected, but it definitely doesn't tell you what to do on the floor with a client like [HITuni](#) actually does.

Luke: Those are two go-to certifications for us and then we'll use a few other certifications as someone moves forward in our tier system or our core growth plan. We just had a trainer get the American College of Sports

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Medicine cancer exercise trainer certifications. That's another way to continue to move forward.

Luke: I don't want to spend too much time on the ACSM certification because I don't think they actually make us much better on the floor like I think a [HiTuni](#) certification does. Then as far as the anatomy piece goes, every quarter we take a, what we call personal trainer expertise quiz. This is a written quiz. Everyone shows up on quiz day and they take a written quiz and it's heavily rooted in anatomy.

Luke: It is like we're looking at all the musculature and you are labeling what all the musculature is, because frankly as you move further away from your academic background, your retention of so much that musculature starts to diminish and everyone knows what a quadricep is, but are you able to understand exactly where the teres major or the teres minor is?

Luke: Do you understand what the four muscles of a quadricep are? The two muscles of a hamstring? Are you getting all of these things or do you understand where the gastroc is relative to the soleus? And so we want to make sure that we're staying, not current because the anatomy is not changing, that we're just retaining some of our anatomy and even our physiology.

Luke: We do that with a simple quiz and they know what's going to be on the quiz. They're just preparing for that quiz, so we don't lose our handle on that anatomy, as we get further and further away from our formal schooling.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Lawrence: Yeah, how important do you think that really is, though, in that the body is so complex, right? There's so many bloomin' muscle groups and things to remember and I kind of feel like, "Well, as long as you understand the principles and the way these muscles work and operate from that perspective, it doesn't necessarily matter that you remember all of the names." Why do you put such an importance on that?

Luke: I agree with you completely and the level of depth of that anatomy quiz is maybe not, I don't want to overstate it. It is not insanely nuanced. I just totally agree with you, Lawrence. I totally agree with you. A great trainer is not defined by someone who really understands anatomy or even really understands physiology.

Luke: I've forgotten so much anatomy and physiology over the years, but I don't think it has an impact on my ability to be an effective exercise practitioner, because I just don't need to know that day in and day out.

Luke: I think the only reason, one of the reasons we need to know it, is if our client's having an injury issue and they say, "This is bothering me. What do you know about this?" We need to at least know what the heck muscle group they're talking about when they refer to it or they heard something from their physical therapist.

Luke: We definitely need to be able to kind of talk that talk. But yeah, I just do not think it's massively important that we know all of the anatomy and all of the physiology and frankly, I don't think most high intensity training practitioners do.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: I think it's probably more important that we understand some basic biomechanics than really understand the anatomy. And we used to overkill our quiz. We used to have a quiz that was just on all the musculature of the neck. And it was 50 different muscles that if I gave the quiz to James Steel right now, he didn't have a prayer of passing it. Hope he's not listening to this.

Luke: But I mean it was nuanced. And I think at some point James Fisher looked at it and he's like, "Why are you having people take this?" And I thought, "Well, we thought it was really important that everyone knew all the muscular, basically every exercise practitioner knows the trapezius and maybe they know the sternocleidomastoid, but they don't know any neck musculature beyond that.

Luke: We're like, "You're going to learn it all." And we probably went too hardcore into it and it probably had really little relevance to how we actually work with the client. We took a step back on some of those things and it's just a little bit more general right now.

Lawrence: Yeah, this is great. And just going back to what you were saying there about creating your own in-house manual, having the mindset in your organization where you promote that everyone goes out and learns everything and challenges it and discuss that internally and then have your own way of doing things is great because it's moving away from that kind of dogmatic approach we see in high intensity training.

Lawrence: But you make sure that you hold on to a Discover Strength approach because that gives you that system that will deliver on that optimal result

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

over and over again for your clients. Right? And sorry, one more thing, Luke, and I'm just thinking, one way people might be able to bridge the gap is I know that [HITuni](#) have started doing tailored [HITuni courses](#) for businesses.

Lawrence: If you want to take the [HITuni](#) curriculum, the modules, the videos and kind of tailor it to your own specific way, you could use that to help you with that kind of like "This is our business system," and still not ignore the other resource. You can still have those, but it might just be a nice way of kind of bridging the gap in that sense.

Luke: Yeah, I think that's a brilliant idea.

Lawrence: Cool. All right. Okay. I thought you might have more to comment on that, Luke, but that's-

Luke: No, I think it's just brilliant. I love that Simon's doing that.

Lawrence: Cool. Yeah, I agree. It's cool. I said one final question for you, Luke, I know you need to jump off. What about [HITuni](#) is great and it's probably a fairly advanced in places, although I have had one person say they were looking for something even more advanced. Perhaps they were alluding to Ken Hutchins' original material. I'm not sure.

Lawrence: But what have you got a view on and if people want to go for the really, really advanced stuff related to high intensity training, is there any resources there that you might recommend on top of [HITuni](#) at all?

Luke: Okay. I'll answer that. But I also want to just state that I think the final step or the next step is still learning from other colleagues. The way you do

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

that is things like you go to rec. Okay. Rec is your chance to learn from all the practitioners. We send all of our trainers on what we call a clinical rotation, where we send them away for one week to some other high intensity training practitioners somewhere in the country or North America for us.

Luke: And they just spend a week there learning from that person. We've sent people to Fred Hahn and Blair and Patty Durrell, L and Diane Del Garbino and the people at Hard-Pressed in Chicago. And I could just go on and on and on, all the different, Roger Schwab, all the different practitioners we've sent to. So we can learn from that particular practitioner because we want to be open minded and learn from those practitioners.

Luke: And so you can go visit them, you can send people to visit the practitioner, you can go to something like rec and learn other people's approaches. And I think one of the most important things you can do is do a workout.

Luke: I was in, a few weeks ago, in Philadelphia and the one thing I wanted to do was have Roger Schwab take me through a workout and every time I visit someplace I want to go through the workout and you're going to learn so much more if you actually go through the workout.

Luke: I think right before Christmas last year, I went to New York and paid for a workout with one of Fred Hahn's trainers. I always want to be trained by a trainer anywhere I go. And so that's why I always, I'm so confused when people come to rec and they don't do their early morning workout. And I'm thinking you got a chance to learn from a practitioner.

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

Luke: And frankly the practitioner probably has way more experience than you do. But even if they don't, you just have a chance to learn some small different application. I think that's really valuable. I think you've got to learn from other people and then to answer your question. If you want to go deeper?

Luke: I actually would take a contrarian approach to that. I don't know if other people, we can say Ken Hutchins, I don't know if that's more advanced. I would say it's more nuanced, more nuanced does not mean more advanced.

Luke: And so if I wanted to go more advanced, to me, more advanced always means look at the scientific literature. What we've found is that an evidence based approach to exercise does not mean a complicated approach to exercise. More advanced could actually be simpler. More advanced to me means a little bit more evidence-based, which means you dive into the scientific literature and some of that reading can be pretty advanced, but the application maybe is not that advanced.

Lawrence: Nuance doesn't mean more advanced. Yeah, that was a great answer. It was awesome. Luke, thanks so much again for joining me on the podcast today. If the first listening, if you've really enjoyed listening to this and we've put some other recent content out with Luke that's very kind of action-orientated.

Lawrence: Luke's also been really generous with contributing content to HIT business membership where we help people grow the high intensity training businesses and there's content in there on Luke's force, on hiring

[241 - Luke Carlson - How to Develop your Trainers Without the SuperSlow Exercise Guild](#)

process, trainer compensation, retention, pricing, et cetera, et cetera. And it's just a really great resource for people.

Lawrence: Luke, best way for people to find out more about you?

Luke: Discoverstrength.com, resistanceexerciseconference.com, anyone can always shoot me an email that luke@discoverstrength.com.

Lawrence: Excellent. And for everyone listening to find the blog post for this episode, please go to highintensitybusiness.com and search for episode 241 and until next time, thank you very much for listening.

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