



Workout Program Design Masterclass with Brian Stroh (June 2025)

Lawrence Neal: As usual guys, we're gonna start with a presentation from Brian and then we'll do Q&A, but a very quick intro before we get started.

So, firstly, Brian, thank you so much for taking the time out to do this. I'm so grateful. You're super busy with grown and franchise, so this is *not* your priority, and I appreciate that and we're all really fortunate to have you. I'll explain more about that in a second.

But welcome everyone, thank you for taking the time to join us today. Super excited for the Masterclass today. This is obviously the Masterclass for June 2025. And we do this every month in High Intensity Business and we alternate – so, if this is your first Masterclass that you're attending – we alternate between personal training or the science and application of personal training and business, right? So, obviously they overlap a lot.

But today we're focusing on personal training. And then, next month we'll do a business topic, and then a month after that, we'll do probably another personal training topic. And by business, I mean marketing, hiring systems, that kind of thing.

Previous Q&As or Masterclass experts include Luke Carson, Jeff Tomaszewski – a colleague of [Brian's] – Pete Cerqua, Dr. Doug McGruff, Dr. James Fisher, all the people that you know and love in high-intensity training and many more.

Today's expert is [MaxStrength Fitness](#) Director of Operations. Brian... Brian, how do I pronounce your last name? Is it "straugh?"

Brian Stroh: "Strow". Just like the old German beer, *Strauss*.

Lawrence Neal: [Are you of] German descent?

Brian Stroh: Yes, but no relation to the beer company, unfortunately.

Lawrence Neal: Fair enough, fair enough! I don't want to talk about beer anymore. I've just had a... bachelor party, and I'm done with beer forever. So, there we go. So, with all of that said, again, thank you, Brian. I'm gonna, I've given you sharing permission, so do you want to load up Canva, get your presentation going?

Guys, it looks looking great. I had a look, I scanned it before this and I'm excited. You can start showing that, go through that. We'll start there and then we'll get into Q&A. So, Brian, whenever you are ready.



Brian Stroh: Great. Well, let me share my screen here. Seems to be working okay.

Let me first state that I'm a huge fan of Lawrence here and the show. I feel I owe this to the show 'cause I've learned so much over the years, and I can't imagine, you know, being able to be on the show for the first time. So, very excited. Lawrence, thank you, You've done great work for us and for our industry over the years.

Lawrence: Uh, you're very welcome.

Brian Stroh: All right. So, Lawrence came to me and mentioned that program design was a hot topic and I couldn't agree more. I feel as trainers we should be discussing this type of thing more frequently.



Just by talking about it, I feel that we become more confident with it and able to talk to our clients about it. And at the end of the day, being able to satisfy our clients, give our clients results and, you know, keep them safe is the most important thing we can do. So, I love this opportunity.

This is the favorite thing that I've done over the years — being at MaxStrength Fitness now for almost 17 years, my favorite thing to do after a session is to say, “How'd that go?” Either with a



colleague or maybe they got done training and I'm asking them now because I'm responsible for their, their growth, "How did that go?" And, and I always want to know, *how did the session go?*

And I think a lot can be learned from those moments in between sessions where we discuss that. I feel like I want to use today kind of to go down that same type of approach.

So, getting into this program design and... you see guys, I've called it "...Considerations." This by no means is the end-all, be-all way to approach program design.

I have a feeling that almost anything can work as long as the, as long as the client's not, injured or getting injured from our approach. And if they enjoy their workouts to some extent and, and we're gonna keep them coming back as long as we can deliver.

So, let's begin by saying, how much does programming matter?

HOW MUCH DOES PROGRAMMING MATTER?

- Effort
- Simplicity vs. Complexity
- Client education

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At the end of the day, it really only matters, if the client is training hard enough. Is there an effort? That's good and bad. Meaning, if we've got somebody brand new right off the street, [they've] never strength trained in their life, almost anything we do is going to help them. Almost any program that we program for them is going to help.



So, no matter the exercises I choose, anything is gonna benefit them, but the effort needs to be there first, and that's the most important thing.

And I think that long-term, that's how we can better help our clients the most – is by teaching them *how to train, how to exert effort, how to keep calm* and do all those little things that we as, as trainers do when we ourselves work out, get our clients to do that.

So, before anything else, make sure that we're teaching effort and how they're applying that effort.

And I also feel that in our industry, we're pretty good at making things more complicated than they need to be. And I love that about us, and I think that's what draws us all to this, is being able to talk about the details of exercise. But at the end of the day, simplicity is really what's needed.

So to me, that's the big challenge: can we simplify what we're trying to do?

And that helps not only for the trainer to understand – the instructor – but now when we have these discussions with clients, can we simplify it for them to understand? And I'm gonna give a little guidance on that today.

And really, at the end of the day, we're constantly educating our clients. It's more than just taking 'em through a workout. And I realize that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with how we program a workout, but I can't stress it enough that we really should see ourselves as teachers teaching them *how to strength train* because it doesn't come naturally to them.

It's probably come natural to all of us on this call. That's why we've, we're drawn to this. But our clients are very, sort of disconnected with their physiology and with their physicality. So, we need to always be educating them.

And I hate to sound like the typical personal trainer and give personal trainer answers or *speak in personal trainer*; I like to really get down and reason with them so we have an understanding of the science, but how could I get them to understand what we're trying to do with our workouts?

And that should come through in our instruction too: our instructions should be simple when they ask questions. It should be simple. Even though we could certainly give them more information behind the scenes, if they wanted to know more of the science behind it or the why, we could certainly do that. But I think simplicity is key especially for your trainers to be able to discuss this with clients and to make it simple to understand the details – but make it simple.



But keep in mind, at the end of the day, if we're not first invoking a stimulus, then I don't know that the programming matters that much.

So, keep harping on effort in form over time, and that's gonna get the best results.

But the programming should matter. So let's, again, *overthink* things like we do as trainers, let's overthink for a while and really break this down. And again, remember: these are considerations; these aren't necessarily *rules* – these are just the considerations that we found over time that help us the most.

So... we have our initial consultation, and during that we typically give them two to three exercises.

INITIAL CONSULTATION

- Leg Press
- Compound Row
- Optional third movement

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We'll start with the leg press. Makes sense, why that that exercise – [it] has a lot of *feel*. It's very basic. So, your compound movements are gonna be easier to perform. Clients will be more natural when asked to perform a compound movement. So, we'll start with the leg press.

We'll oftentimes then go with the compound row. Again, just a compound exercise. And if I had to pick one upper body exercise to do the rest of my life, or one upper body exercise to have clients do for the rest of their life, it might be the compound row, just because most folks are



anterior dominant and we need to pull things back – we need to strengthen the back of the body, and there's a lot that comes from the compound row. So, we like that as our second exercise.

And then there'll be an optional third movement, and we'll talk more about that as we go. But three movements to me... could constitute a full body routine, right? If I have a leg movement, a push, and a pull, I've essentially trained most of the muscles in my upper body.

So, that optional third movement, when we get their demographics – we'll look through their, uh... it's basically their health history and their goals – we'll look through that and see, okay, have they had any issues in the past? Any orthopedic issues? Or do they have anything that's medically diagnosed, either an injury or some sort of surgery that maybe we need to help strengthen? Or do they just have a body part that they want to target?

We get a lot of people that say, "...my arms," or "...my core," that type of thing. So, in that case, we'll consider that for the third movement. So, because this is the initial consultation, we're trying to sell, I think it's a good idea to show them what they need. So, the leg press, the compound row, and then, we can also address whatever their concern is.

So, if they have a low back issue, you know, maybe I put them on lumbar, but that's that optional third movement that we do for the consultation.

And our consultations are typically an hour, maybe a little bit shorter – if there's not a lot of questions – but to put them through three exercises, they get a pretty good taste of what this is gonna be.

And then at MaxStrength Fitness, we created what I call an exercise selection template.

Now, we never really needed this when we were one studio, because a lot of times we would have these discussions in house on how to program.

But now that we're expanding and we have franchise partners, and they have trainers that need to be trained, we found that we need to simplify.

And at the end of the day, if I take our room of equipment, which is 20 pieces of Imagine Strength, and I look at that room and I say, "Okay, well how can I break this down?"

It seems to be best simplified if I include everything into one of five categories: so, we have upper body push, upper body pull, we have lower body – so that would be leg press, leg extension, leg curl, calf – that would be in the lower body. Then, I have hips – so, abduction, abduction – and



then your trunk/spine/core – so, lumbar, abdomen, torso rotation, cervical extension – those would fall under trunk/spine/core.

EXERCISE SELECTION TEMPLATE

- Upper body – push
- Upper body – pull
- Lower body
- Hips
- Trunk/spine/core

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Now, in opening these franchisee studios, I've told these new trainers that if we simply took this template and I pick one exercise from each one of those categories, you're gonna have a pretty good five exercise, 20-minute workout.

And... the key there is there's also not a lot of overlap. So, I could almost perform any of these five – almost, and we'll talk about where you can't – almost perform any of these five categories in any order, all right...? And I think that's key.

So that's, that's the fallback. If I had to quickly rush and put a trainer into the system, and they had to start today and they had to design a workout, I would say just pick one exercise from each of these five, and you're, you're probably safe.

But again, being that we're in this high-intensity community, and we tend to overthink things, I really like to look deeper and say, “okay, beyond this, what would you consider?” and I think that's where we're going the rest of the way here, beyond this initial failsafe – the safety net, so to speak – of these five categories, what would you consider?



So again, orthopedic issues, medical, any medical diagnoses, any targeted goal areas.

**ORTHOPEDIC ISSUES, MEDICAL
DIAGNOSES, TARGETED GOAL AREAS**

- Tolerable movement patterns – conservative introduction
- Weak areas
- Emphasis on certain muscle groups

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So, Jeff's background – he's [a] former physical therapist, so he has the physical therapy background.

The rest of our trainers – we're not hiring physical therapists here – but when we ask our clients to fill out their demographics packet – their intake form – we're asking for any sort of physical therapy they've had or any medical diagnoses that they've had, so that we can see exactly [if] they have any problem areas. And they would certainly tell us during the consultation anyhow, but to actually have it documented that, "Okay, they have an issue, and maybe now I need to go back and talk to the team going forward." If it's a certain issue [that] maybe I'm not familiar with or if I want to know, "should we address this area or not?" It helps to have all of that knowledge, you know, beforehand. So, we have these demographic packets that help us with this.

And then, a lot of clients also have targeted goal areas, like I mentioned, maybe they're mentioning... they want to strengthen their core – we get that one a lot – or their arms.

I think the key is – and I used to be hesitant in the past, but now if somebody has a knee issue, let's say they're coming off of a knee replacement – as long as they're cleared by their doctor – that's the other thing I need – I need to make sure that they're cleared to resume normal activity.



I'm gonna go right after that area and I want to make sure that they can tolerate the movement pattern.

So, if it's the knee, I'm gonna put them on the leg curl and I'm gonna select a really light weight, and, "Can we just tolerate this movement pattern?" and "what does the range of motion look like?" That's gonna tell me a lot.

And we can be confident in that, because – I probably should have prefaced this – we come from a SuperSlow background.

So, I was with Overload Fitness with Jeff, and Josh, and Ken, and Al... so our roots are in SuperSlow... Safety's a priority with us. We have a real careful approach, and while we don't necessarily move in the 10 seconds– we're a little bit faster than that – it's still [a] gradual load up and careful changes of direction – that's the key.

I think that getting someone on – even if they have the compromised joint – getting them on a piece of equipment with a light weight and starting with that to see, "Can they tolerate this movement pattern?" –I think that's key.

And, and oftentimes, I'd say more than 90% of the time, if I had to go by personal experience, it seems that they can certainly tolerate these movements, and they actually feel better oftentimes after doing them.

So, make sure that they can tolerate the movement pattern with a conservative introduction, and then I'm gonna progress that exercise conservatively.

Now, if there are other exercises that they don't have an injury, a previous injury, or some type of... surgical repair, I can push those exercises a little more aggressively. But anything that's compromised, I just want to be careful with my progression there.

And then any weak areas – so, most folks coming into us, we can probably guess they've got weak hamstrings. We can probably guess they've got a weak lower back or a weak abdomen. So, in building out their program, we're starting with that leg press. We're going with a compound row. I'm then gonna put in some pushing movement, whether it be a seated dip or a chest press or something like that. But then, are there weak areas that I know of that they've either determined or that I'm suspecting?

And then the last category there is emphasis on certain muscle groups – so if somebody said, "Hey, I want to build up my arms." Well, I might actually devote an exercise now to direct arm training, or I might not necessarily do that at this point, early on with someone else, I might just



keep them on compound movements. But if somebody asks for arm work, typically they're gonna like to feel their arms working.

So, I'm always looking to say, "All right, what are the basics for our introduction?" and then, "What can I address that they've specifically identified?" and, "Does it make sense?"

I certainly would only want it to make sense, but we have a template at MaxStrength Fitness that has a list of typical either complaints or areas of concern that the clients have come into us over the years with. And then we put together a template of how you might structure their workouts. and the end result would be an ultimate A and a B routine.

Now that's for the benefit of our franchisees that are opening, and they're in their studio and they're getting their clients in, "How do I ultimately progress these people so that months from now we've got a fully built-out a and a B routine?" – we have that template in-house, and we use that to just guide them.

And again, it's just a guide. They're not hard, fast rules necessarily on how to program, 'cause I'm not sure anybody really has that answer yet as to what the best programming might be... it's just a guide.

And we're oftentimes – especially with a newer franchisee – we're in constant contact with them. We're talking at least weekly, if not more, on their sessions: what's going on with their clients? What do the workouts look like? What have you struggled with? Or what have you done successfully? We're constantly having these discussions, just like the discussions we had in between sessions when we were a one-shop operation.

Again, I just think so much comes from just having these... what would seem like informal conversations at the time, but they're meant to help develop our trainers, into becoming more competent and more confident. So this will, this will take care of them, at least at the start of the program.

Now, let's discuss something that I think might be the most important thing with programming, and that's frequency.

And I think we can look at frequency... or we *should* look at frequency as a *continuum*.



FREQUENCY

- Continuum
- 2x per week > 1x per week > 0x
- Hypertrophy and atrophy are muscle fiber specific
- Exercises are not necessarily interchangeable



And for me... I tend to benefit most by looking at extremes to help illustrate what I'm getting at.

So, if we had somebody that was completely sedentary and they were only ever on their couch and only get up to either go to the refrigerator, go to bed, get the mail, I think we can agree that if they simply put in a leg press, maybe even once a month, that they would be better off. If that's all they did was one hard set of leg press a month, that that person would be better off in the long run than having done no exercise.

So, that's one end of the spectrum, right? Somebody who doesn't train at all.

And then I think we could agree that if I got that person who did one set of leg press a month... if I could actually get them to train and do a full-body workout one time a week...? That would be life-changing.

I'm not denying that one time a week can be very effective and can actually help increase someone's *healthspan* over time. But I also think that twice a week — it's a lot better than once a week.

And the science is coming back — and I know that might be kind of controversial here, because it seems to be that if we don't make progress with our workouts, the idea is that we need more



time in between workouts – and I'm not so sure, with looking at the research and meta-analyses that are coming out, that that's the right strategy.

And I think twice a week is certainly *twice as good* as once a week and *maybe even better than that*.

So, again, that might be controversial, but I think we can all agree that *some exercise* is better than none, and that once a week is certainly better than once a month. I'm arguing that twice a week is even better, and you'll see why that's important here as we go on.

It has to do with the fact that hypertrophy and atrophy are muscle fiber-specific. So, what that means is, even though I'm doing a chest press, I may not be targeting every single muscle in my chest.

Now, as a beginner, yes, if somebody's never worked out before, they do a chest press, they're pretty much gonna be accessing any muscle fiber that they can activate in that moment – they're gonna be activating it and it's gonna be receiving a stimulus.

But it's important to know that *hypertrophy* and *atrophy* – which are two opposite ends of the spectrum, right? – hypertrophy: we're growing muscle; atrophy: we're losing muscle.

And muscles, by the way, are either hypertrophying or growing, or atrophying, and I think that that might be a more recent concept.

I think a lot of us, myself included, believe that, “Well, if I didn't train, I'm *maintaining* a certain level.” Well, you *are maintaining* a certain level, but only with those muscle fibers that you are using.

So, whatever that activity level is for you, if it's just the course of your normal day, then you're using those muscle fibers to get through the day. But there's higher threshold ones... those ones that really grow, those ones that really make us strong when we think of strength – those need to be challenged, and that's muscle fiber-specific.

That's important because exercises are not necessarily interchangeable.

And I'm speaking from experience here, but in the past, I might have my clients on – if they were working out twice a week – I might have them do a chest press on Monday, and then on Thursday – so, that's a pushing movement, upper body pushing movement – on Thursday, I might have them do the overhead press. That's also an upper body pushing movement, but in reality, even though they're training twice a week as far as it is concerned with our pushing muscles, those



muscles are only getting stimulated once a week except for the fibers that are common in between the two movement patterns.

So, on a chest press, you're gonna get some anterior delt. And on an overhead press, you're gonna get some of the pec fibers, especially on like a MedX or an Imagine Strength overhead. You're gonna recruit some of the pec fibers on that, but only those muscle fibers that I've trained in both sessions that overlap will be stimulated twice a week, otherwise, it's once a week.

And we agree once a week is better than nothing, but I do think that that twice a week is important, and I think that we might get better results if we take that into consideration. Does that make sense so far?

Lawrence Neal: Yeah. Brian, just quickly from me – this is gold by the way; I think you're doing stellar job – we just need to speed up the pace a little bit, in order to... get to questions in about 10 minutes, if that's possible.

Brian Stroh: Okay. Very good, thank you, all right... so, then I mentioned how beginners can do almost anything – it's a concept called *regional hypertrophy*.

REGIONAL HYPERTROPHY

- “Beginner’s Luck”
- Untapped MUR = progress
- Leverage the same movements, master the execution
- Intermediate and advanced subjects would benefit from variety to increase MUR

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I consider it beginner's luck — meaning anything they do, they're gonna benefit from. And I wish I would've known that when I started training; my approach would've been a lot different.

But it turns out that because most of our clients who come to us have never trained before, they have a lot of untapped motor units, and motor units simply control a group of muscle fibers in a muscle — they don't control the entire muscle; just the fibers that are in that unit. So, they have a lot of untapped motor units.

Well, every time they train, they're gonna be accessing more and more of those motor units, and that's gonna reveal itself in the form of progress. They're gonna... rapidly progress in the beginning.

So, I think at that point, in the beginning, it's important that our clients just leverage the same movements over and over and master the execution.

So, let's think about that — the same movements over and over: so, chest press, compound row leg press — just keep doing that over and over for months, if not years.

Now, I realize... that's not always possible, and we're gonna talk about that. But intermediate and advanced subjects would benefit from more variety *because* they've already recruited everything they possibly can on a certain motor pattern.

If we've done that movement for, you know, months and years, we've essentially tapped into everything we're gonna access and therefore stimulated all of those motor units. I might need to find different muscle fibers that I haven't quite tapped into, in which case, a similar but different movement I'd bring into play.

So, if I'm doing a chest press, maybe I also do a seated dip, because those are in different planes of motion, right? The chest presses is sagittal, and the seated dip would be more frontal plane. So, I'm gonna recruit different muscle fibers, and that's more important for intermediate and advanced subjects.

Like I said in the beginning, if we can just stick with the same movements and have them master the execution, that's gonna be better.



CLIENT SATISFACTION VS RESULTS

- Constant challenge
- Variety diminishes potential Progressive Overload
- “CONTINUING EDUCATION”
- Communication, Intuition, Passion vs. Boredom



But I realize that we're in a constant battle between client satisfaction and results. Even though we know it's best to train the same movement patterns over and over again, our clients don't necessarily know that. But without a doubt, variety diminishes the potential for progressive overload.

Again, think of this as extremes – imagine that we only did the leg press once a month. It would be hard to progress that, right? If I want to progress something, I actually would want to train it more frequently.

So, I think it's up to the instructor to continually educate, and that's why I call it... continuing education. We normally think of that in terms of ourselves being constantly on the forefront of the literature. But in this case, I feel like we need to constantly educate our clients. And because they're not... nearly as interested in this stuff as we are, it needs to be a constant reminder. We should find ourselves saying the same things workout after workout.

And it's unfortunate –and trust me, I have some rockstar clients that you tell 'em once and it's implemented and I never have to address it again, that's great, but – for a lot of clients, you have to reiterate these things.



And I think one of the things we need to reiterate is the importance of execution over variety. It seems to be that clients are always worried about the other machines in the room that they're not doing, when it's really their execution that's holding them back – it's the constraint, it's the *bottleneck*, if you will.

So, try to get them interested in the execution. Okay?

So, if we constantly communicate that, number one... and I think it's good to have a good relationship with your client too, in that they'll start to tell you, “Oh, I don't like this one,” or, “I'd like to try something else” – I do want to know that as an instructor.

And sometimes I have to pick up on that intuitively. I'll sense that they don't like this movement or sense that they don't like their workout, in which case I will make some changes. But if we are passionate about our instruction and about emphasizing the execution of the movement, I think that can help overcome their boredom.

We have to make sure as instructors that we don't become bored with the same workouts. Because honestly, guys, the same motor patterns over and over for months and years? That's what works best.

But I will certainly still give in to clients and give them some variety, but I'll explain to them... and I'll use myself as an example or I'll use my parents who I recently started training, now that we've opened another location closer to them, I've been able to train them and they're both in their seventies, so they've been working out for about a year. They've each done the exact same workout. It has not changed in a year. They don't even ask. And, and I think that's 'cause they inherently trust me, but they don't even ask about the other machines – they know I'm putting them on what, what they need to do, and it really comes down to the execution.

So, I think our passion... if we're passionate about our instruction and about the execution of the workout, that can overcome some of the boredom and some of the variety that's requested, because I don't think variety is the way to go, especially for newer clients.

Okay, and then, exercise sequence – let's run through this quickly.



EXERCISE SEQUENCE

- MUR is the key (at least for strength and hypertrophy)
- Push, Pull, Legs – within session rotation
- Problematic Pairings (LP into Lumb)
- Multiple compounds and Perceived Level of Effort – what's the rush?
- Leg Press last???



This really does matter, especially the more advanced someone is.

I see all the time – I'll get a chart, or – in the old days, when we used to write out our workouts, Lawrence, we'd write the workouts out on a paper chart – I would see a chest press and an overhead press on the same workout, and, and it wouldn't be numbered. And I would wonder, "Well, which am I doing first?" Because it makes a huge difference in the outcome. Those two movements overlap and the one will fatigue the other directly, very directly. So, it makes sense to lay your workout out so that you're optimizing the sequence.

And, I spoke a little bit about motor unit recruitment and about how... new trainees, rather – new subjects – they've not really tapped into much of their musculature at all. So, *anything* they do... they're gonna get a huge increase in motor unit recruitment.

But... somebody becomes intermediate – and even into the advanced level – their motor unit recruitment is gonna be pretty much tapped out, so we need to be very strategic in how we sequence it.

So, in my mind, that means I want to rotate through a pushing movement, a pulling movement, then the legs, and then back through that.



We hear the push-pull-leg split and that split is... fine, whatever — full body, I think, is better. But I'm talking about the *within session* rotation of exercises.

So, a pushing movement: so, maybe a chest press, a row, then the legs or the hips... maybe a leg curl, then, back up. Because if I go right from a row into a pull down, that pull down is gonna be greatly affected by that row that I just did. And what's gonna happen is I'll be full strength on that row, but that pull down is gonna be greatly compromised. And because of the fatigue, I'm not gonna access the motor units that I need to access on that pull down.

So, I like to put a little bit of space in between them. And that's easy to prove. You could do your compound row and then immediately do the pull down and then try those two exercises, but put 10 minutes in between — the fact that you get a better performance on that pulldown means you're recruiting more motor units.

That's what that strength is: you're accessing more motor units because there's less fatigue.

And again, not that our quantitative output from a workout is the end-all, be-all; it's not. But if we're talking about strength and hypertrophy and I'm trying to optimize, I think it's better to put some space in between similar movement patterns.

So, that's why I like to rotate: I'll do a row, I'll do a chest press, and then maybe an abduction, and then back to the upper body.

We also have some problematic pairings that I think we should avoid at all costs — so, when we talk programming and we talk sequencing, I think anytime you do a leg press or a leg extension and go right into a lumbar — and Al Coleman talked about this too, and he was spot on, as usual — anytime we do those movements and go into a lumbar, you've got problems on a couple of levels: number one, your legs are uncomfortable from the leg press you just performed. And now I'm gonna sit down on the lumbar and you're gonna put those pads, that femur restraint, and you're gonna crank that down? That's gonna be uncomfortable. And right away, that's gonna take away from my output on the lumbar. So, we've gotta avoid that. Same with leg extension.

And I also don't like to go from the lumbar right into the leg press. I don't want to fatigue or to feel that pump effect, if you will, in the low back muscles that you get from the lumbar, and then hop right on the leg press, and now I'm in spinal flexion, so now I'm feeling that musculature back there, that automatically will decrease your motor unit recruitment without a doubt. So, I like to put some space between those two.

Same thing with multiple compound movements, right?



If you want to blow somebody away in two exercises, have them do a pull down and go right into a leg press – those two movements back to back, they'll be – they should be, if they do 'em right – they'll be gasping for air, okay?

And what that's gonna do is that's going to increase their *perceived* level of effort.

We all have this perceived level of effort, and it's different for everyone. But it's how hard the effort – and it's not necessarily exercise; it could be any physical movement, any physical act we're doing – there's a perceived level of effort with that. And the higher that is, the more likely I am to quit or reach my maximum tolerable level, in which case I'm gonna stop my effort, which means I'm leaving some motor units – back to motor unit recruitment – I'm leaving some of those motor units untapped, which means they're not stimulated.

So, anytime I'm increasing a perceived level of effort, I'm also increasing my... or I'm getting closer to my tolerable level of effort, my maximum tolerable level of effort. And I realized that we want to create an effect. We want clients to feel as though they've worked.

But again, if we're trying to optimize and, and looking at strength and hypertrophy, maybe splitting those movements up, maybe going from a pull down to something less challenging, whether it be neck extension or abduction, and then into the leg press or... and that's why I have, what's the rush there? Maybe not rushing in between movements so fast, and I know we're limited on time, but if we give them a little bit of time to catch their breath, their next set is gonna be better, which means their motor unit recruitment is gonna be a little bit higher. They're gonna get more out of it. Because I don't think we should be using these workouts for cardio, even though we can.

As Skyler pointed out – he made a great point – we can structure it that way. We can make these workouts a cardio-type effect. I just don't know that that's the best way to do it.

So, I kind of take my time, and I take big movements, and I tend to split them apart with smaller movements in between, to give a built-in rest period.

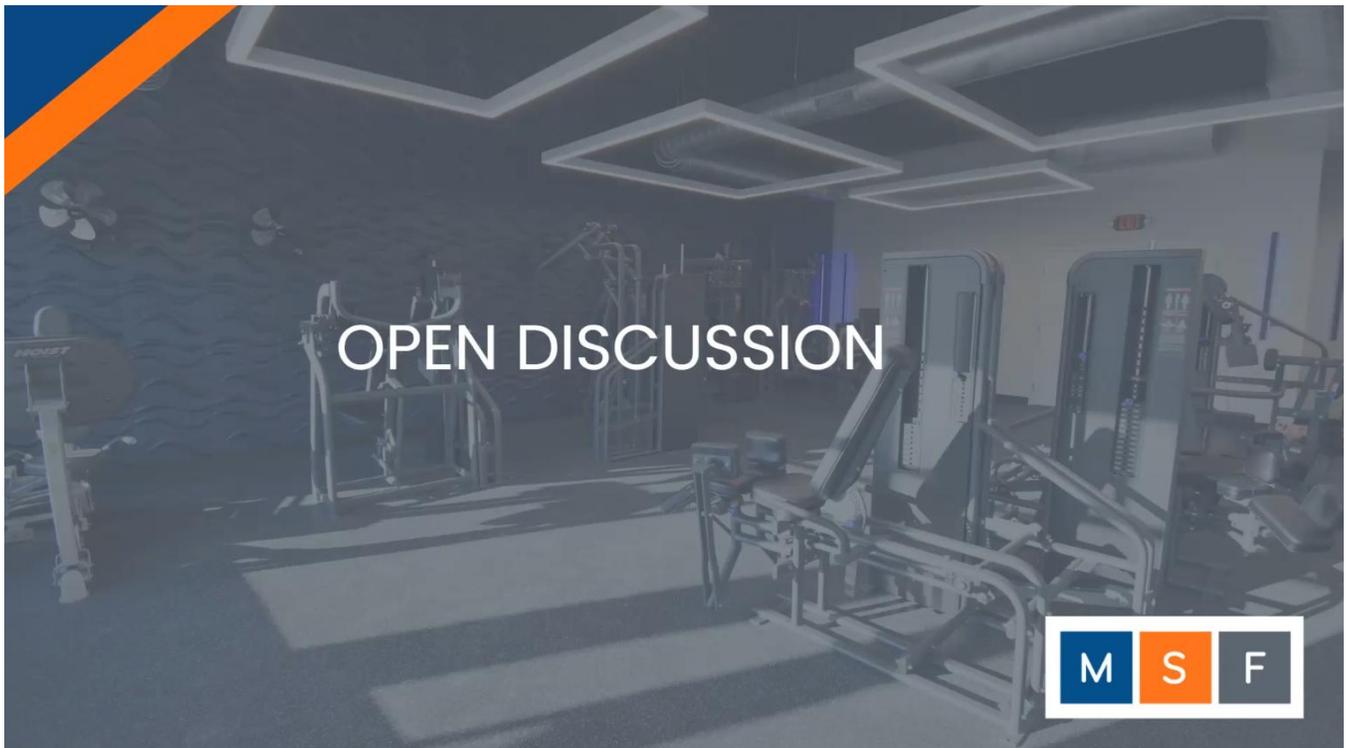
And that's why I consider leg press last. I know a lot of people are for putting that leg press forward first... or more forward in a routine.

Ken Hutchins himself explained that while you're at full strength, it's best to use what could be considered the most important exercise – it's best to put that first. The problem is that if you do it properly, the oxygen debt afterwards, you never catch your breath again. And oxygen debt is a form of perceived level of effort or it's a variation of it. And it just makes everything that follows harder.



So, I like putting that leg press last. Again, at least for strength training and hypertrophy, I like to put that leg press last... and there we are.

So, open for discussion.



Lawrence Neal: Brian, That was awesome.

Brian Stroh: Oh, cool. Thank you.

Lawrence Neal: Yeah, that was very good. I really enjoyed that. I think it was great. You laid the groundwork so well.

Guys, open for questions now, so, if you've got any questions, you can raise a hand, you can write in the chat, you can write in the Q&A – if you raise a hand, I'll unmute you, you can ask the question. You can speak and ask Brian the question live. Fire away guys, we've got 17 minutes of questions...

So, well... to get things going, Brian, great presentation – I really enjoyed it. So many things that I could... so many threads I could pull.



I just wanted to know: you seem very confident in your view that... you feel that twice a week is, you actually said *twice as good* than, in some cases, once a week. Perhaps you're way more immersed in... I'm sure you are way more immersed in literature than I am, but I would love to know what gives you that confidence. Like, what is it you've seen or read that makes you feel that that's the case?

Brian Stroh: Yeah, that's a great question. And I realize that that might be controversial in our niche, because the suggestion – even Mike Mentzer – “when you're not making progress, insert more time.”

Let's think of this from two approaches.

Number one, with our own training. Because you and I, Lawrence and everybody else on this call, we train really hard, okay? But our clients don't. So, most of our clients – and I'm not bad mouthing them; I love my clients, and I feel like they actually need us, and that's a good thing, they really do need us – the strength training isn't necessarily an instinctive thing that people would know how to do properly or safely, so, they need us, and I love them for that – but a lot of clients don't train hard enough to even warrant this idea of needing more rest.

And I understand it feels overwhelming to them. The workout... it feels overwhelming to them, but at the end of the day, we're all human beings. We're all these organisms, and we have this physiology. And if they're not... continuously tapping into those higher threshold motor units with higher level of effort, then I don't know that it warrants more rest. It's definitely the wrong approach, I think, more rest with our clients. I definitely think it's the wrong approach.

And getting back to your specific question, Lawrence: you mentioned, “what makes me so confident?”

I'm not a literature guy. I'm from an accounting background, so I don't have this exercise physiology background. But I've experienced things myself, so I always implement whatever I suggest. I always implement it in my own training, and I'm a stickler... on my own training, my workouts are probably one of the most important things to me – they're sacred. So, when I talk about this, trust that I've tried every approach.

The idea that the workout itself stimulates this muscle protein synthesis, right?

So, our body is always synthesizing protein, but when we invoke a hard training session, um... I'm sorry, the hard training session would invoke this increase, our body's gonna become more sensitized or more efficient with synthesizing this protein – which is important that we have



protein in our body, so we make sure we eat enough protein, but – it's gonna synthesize it at a higher rate.

So, the workout itself signals the increase in muscle protein synthesis. Well, those levels fall off after about 48 hours, which means we can stimulate that again.

Now, we've gotta be careful with fatigue. If I'm doing a high volume workout, or I'm doing exercises that have a lot of stretched positions – let's say I take a chest fly and I set it up so that I get a really big stretch at the lower turnaround – I'm gonna be sore from that, I probably won't recover.

But if I'm minimizing my volume... just enough to invoke the stimulus, after 48 hours, that muscle protein synthesis tapers off and it's back to its normal levels. I can stimulate it again with another session – and that's the key. I want to always be elevating my muscle protein synthesis, 'cause that's the indication that I'm building muscle.

And to put more time in between... that muscle protein synthesis is just gonna completely flatline or go back to its normal levels, and I'm not gonna be building anything.

Now, I may have to – if I've done a lot of volume and we can discuss what volume... how high is too much or high, how high is, or how little is too little, we can certainly discuss that, maybe that could be another presentation in the future – but just know that the MPS levels tend to be 48 hours.

Now there are other studies out there that show 72 hours. The problem with that is, there are some folks, some physiologists that say, “Well, that was muscle swelling that was being measured from the workout itself.” And muscle swelling is a result of inflammation, which is not how we build muscle. We don't build muscle through, you know, damaging a muscle or creating metabolic stress. We really only stimulate and build muscle through mechanical tension.

So, if I've got inflammation present and now my muscle protein synthesis is elevated for even 72 hours – because again, some of that might be, you know, repairing any damage from the workout, even at 72 hours – the idea that twice a week isn't better than once a week is still... it's covered there.

Twice a week gives you plenty of recovery time, again, if our volume is in check.

Lawrence Neal: Sure. Yeah, Brian, I appreciate the answer. I know you can say so much more on that. I want to make sure we also get to attendees' questions. But no, that was really helpful. Thank you. You and I could probably speak about that for like four hours.



Steve B asks: can you speak a bit more on how perceived level of effort affects motor unit recruitment in the following exercises, and if this matters from a customer service perspective?

Can you see that question? Yeah, sorry... so I can read again: Can you speak a bit more on how perceived level of effort affects motor unit recruitment in the following exercises – Steve, I don't know if you meant to type some exercises in there as well – and if this matters from a customer service perspective?

Brian Stroh: Yeah, unfortunately, I'm not seeing the...

Lawrence Neal: ...I'm putting [it] in a chat for you, Brian. There you go – do you see that?

Brian Stroh: Yep, alright. Great question, Steve.

We have this... without getting too scientific – and then again, I'm not scientific in the least, I only understand the basics as I read, okay? But keep in mind too, that they make a lot of sense to me, with my experience, both in my own training and with my clients – but we used to focus on the *burn* and about rushing in between sets of exercise and accumulating lactic acid.

The problem with that is it's very uncomfortable and it makes you want to stop at a base level, it makes you want to stop your exercise.

So, if I'm on the leg press and I'm 12 reps in, and my legs are on fire, and maybe... I can probably do – let's say the weight's light – I can do a total of 15 reps, but by the 12th rep, my legs are burning so bad I just can't tolerate any more – I'm gonna stop the exercise, because my maximum tolerable perception of effort is tapped out.

And when our brain sends a signal – our brain sends out what's called the *central motor command*, right? And that's what activates muscle fibers – that's what tells the body which muscles to use and how many muscle fibers in each muscle group to use – it's the *central motor command*.

Well, a replicate copy is sent back from the periphery to the brain in the form of what's called the corollary discharge. And that corollary discharge tells the brain, “Hey, this is hard, this is uncomfortable,” and it basically will *shut us down*.

So, if I have bigger movements at the beginning of the workout... so Steve, if I were to do the leg press first and now I'm trying to catch my breath, I'm gasping, and now I go and I get on the compound row and I'm doing that and I feel the pressure from the chest pad and I'm gasping for air, I'm not gonna get the output I would if I were fresh and caught my breath.



I realize it's a double-edged sword, because we want to give an effect. We want the client to feel that they're working hard, but I don't think that we should use our protocol – we certainly don't at MaxStrength – we shouldn't use our protocol on our equipment as cardio, okay?

We could structure it and just put all compound movements. I could set the room up before my client gets there and run them through, but their effort would just taper off the further along they went. And they would be more likely to quit on an exercise, and therefore not tap into muscle fibers or motor units that need to be accessed and stimulated.

So that downstream, even if it's not going from a chest press to an overhead – which we said is gonna be a lot on the shoulders and triceps – even if it's just a leg press to a pull down or leg press to compound row, it's going to increase my maximum tolerable effort, and I'm going to stop my exercise. No matter how hardcore I want to be or how tough or resilient I think I am, it's going to affect my performance.

So, I think we need to be careful in how we structure our sequence. Does that make sense, Lawrence... Steve?

Lawrence Neal: Yeah, Steve, feel free to ask a follow up. But in the meantime, I'm going to – that was great, Brian – I'm gonna just put James's question in here as well in the chat.

So, James asks: how would you choose to offer variety to an advanced, twice-per-week client? A-B-C-D, over two weeks for six months, or A/B for eight weeks, and a new A/B after eight weeks? How would you structure that?

Brian Stroh: That's a great question – fantastic question actually.

So, with A, B, C, D, the problem with that, I think, is we get *too much variety* and we're tapping into different motor units.

So, think about it this way: our chest, we have regions – the upper pecs, the coastal pecs – you have different regions. And then, within those regions you have motor units to control certain muscle fibers.

And again, for a beginner client, if they simply do a chest press, they're gonna probably access most of the things in their chest that they've never accessed before.

But all of us on this call, we've done the chest press dozens and dozens of times we've accessed everything, okay?



So, it's important to now incorporate different movements. But here's the problem with *too much variety*: it takes my frequency down.

So, if I do an A-B-C-D, only those muscle fibers that are common, that are commonly trained hard into A, B, C, or D are gonna be stimulated multiple times a week. Now, what we're turning into... think of it as a *bro split*.

So, if my A routine is my chest, I do my chest and my shoulders, and then my B workout is my back, I do my back and my rear delts, and then my C workouts, my legs, and my D workouts, my arms – each one of those is probably only getting stimulated once a week.

So, even though I'm training out four times a week, the frequency is only once a week.

And that again, that muscle protein synthesis that we talked about – that drops off after 48 to 72 hours – It's ready for another, bump up, a nudge from our workout. And that's gonna be missing because these are gonna be different areas.

So, for an advanced client, I think they need more exercises, but I wouldn't go beyond, like, an A and a B, and I would try to make as many exercises in that A and B as common as possible.

So, I mentioned here at MaxStrength that if we picked from one of five categories, we'd have a good workout. Well, an advanced client, they might need seven or eight exercises. And you can probably do that with an advanced client 'cause they've been with you long enough. So, their sets are shorter, they need less instruction. You can just set them up and, and they can go.

Now again, we don't necessarily want to rush, 'cause I want them to catch their breath. It's a constant battle.

But let me get back to the idea of the A and a B – I want to make sure that if back training is a goal for this client, they want to build their back, well, I need to make sure that I'm hitting my upper back with a row, right? With an abducted upper arm. So, now my elbows are out, I'm hitting my upper back – so, the traps, and the rhomboids, and the rear delts – I'm hitting that with my row.

But then I want to put in a pull down with my elbows in, either supinated in the sagittal plane or pronated in the frontal plane to hit my lats, Okay? 'cause my lats aren't getting enough stimulus from the row alone because I've been training for years – I need to put those in both workouts, and I need to make sure that I hit them every time.



Now, if you have the luxury of having multiple manufacturers – so you know, at Westlake here in Cleveland, Ohio, we have a Cybex, we have a SuperSlow, we have a MedX compound row – we can rotate between those, and those are still all a horizontal pulling movement. Those are all still a row. So, we can keep our clients happy [in] that regard, 'cause to them, it's a different machine when really, it's the same movement pattern.

So, I think... we gotta be careful with too much variety because we end up creating too many different movement patterns that end up reducing our frequency.

But if I have an A routine and a B routine that are similar – not necessarily exactly the same – are similar, and I go three times a week... so, let's say I go Monday, Wednesday, Friday, then one week I'm gonna be going A, B, A, and the next week I'm gonna go B, A, B. So, over a two-week period, I'm hitting each workout three times.

And that's still gonna be a decent amount of frequency based on the idea that this MPS window or... there's also myo-fibrillary protein synthesis, which addresses just the contractile tissue, just the fibers that I'm gonna be nudging that that period where it's elevated, I'm gonna be nudging it up three times in two weeks. And if I have any movements between the A and the B, which I probably will or I should, I'm gonna be increasing that frequency even more.

So, I'd be careful. I know our clients that have been with us a long time, we want to give them A-B-C-D, we want to give them every different machine in the room, but I think there's diminishing returns with that.

Now, obviously we have to make them happy, we have to keep them interested. But I think that's where our passion as instructors to use our instruction and the actual execution of the program needs to be the focus, not what machines they're doing or not doing. Does that make sense?

Lawrence Neal: Yeah. Brian, that was fantastic answer. I think I speak for everyone when I say that this has been a great session and a great Q&A.

James, hopefully you found that helpful.

Guys, we're at time – thank you so much for attending, Brian, I really appreciate this. This has been amazing! Great presentation, really good Q&A. I hope we can do so much more together 'cause I just think there's so much more we can talk about.

Brian Stroh: Yeah!



Lawrence Neal: Um, just before we wrap up guys, just a couple of things quickly: Brian has kindly... so, I sent some of your questions when we were planning this to Brian, to kind of get an idea of the type of things that people wanted to know and understand better. And Brian, I think you said you wrote up some answers to that and you might be able to send that to me and I'll share that. That'd be great.

Brian Stroh: Yeah. It's a little rough. It's... more in the form of notes, but there's still... the content's there.

Lawrence Neal: Oh, cool. Yeah, I mean, that's fine. Don't worry, that sounds great. And obviously, if people want to learn more about you, learn more about MaxStrength Fitness franchise opportunity, it's [MaxStrengthFitness.com](https://www.MaxStrengthFitness.com).

Thank you, everyone, for being a member, as always.

And for next month's Masterclass, we're going to do something more business development/marketing-related – probably, someone's going to come on and talk about Google Ads.

I know someone who had some great results recently with Google Ads getting new leads, incredible ROAS, which is just short for “Return On Ad Spend”. Like, really impressive. And there's someone who's very well-known in high-intensity training.

So, I'll confirm that shortly and get that, uh, posted inside HIB for you guys to register as well.

And that is that! Brian... any parting thoughts before we wrap up? This has been great.

Brian Stroh: Uh, no, I just think, you know, with all the talking that I did, I think the key concept here is to simplify this whole idea of strength training, not only for our clients, but internally – we have these complicated ideas out there on strength training, but I think we can really simplify 'em down to some basic principles and use that to help guide us with our programming, with our instruction, and with our talks with clients. I think that goes a long way into retention.

Lawrence Neal: Yeah, well said. And needless to say, I'm going to be doing some new N=1 experiments on myself after this, going to three times a week! A-B-A and B-A-B routines. So, I'm be [unintelligible], if you don't mind!

Brian Stroh: Let's do, this is my, this is my favorite thing to do! Yes, we're busy here growing franchises, but to me just talking about strength training, I can't think of anything I'd rather do, honestly.



Yeah. So, yeah, please, Lawrence, ask away. I'd be happy to help you.

Lawrence Neal: Thank you, yeah, your enthusiasm is palpable! Really appreciate it.

Alright, Brian, well, have a great rest of your day, and thanks again.

Everyone, have a great rest of yours and, yeah, we'll talk soon.

Brian Stroh: Thanks everyone.

Lawrence Neal: Awesome. Thanks. Take care everyone. Bye-Bye.