



Tell Me Anything But Don't Tell Me To Stop Training

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Here you come with your signature limp and stifled grimace of pain. Your stark look of disappointment suggests that ice, anti-inflammatory drugs and electro stimulation therapy have collectively done little to alleviate your demoralizing leg pains. Your doctor, the reluctant physician, knows what's coming next and how he would like to respond. However, fidelity to his Hippocratic Oath will not permit a surrender to the impulse to run and hide underneath his desk. The first imploring words out of your mouth are: "Doc, I've been training for six months to run/bike/swim/ a PR in this upcoming race. I'm soooooo close to reaching my goal. I can't stop training now. You've gotta help me."

Meanwhile, you are walking on your injured leg as if it is a poorly fitted prosthesis. Common sense dictates that you wave the white flag of frustration and disappointment, ask for a hug and then, drown your sorrows in a few pints of Ben & Jerry's ice cream until you can accept a few weeks of enforced idleness. Maybe then you will seize the rare opportunity to start reading those books you never found the time to pick up. Maybe perhaps, you'll even learn to play that instrument your parents returned decades ago when you threw it at your brother in a moment of sibling rivalry.

Between the expletives you are probably muttering: "This guy is clueless. He doesn't understand how hard I have worked to get to this point." Your "clueless author" would ask you to consider that if there wasn't some part of you that didn't want to get off the "training treadmill" then, you wouldn't be where you are right now. Furthermore, you wouldn't now be looking to turn your physician into a "bad guy" when he plays Devil's Advocate and asks you: "Would you like to rest for two weeks now or be laid up for six months later?" If being stuck between a rock and a hard place be your worst nightmare please keep in mind that whatever you hope to achieve in performing at your best may not in truth be all that it's all cracked up to be in your fantasy life.

Your physician has already figured out after the third or fourth go around with you that he is wasting his breath asking you to consider the probable consequences of abusing your body and how you would feel if such a scenario was played out to its natural and debilitating conclusion. It's amazing how deaf we can be when we don't want to listen to what we most need to hear. Why even recommend non weight bearing aerobics when your physician knows that to belabor the point is to risk losing you as a patient. So, how is a health care provider to deal with patients like us when we feel in our hearts that a world without pumping endorphins is like a world without sunshine?

I'm thinking specifically about the injuries sustained by those of us who believe that "more training is better," "too much training is never enough," and that "less is more" is reserved for lazy underachievers. By training on the edge we repudiate the time honored notions of rest and recovery. Without them, our bodies break down instead of adapting to training stress, and instead of reaping improved levels of performance, our performances diminish over time and/or we get sick and injured. So, why then do we cut off our noses to spite our faces?

The answers are many and they are not mutually exclusive. Principally, owing in part to how our personalities develop we have varying degrees of trust in processes we can't exercise omnipotent control over, i.e. creativity, emotions and the body's performance improvements that require rest and recovery. "Doing" is valued and "being" is not. We may move so urgently toward our desired goals so as not even to question why we are in such a rush. Then, whether we are aware of it or not, we may rebel against the internal pressures to do, do, and do more by over indulging in passive pleasures such as eating, and drinking to turn of the compulsive power switch until the rooster crows the next morning. Then, it's back off to the races.

Some of my clients describe themselves as "slaves" to their jobs, hobbies and athletic outlets without recognizing the poignant implications of this metaphor. We may kick and scream at the suggestion that we "shut it down" for awhile. Seldom if ever do we reflect on the evidence that such dramatic refrains as: "No pain, no gain," may be nothing more than a defense mechanism against guilt provoking wishes to "take it easy." In truth we may be begging for firm, benevolent paternal responses from folks like our trusted physicians such as: "I don't want to see you in my office again unless, you stay off the roads, your bikes, etc., for ____ days.

Many of us are unaware that we may harbor fears that if we do not crack the proverbial whips daily we may never muster the motivation to train again. Such self doubts may originate in childhood with well meaning parents who unwittingly transmit through words and actions: "If I weren't here to push you, you wouldn't get anything done." Others may have learned early in life that one is not entitled to enjoy any aspect of one's life if one does not pay first with a "pound of flesh."

If you are a workaholic on and off the athletic field it may be time to ask yourself why it is that my things to do list is perpetually filled with things to do and the unfinished business keeps me running even when the business isn't urgent or important? Maybe, it's time to consider that "less may be more" and will result in better performances, greater enjoyment and more time to nurture multiple sources of self esteem. We may underestimate our abilities to trust the messages our inner voices communicate to us. Our bodies speak volumes. Start listening!