

DAN JOHN

The Quadrants of Diet and Exercise

The thing that amazes me the most the longer I'm in this field is the great amount of discipline, free will and just human courage people have on the day before starting a new diet. It doesn't matter what you say. They're like Captain America rolled into Gilgamesh, Hercules, Batman, Superman, King Arthur, anybody, the day before they start a diet.

Of course, once the diet starts I hear, "Well, I know I'm supposed to eat seven cherries, but I didn't have cherries so I ate a quart of ice cream." I hear this constantly and it's funny, but I'm amazed it keeps going on and on and on.

What got me thinking about these dieters in the last few months was actually my academic background and I came to realize two big points about diets and exercise that I'm going to tie together here.

The first point goes all the way back to when I was in college, which to me seems like a week ago, but to others it was a long, long time ago.

I studied *Beowulf* as part of my master's degree. In fact, of all the things I know, I think I know *Beowulf* the best. I worked really hard on it. I went through it one time with Burton Raffel's English translation and broke down every sentence into a sentence deciding whether it was a declared sentence or a question. Oh, I worked too hard on that. Then it hit me that a big issue in the book *Beowulf*—the old epic—is that warriors in the story always speak in the pure-present tense. I've called this 'warrior speech' my whole life and I think that's the way athletes usually talk: Let's talk about today.

When I'm getting ready for a track meet, please don't ask me, 'Dan, didn't you at one time throw blah, blah, blah?' 'No. No. Today is today.' 'What about next month? Are you going to the Monkey Magic Invitational?' 'No, let's talk about today.' When I'm in warrior mode, I'm all about today. You have "to be" to be an athlete.

Though I've never really found out who actually said it first, I've always quoted George Sheehan as saying there are four people who live in the pure-present.

The first group in the pure-present are children because there's no past to them. They don't have the memory for it and the future...Well, I'm going to be a super hero or a cowboy. They live in the pure-present.

Poets, in which group I include actors, actresses and artists, live in the pure-present. We shuffle our movie stars into this all the time. The person might have made a trillion dollars in films, but one dud and boom. The person is nobody anymore.

The elderly live in the pure-present. In fact, that's one of the real joys of being around older folks. I would say the sick as well live in the pure-present. There's nothing more now than being ill.

Of course, the last group would be athletes; athletes live in the pure-present. It's funny. With the Olympic games, people talk, 'Well, he won four years ago,' like he's some kind of bum. 'He got a gold last time, but this time he took fifth. What's wrong with him?'

Fifth is pretty good at the Olympics.

I contrast the pure-present, or warrior speech, with kings. The best way to get a sense of kingly speech is to read the *Gettysburg Address*. It starts off with a reference to the past, "Fourscore and seven years ago..." Abraham Lincoln notes the present and then goes on to reference the future by saying, "Years from now, few will remember what was said here." That's a perfect kingly speech and that's how I think most of us should approach a lot of the things we do—past, present and future.

One of my newest clichés I'm just beating to death is, "It's not what you're going to eat tomorrow that's the issue. It's what you ate yesterday." Think back to the heroic dieter on December 31st with a fistful of booze, a pocketful of Cheetos and a handful of munchies telling you how disciplined he's going to be tomorrow.

But it doesn't always work. Most of us need to sit down and say, 'Okay, this is what I've been doing for a long time. Here's where I'd like to be 20 years from now.'

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This is the transcript of Dan John's *The Quadrants of Diet and Exercise* audio lecture.

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Right now, what's the best way to go from where I've been in the past, to where I want to go in the future? I call this the kingly approach. Just quickly to review, the warrior approach is to live in the pure-present. The kingly approach represents the past, present and future.

Usually I talk about this with diet. I call it a warrior-style diet. Ori Hofmekler wrote a great book called *The Warrior Diet* and it's really one of the best ways to look at dieting. I'd also throw in Chris Shugart's Velocity Diet, which I've written too much about, and maybe even the two week meat fest that is the Atkins' Induction.

Intermittent fasting folks are pretty warrior-minded. I was out years ago with a group of military guys who were all doing intermittent fasting. There was no place to eat at meal time, so we went to a McDonald's. It was stunning to watch these guys pushing two and three sundaes in their mouths, then burger after burger, trying to get as many calories into their faces as fast as they could. No, Mom doesn't want you to eat like that, but folks, that's warrior eating.

The kingly approach to dieting is more my favorite. A good example might be the Mediterranean Diet. Take a class on it, and the instructor will discuss the olive oil business one week or the history of the tomato. Then here's a recipe to cook today. Of course if you eat this way, three years from now you'll have golden, tanned skin with just a sheen of health. You'll be thin where you want to be thin and robust where you want to be robust.

I like that approach and I think both approaches are right. I think you can have the warrior diet approach. I've always thought that and I am a huge fan of things like the 28-day Velocity Diet.

This is what I get ripped for on the internet most frequently. That Dan John, he likes everything... and I do. I also think there are times when you can warrior diet. I don't want to repeat what I've had to do to lose weight for an Olympic lifting meet, but it's scary stuff. At the same time, it might have been a brighter idea for me to eat more reasonably for six months so I wouldn't have shown up two days before

the meet 21 pounds overweight. The truth is, who knows whether I would have done better on one plan than the other. I don't know. Now, let's contrast this with my second point and one of the principles people miss, which I think is really important .

Years ago, I was reading a magazine article about prayer and spirituality. The article was by George Niederauer, which was interesting because my boss at the time was Bishop—now Archbishop—George Niederauer. I sent him a little note, 'Are they talking about you?' He let me know, 'Yeah, that's my article.'

He said prayer comes in two kinds. There are "bus bench" prayers and "park bench" prayers. A bus bench and a park bench look exactly the same, but your expectations sitting in them are radically different.

If you're sitting on a bus bench and waiting on the 8:14 (the bus I used to take to work), and that bus isn't there and you don't see it coming down the street by 8:09, you get a little weird. At 8:10 if you still don't see it, now you're thinking, 'I'm going to be late.' If you don't see it by 8:12 or 8:13, you're freaking out. Of course if it gets to 8:15 or 8:16, you might be late for work and bad things happen, especially if you're a schoolteacher. That's the bus bench.

Take the same bench and put it in a park. You and I go to the park this week. It's a nice day. There's a bird over there. 'Hi, Mr. Bird.' There's a squirrel. The squirrel pops over—pop, pop, pop. 'Hi, Mr. Squirrel.' He leaves. Three days later, it's the same park bench. We see the bird. 'Hi, Mr. Bird.' There's no squirrel. I don't get angry if there's no squirrel today. You don't get angry if there's no squirrel today. I'm perfectly fine without a squirrel today.

That's the park bench.

I think a lot of people try to train in what I call the bus bench mode. You know when you've been on a bus bench program. That's a two-week program, or six weeks to add one inch on your arms, or...mighty titanic triceps in three days. That Soviet squat program I did years ago was rough and I will tell you one thing: If you don't get results in a

bus bench squat workout, you have the right to be angry. You worked hard. You should get results.

When I did the Soviet squat program—the one where one workout has six sets of six with 80% of your best—it killed me. I racked the bar after the first set and was sick to my stomach realizing I had five more of those to go. That's tough stuff. At the end of that time, though, I added 20 pounds to my front squat. I expected results from the program and it worked for me. That's a bus bench program.

If you read my work, you'll notice I usually argue for park bench workouts. I also call them "punch the clock workouts," but I like this notion that you just kind of go in the gym sometimes and work out a bit. It's not an heroic quest.

My point with the *Intervention* book and DVD is to point out that fairly reasonable training can, over time, lead to much better gains than these insanity programs that last 90 days. Dan Martin famously called me "Mr. 91" because I'm the guy who sits around going, 'Okay, 90 days is great. What are you going to do on day 91?' Seriously, what are you going to do? I've made my career thinking this way.

The mistake you might make is to think park bench workouts—doing the basic human movements, doing them with reasonable sets and rep programs, doing them with reasonable loads—are somehow right and these crazy 90-day programs are wrong. I didn't say that. Both park and bus bench workouts have a place in our training. The problem for most people is when they try to combine all the points I've made so far.

I think it's pretty clear we can create four quadrants with these combinations of diet and exercise.

The first quadrant is a warrior-style diet and bus bench workouts. Here's what most people think they can do: They're the drunk December 31st crowd. They think they can do a bus bench workout—PX90 or something like that—with what I would call a warrior-style diet. This might be Induction from Atkins; this might be the Velocity Diet. You know what? I think there are times when you can do that.

That's a tough diet with a tough workout program. However, I don't know if you can do it for 90 days—that would be rough. It's like when a person gets a juicer and decides to drink and eat just juice for two weeks or do a liver cleansing for two weeks plus train hard. After a short amount of time, your body just throws in the towel. I think you can do both, but it's the hardest combination to do.

Looking at other combinations, let's try a park bench workout with that warrior-style diet. You actually see that with the new Velocity Diet information from Chris Shugart. There's no question that six protein shakes a day is a warrior diet, so let's combine that with a very park-bench workout. That might be three days a week doing every human movement for three sets of five or three sets of eight. You leave the workout more refreshed than when you first started, and I love that kind of thing.

I really think warrior-style dieting mixed with park-bench workouts is doable. In fact, if you were to tell me you're going to try to attack fat loss solely with diet, I'd tell you to go for it. Do that 28-day or two-week thing, but make sure your workouts are reasonable.

On the other end of the continuum, I find a king-style diet such as Mediterranean, Atkins' or even the Paleo Tiffany and I call 'meat, leaves and berries,' very doable for a long period of time. You can disagree with the specifics, but follow the principle of the park-bench workout. If I were to say, 'Okay, I want you to eat the Mediterranean diet, three meals a day with lots of vegetables, lots of spices and lots of color in the meals, mixed with reasonable workouts,' you'd look at me like, 'Yeah, I can do that forever, Dan.'

Right. Thank you. That's the point: park bench workouts and a king-style diet. The bulk of your training probably is a king-style diet (a reasonable diet) mixed with park-bench workouts (a reasonable workout).

There is one other quadrant left to discuss. This is when you combine a reasonable diet with tough workouts. Personally, I think this is how to peak. Once again, you have this king-style diet. For the

sake of example, let's stick with the Mediterranean plan because it has the least critics. Could you do the Mediterranean-style diet and mix it with a really tough program such as a 13-week peak cycle like Dave Turner's 10-week peaking plan? You absolutely can do that. You can ratchet some tough workouts if you're being reasonable on the diet side.

When you have a reasonable diet, you can practically do anything in the weight room or on the training field. If your diet is reasonable, you can do a lot of reasonable workouts, but you can also ratchet up the intensity a couple of times a year and go after it with some tough workouts.

When I was young, I used to think I was always only three to six weeks away from my peak. To be honest with you, when I was 18, 19 or 20 and my snatch was only 231 pounds and my clean-and-jerk was just over 300, it wouldn't take me very long to get up to those numbers. A few weeks of just going after it in the weight room and I'd be right there at my best numbers. Of course as a career goes on, you need to take more and more time to build up to the bigger numbers.

Is it possible to combine warrior-style diet and bus-bench workouts in a year or a decade? Absolutely. How often can you do a tough diet and tough workouts with the tough diet being a warrior-style diet? For the combination of tough and tough, I think it's rare and I think most people can probably only do it for two weeks.

There are a few people who can probably sneak that up to four or six weeks. I certainly know if you've been in a physique contest, you know how to do it even longer. Bless you. I hope that's a skill set you keep for the rest of your life because that's rare air.

One thing you'll note about people who compete in physique contests: Ask them how they're doing and they might punch you. You're not your happiest when doing tough diets and tough workouts. It's tough on a marriage. It's tough on raising children. It's certainly tough at work. I found out afterward that I was not always the happiest man in the world on the Velocity Diet.

Is it possible to do a warrior-style diet with a park-bench workout? Yes. To be frank, I think you can probably do that for about four weeks. This might be a great thing to do before bikini season, perhaps before a school reunion or before a wedding when you really tighten down the diet and keep training. In fact, it's very doable.

Most of us recognize this as one of the ways we do a quick size-loss program. Now, I don't want to call it fat loss or even weight loss, because that doesn't always happen. However, this represents a reasonable workout mixed with a tough diet, and we can handle that maybe twice in a year. Doing a tough diet and a tough workout, maybe we can do that once every four or five years. It would have to be for something really, really important to me. For those of you who do physique contests or perhaps those of you who wrestle...you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din.

You could do the king-style diet mixed with the bus bench workouts, or what I call the reasonable diet with tough workouts, twice a year if you're an athlete. Marty Gallagher talks about how he made Captain Kirk Kowalski and Ed Coan have two 12-week cycles a year—one to get ready for the Nationals and one to get ready for the Worlds. They weren't allowed to miss repetitions. They were supposed to come in and just take care of business. These are tough workouts but doable if supported by a reasonable diet.

As I age as an Olympic lifter, I can see myself peaking for eight weeks or 10 weeks. I'm not going to peak for the Christmas Invitational, but peaking for the Nationals might not be a bad idea. For the bulk of the time, though, it's really important to have a king-style diet mixed with a park-bench workout—reasonable and reasonable.

When I discuss tough workouts, I often hear, "There's not enough time in the week for us to do all of this." I have done some pretty tough workouts and I believe that I have 24 hours a day, roughly, seven days a week. Do I suddenly sneak up and have extra time?

A person who was staying with me in Utah was telling me about how he trained three hours a day. It's going to be tough to for an adult to raise kids, have a full-time job, have a relationship that matters, be part of the community, on and on and on, training three hours a day. I could certainly do that in college, but even then I think I wasted most of my time in training.

This visitor and I did a little experiment. We went to Dave Turner's gym and did the Hercules Barbell Club workout. In one hour, Dave took us through 13 warm-up exercises. He then made us do snatches and clean-and-jerks with sticks. Then we did 26 sets of exercises—front squats, snatches, clean-and-jerks and presses. For the few minutes left, we had to clean up, yell out the team's motto and then we left.

The challenge was that we had to have it all done in one hour. We did 26 sets of Olympic lifts, plus a pretty brutal warm-up in less than an hour. Two and three days later, my house guest was still sore. He said to me, 'I suddenly get it. My workouts weren't three hours. I was *in the gym* for three hours.'

I'm crazy about this concept of reasonable workouts with reasonable diets most of the time. You can see it in my book, *Never Let Go*, and it's in everything I write: Hey, folks, sometimes you have to lighten up. You have to enjoy it. And a warrior-style eating program is actually kind of fun. I hate to say it like this, but you kind of feel better than everybody. You do. It's like, 'Look at me! Look at me! I am the paradigm of discipline!'

As I come to the end of this idea, I want to make sure we don't pigeonhole these quadrants of dieting and training. I constantly hear, "Oh, that's Dan John. He's the guy who makes things simple." That drives me crazy.

John Powell often talks about this idea called 'simple.' We teach the discus technique called Stretch-One-Two-Three. One time John was teaching this technique to a boy. The boy started doing it, tripped over his feet and fell on the ground. Then the boy said, "You said this would be easy." John famously said, "I said this would be simple, not easy."

Folks, reasonable diets and reasonable training sound so easy but it's not. It's simple. It's simple, but let me tell you something that's hard: If you're going to work out three days a week for the next 10 years, that means most of you are going to work out three days a week for the next 10 years in the gym.

I have my own home gym. Going out to the garage to train three days a week on your own in the hot summer or the snowy winter when there are better and more fun things to do around the house is tough. I know it's tough because I've been doing it for decades. Reasonable sounds so simple but we fall in love with the toughness of tough training. 'I'm all about this tough stuff, tough stuff, tough stuff.'

In my humble opinion, the simple programs that look easy on paper are the hardest to do because you don't have that heroism of, 'I am taking on the world. I am Beowulf. I am Superman. I am Wonder Woman.' The boring programs I recommend for the bulk of the time—reasonable training programs, reasonable diet plans—are hard!

When you tell somebody, 'I'm doing the Mediterranean Diet,' 'I'm doing the basic human movements in the weight room' and 'I'm making sure my joints are mobile,' hey, even I got bored writing that sentence, but that's what works long term.

The heroic tough workouts...I get it. We fall in love with them, but remember, reasonable work and reasonable diets are their own kind of hard. To quote my friend, John Powell, I said it was simple, not easy.