SCIENCE *of* STRENGTH TRAINING

15 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY CLIENT

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO PROGRAM DESIGN

WRITTEN BY:
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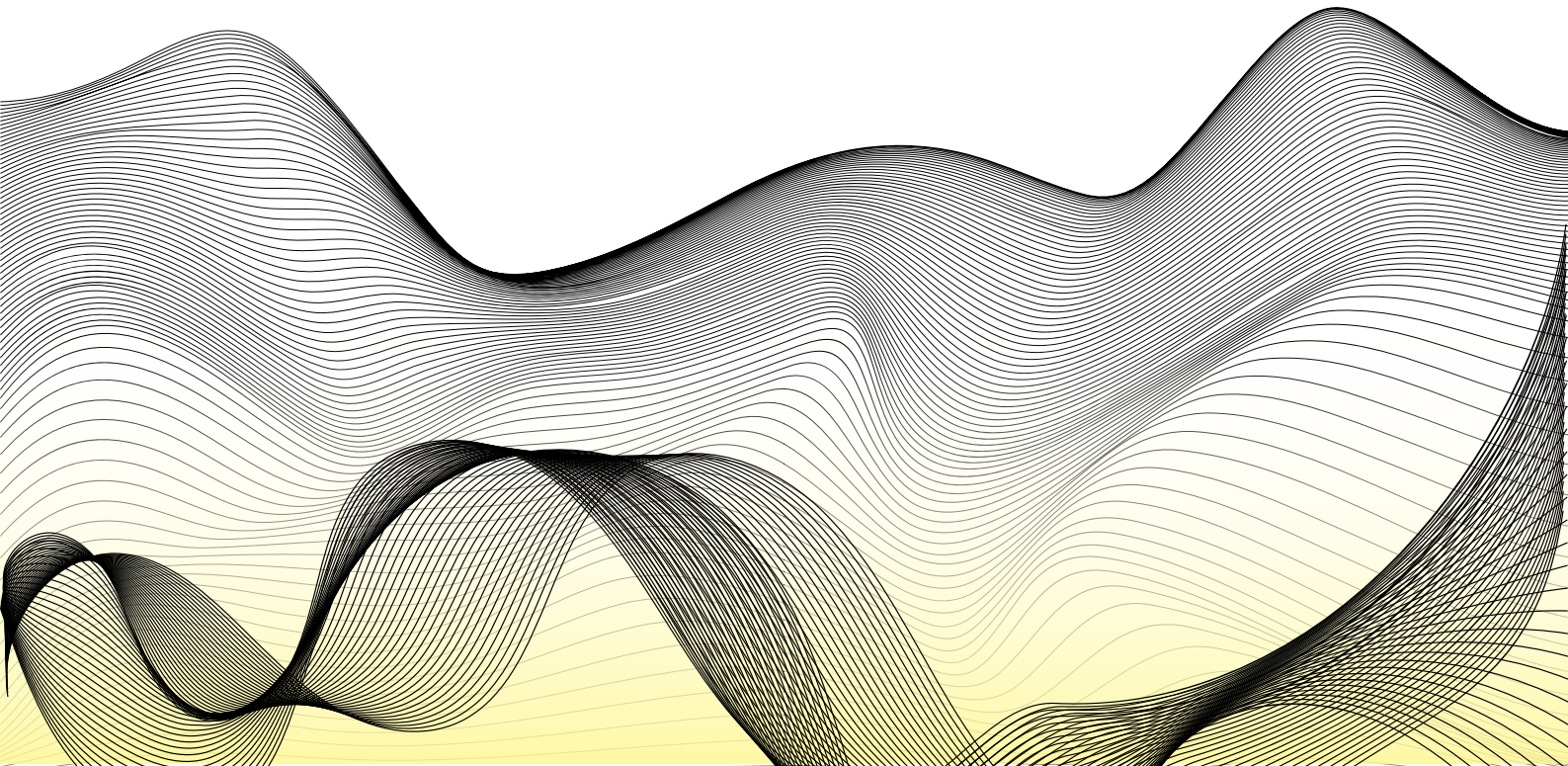


INTRO

Throughout my career as a personal trainer, I've had many insecurities about my skillset. So much so that I think it's left me crippled when it comes to making decisions that are best for my clients — at least, that's where my head went during the decision-making process.

For me, nutrition always seemed relatively simple. Find their relative maintenance calories, then create a caloric deficit or surplus to help them move in their desired direction — lose body fat, gain muscle, etc.

But when it came to designing effective training programs, the options seemed endless. And they are, making it even more challenging to know if you're putting the client in a position to succeed.

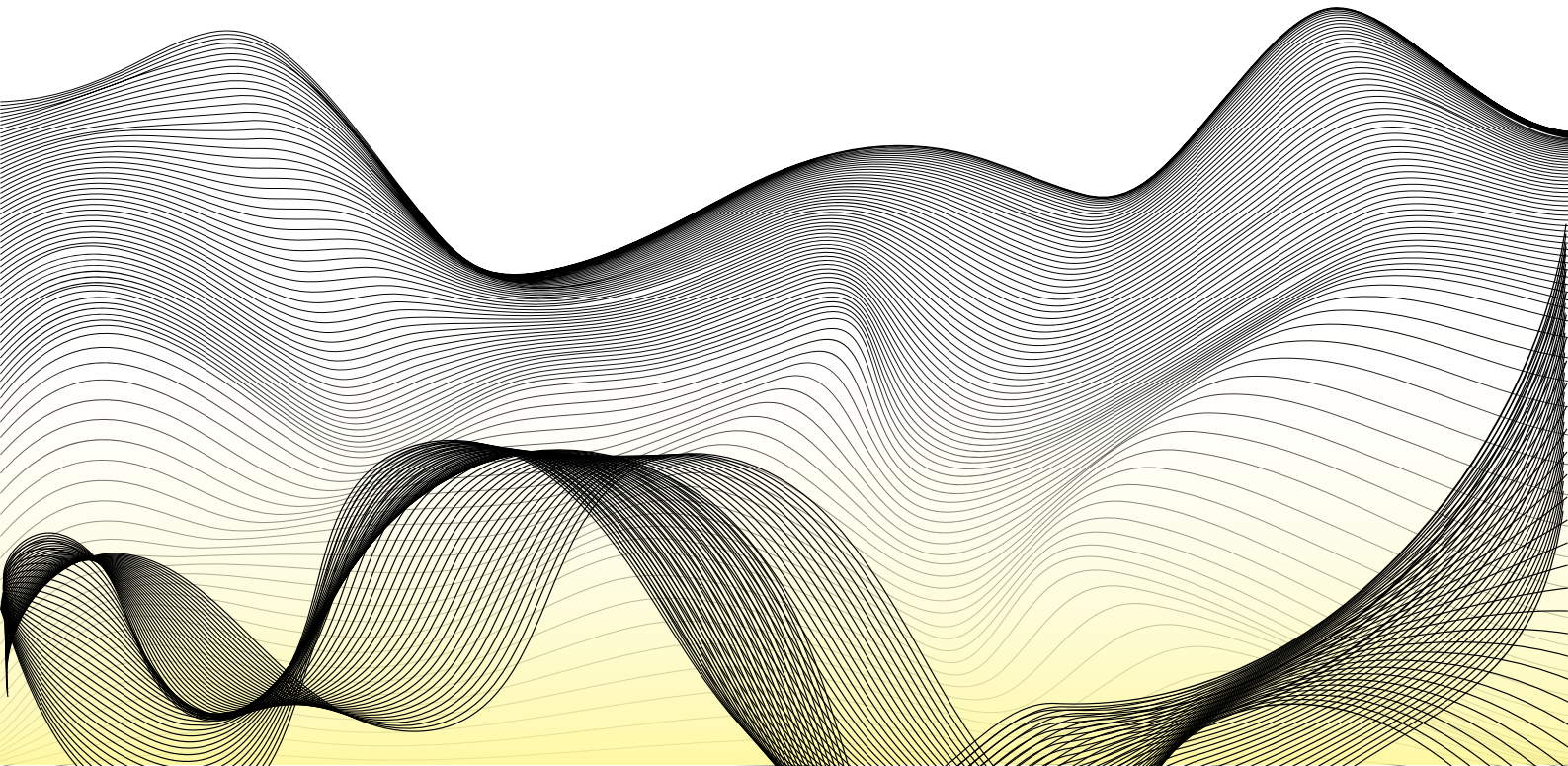
In the following pages, I will take you through a framework I have developed throughout my career, built upon the invaluable things I've learned from everyone I have worked alongside.

You'll learn 15 important questions you should ask every client and how to implement them into the programs you write.

You'll learn how to design workout programs you enjoy building, that your clients love performing, and singlehandedly raise the standard of your service.

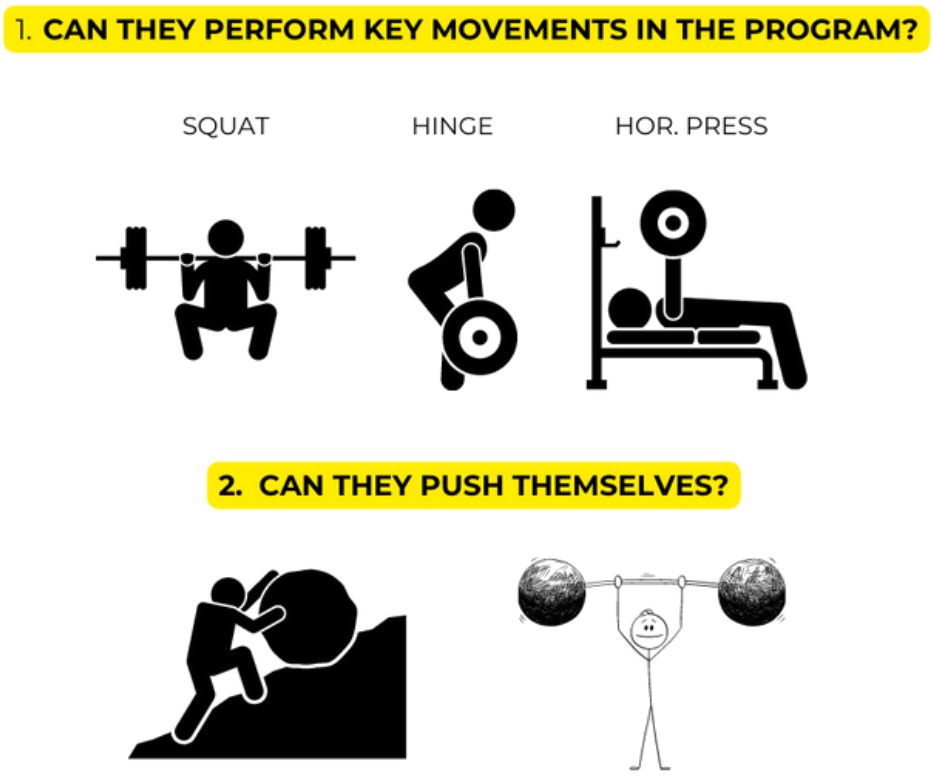
SECTION 1

UNDERSTANDING MINIMUM THRESHOLDS



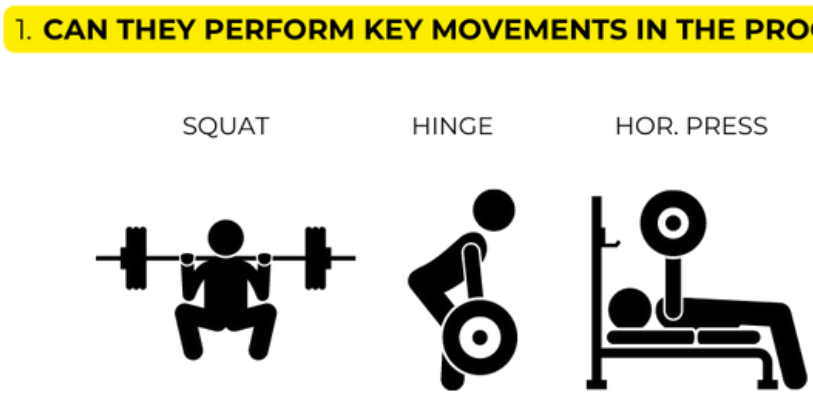
MINIMUM THRESHOLDS

Let's start with the minimum threshold required to achieve any goal training stimulus. A lack of ability in either of these skills will impact your ability to program for this client in the short and long term.



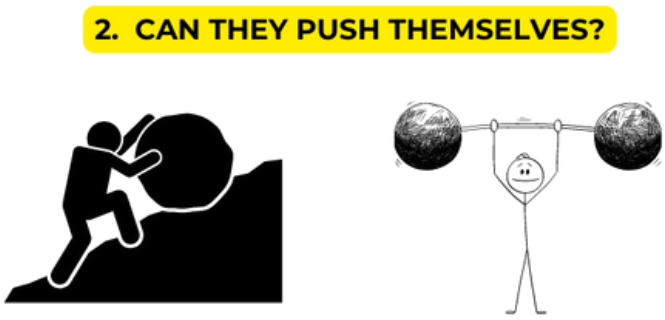
1 SKILL PROFICIENCY

It's easy to miss what's right in front of us — does the client have the ability to execute the movements and the plan as a whole? It seems obvious, but it can be one of the most overlooked components of a client's training program.



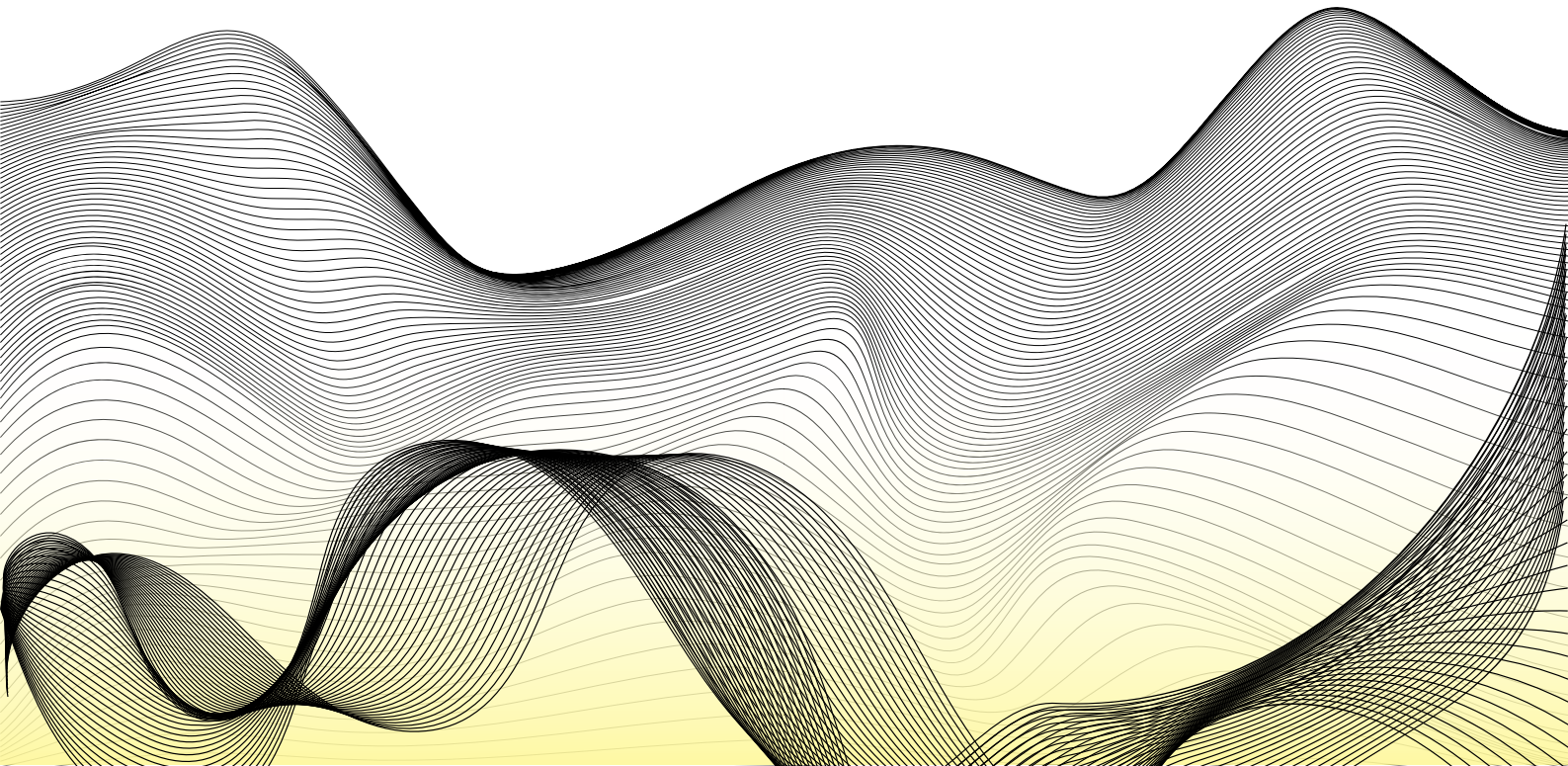
2 EXERTION THRESHOLD

Does this individual have the ability to push themselves? Better understanding their exertion threshold will allow you to properly place them into a type of training that allows them to *thrive* rather than *survive*.



SECTION 2

15 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY CLIENT



QUESTIONS

This section will walk you through the 15 important questions you should ask every client and how to implement them into the programs you write.

The questions are split up into 5 categories:

Category #1 — Training Age and Skill Level
Category #2 — Training History
Category #3 — Training Limitations
Category #4 — Training Preferences
Category #5 — Values and Lessons

This set of questions is certainly not exhaustive, but it gives you enough relevant information to put together a training program based on the individual's training age and skill level, training history, physical or psychological limitations, preferences, and values.

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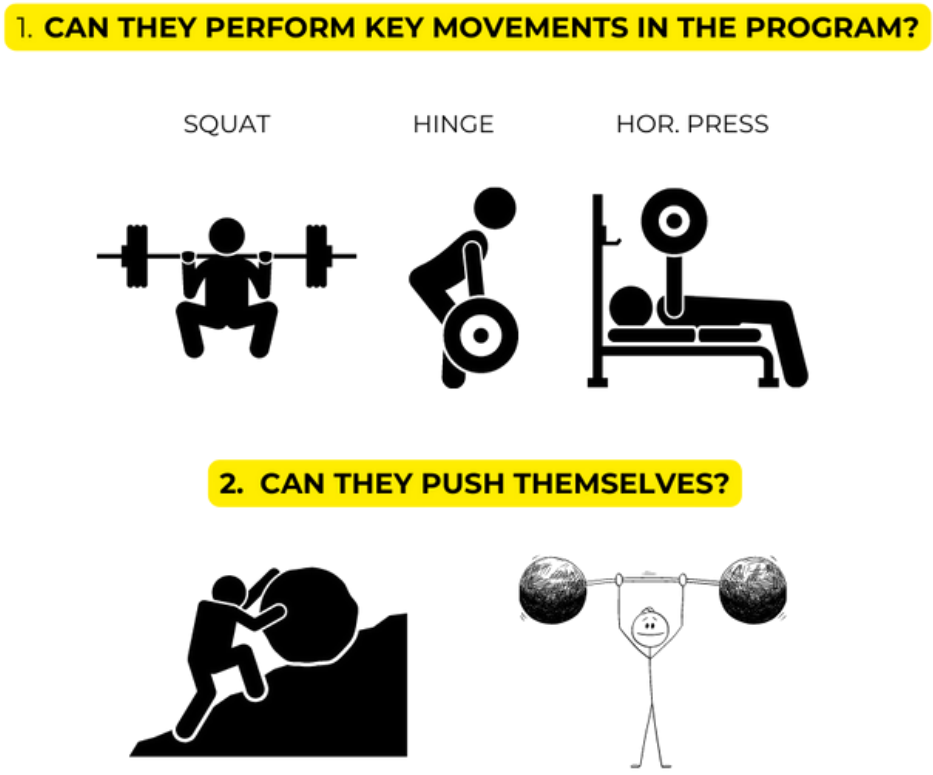
CATEGORY #1 — TRAINING AGE AND SKILL LEVEL

Q1: Are you new to lifting weights? If not, how long have you been lifting?

This question is probably one of the most overlooked — which makes us again confirm the following:

- **their ability to execute the movements and the plan as a whole.**
- **their ability to push themselves (you can help this by putting them into a position to succeed)**



CATEGORY #2 — TRAINING HISTORY

Q2: What have training programs looked like for you in the past (reps, sets, rest periods, whatever you can think of)?

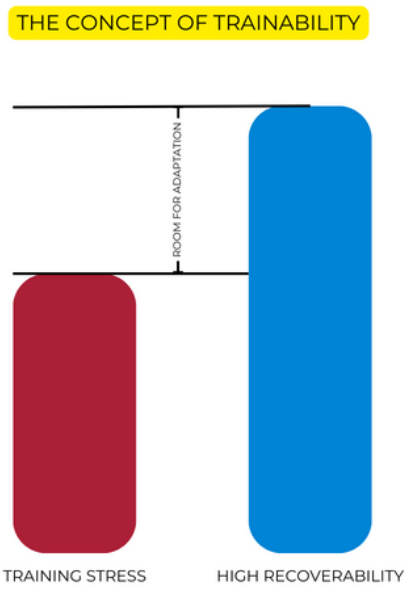
Q3: What's been your goal with lifting over the past month?

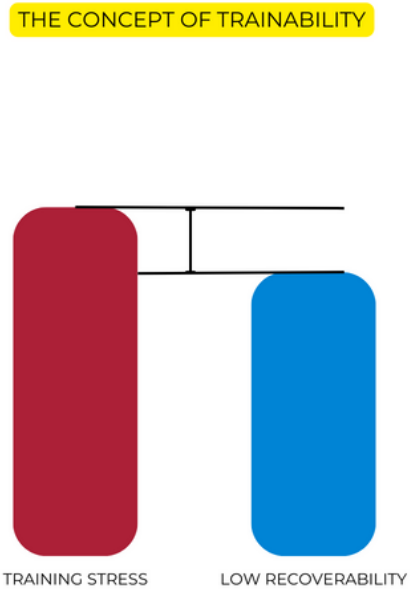
Q4: Do you feel like you're making progress toward that goal?

Q5: Do you feel like you recover well between workouts?

These questions can help us ensure we don't put them right back into something that hasn't been working for them.

Regardless of the theoretical effectiveness, putting them in something that is identical to what they've been doing probably won't do much for client buy-in and excitement.





CATEGORY #3 — TRAINING LIMITATIONS

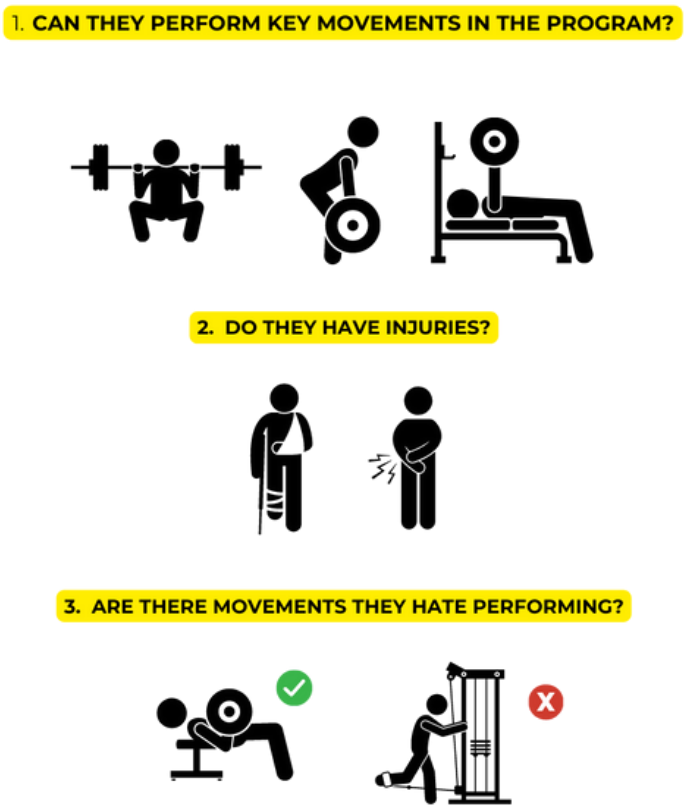
Q6: Do you feel like there are current limitations within your skill or ability to lift weights?

Q7: Are there currently exercises you cannot perform due to injury?

Q8: Are there currently exercises you do not want to perform (because you hate them with a passion)?

These questions can help us ensure we don't program movements that they are explicitly against or cannot perform due to injury.

Trust me. This is one of the fastest ways to lose buy-in and lose someone's full commitment to your plan.



CATEGORY #4 — TRAINING PREFERENCES

Q9: On the flip side, are there currently exercises that you absolutely love and wish to keep in your programs?

Q10: How many days per week would you like to train in the gym?

Q11: How much time do you have available to work out (on average)?

Q12: Do you enjoy pushing yourself really close to muscular failure or using really heavy weights, or do you prefer to work out more casually?

Q13: Are there any other physical activities that you would like to do in addition to your workouts (running, yoga, hiking, swimming, cycling, etc.)?

These questions can help us ensure we put them into something they enjoy and works best for their schedule.

It can also help you design a more well-rounded program that includes their favorite activities outside of the gym.

In my opinion, this is where we meet them somewhere between what they want and what they need to achieve their goals.

CATEGORY #5 — VALUES AND LESSONS

Q14: Why is training important to you? What do you want most from it (think: confidence, aesthetics, improved physical or mental health)?

Q15: If you could take one thing from working with me, what would it be?

These questions can help ensure you help steer them in the right direction (based on goals, preferences, values, etc.).

It can also ensure that you know what they desire to learn most from you and your services.

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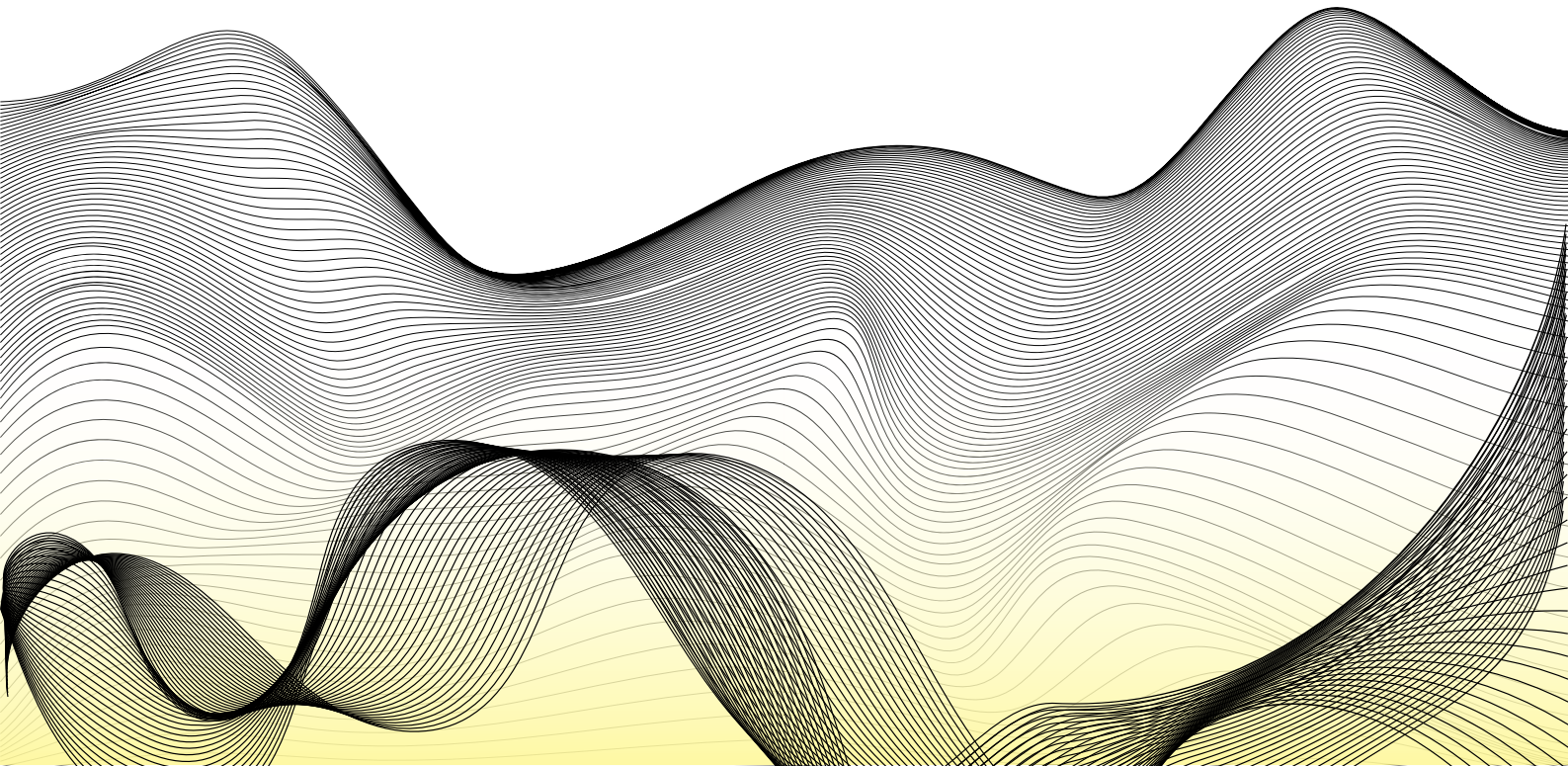
SECTION 3

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



PROGRAM DESIGN: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When designing programs for your clients, hyper-individuality is probably a bit overstated. The concept of individuality makes it seem like 80+% of every program you write for a client will differ for each person with similar goals.

In reality, 80%+ of the programs you write will look very similar. You may have noticed this so far in your career. So what makes a training program more catered to the individual client?

It's being able to more effectively put the answers from the questions above into action that can take a program from cookie-cutter to individualized for each and every client you work with throughout your training career.

Everything starts with the client's **Trainability**.

The most impactful question you can answer is this: What will be best for this client based on where they've been and where they want to go?

In my experience, the first couple of phases is where you really establish buy-in with the client. If done correctly, they will feel heard, respected, and well taken care of — trusting your best judgment as you get into the tough stuff.

We can very quickly rule out things that *won't* be ideal, narrowing down the totality of our options. With this in mind, let's take one more look at how each of these categories can help us put our clients in the best position to succeed.

Using **Category #1** — Training Age & Skill Level

You can establish if this person is new to lifting weights. If they are, they most likely need something that doesn't have as much volume per session with less technical exercise selection when starting.

Using **Category #2** — Training History

You can establish what programs have looked like for this person in the past. In my experience, this tells you what they likely enjoy most, or at least are the most experienced with. Has this training led toward meaningful progress? Aka, has it been effective? If yes, you can get an idea of things like volume tolerance, recoverability, etc.

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Using **Category #3** — Training Limitations

You can start to establish if they have any fresh or lingering injuries that will limit your ability to load certain movement patterns or specific ranges of motion.

You can also start to get an idea of how confident they are in their overall ability to lift weights. This also prevents you from programming any exercises that they loathe.

Regardless of the effectiveness of an exercise, you do not want to put things they absolutely hate and avoid like the plague in the first phases. This would be like you putting a food they are repulsed by in their meal plan. Good luck retaining the client for very long.

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Using **Category #4** — Training Preferences

You can start to put things together more completely. With these answers, we are getting them to basically tell us what they ideally want their program to look like (without them really knowing it). We see how often they want to train.

How many days do they want to train, and how much time do they actually have to train each of those days? Do they like to work really hard? Do they want to ease into this with lighter, more casual sessions? Do they really like to lift heavy?

Again, meeting them closer to where they really would like to be can help with buy-in. Lastly, get an idea of what they like to do outside of lifting weights or if they are interested in combining additional modes of fitness. Most people enjoy doing more than one thing, they just don't really know how to program it where it's effective and sustainable.

Using **Category #5** — Values & Lessons

You can start to establish what's actually most important to them.

Are they seeking more confidence in the gym? More competency with each lift? More understanding around what they're doing and why? Are they mainly there to feel better both physically and mentally?

Now that we have all of this information, we can start to put together a plan that not only fits their preferences and time availability but one that meets them where they're at now.

A program that allows them to *thrive* rather than *survive*.

"Best for them" > "Best on paper"

Have questions? Email me at coachaustincurrent@gmail.com.

Many of you may know me from my years of sharing educational videos online. You may have bought my book, Science of Strength Training. There's also a possibility that you and I have not yet crossed paths.

Whichever it is, I'm so stoked that you read through this guide and learned some of what I have to share about designing effective and enjoyable training programs for your clients. If this topic is right up your alley, I'd encourage you to join my email list. Due to my own insecurities, I do my best to ensure it's a good use of your valuable time and attention.

Click Below to Join the List

This is exactly what you click to join the list.

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Every month, I work with personal trainers one-on-one through my mentoring sessions. In these sessions, we tackle the weak points within your program design knowledge.

My goal within these sessions is to equip you with the knowledge to design workout programs you enjoy building, that your clients love performing, and singlehandedly raise the standard of your service.

Click here to apply for Mentorship

Here's what some of my past mentees have said:

"Austin has many 'superpowers,' but one of them is definitely the ability to break the complex down in a manner where it is easy to understand and comprehend. Future students will be lucky to have you..."

Kevin

"Working with Austin has been fantastic. Austin gave me a plethora of free advice before I started working with him more in a formal setting. He gave me tangible strategies and advice I've been implementing since we spoke. The bottom line is that Austin is a great mind and an even better quality person who is invested in each of his clients/mentees success. I look forward to growing more with Austin!"

Zach

"After our conversation, I have a very clear and actionable path toward successfully building better training programs for my clients. The care that I received is unmatched — there is no comparison. In coaching, it is imperative to meet the client where they are in order to progress them within their current capabilities. This is exactly how you will be approached — as if you are the only person in the world that matters. Because in that moment, you are. I cannot speak highly of the value this genuine and very humble human has bestowed upon me. I have zero doubt that my business will grow exponentially moving forward."

Taylor