

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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PORTRAIT OF NEW WEST LAWRENCE



AARON COMBS

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING COACH

Official Sports: Movement with a Purpose

What are your educational studies, and what is your degree?

I attended Pinnacle Career Institute (a trade school) for the certified personal trainer program through the NSCA (National Strength and Conditioning Association). Postgraduation, I acquired specialty certificates for nutrition and fat loss, strength training post-rehab and personalized hormonal profiling through skinfold analysis. Continuing education is a must in this industry, and I recertify every two years to stay current on new science and trends.

What are the things you want to know from a prospective client before you create a health plan for him or her?

From a prospective client, I want to know what their goals are and how long they have been after that goal. Goals give us direction and a purpose to strive for. This lets me know that they're motivated to make some changes, which is a huge benefit for both coach and client. I also want to know if they have a support system. Do your friends, family, significant other work out or have an active lifestyle? At most, I may see someone four times a week for an hour each out of 168 total hours in a week. I'm supporting during my time with clients, but the numbers don't lie. They need to have support outside of the gym. It's very hard to make changes if you're still doing the same old stuff with the same old gang.

Knowing there is not one workout plan for everyone, how do you create a specific workout plan for each particular client you have?

I put everyone through a movement assessment when they first sign up. I'm not looking for how strong they are. The purpose of the assessment is to see current ranges of motion, imbalances in the body and where they are located, and coordination. From this information and combined with their goals, I know where we need to start to be successful.

What are the things you want your clients to take from working with you?

The takeaway I want to leave people with is confidence in themselves and, more to the point, an "I can" attitude. When you raise someone's confidence, you elevate what they're capable of and can accomplish. New goals always come once this takes place.

Why do you think so many people struggle to maintain a healthier lifestyle, even after spending time working out with a personal trainer?

I think people struggle with maintaining a healthier lifestyle, even after working with a trainer, because they have unrealistic goals for themselves, and/or their lifestyle hasn't changed. We tend to want the best outcome with the least amount of effort put forth, and also in the shortest time possible. This isn't realistic. Some aspects may have changed, but we "want it all" without giving something up. We have to make room to create a healthier lifestyle, which means leaving behind habits that previously served us well in the past.

Why did you become involved (what inspired you—is there a specific thing, person or incident)? What keeps you motivated to continue doing this?

Since I was in fourth grade, I knew I wanted to own a business/work for myself. I wasn't sure what type of business, just that I would own and operate something for myself. Our dad was always giving out advice for free on everything from how to stretch properly to being adequately nourished and hydrated for competition. He really did drop some gems back then, and as I got older, I realized we did have access to great information, but at the time, it was tough because it's Dad, right, and he can't be right all the time. I had this huge knowledge base from the multiple sports and coaches I had, plus Dad's knowledge, and figured out a way to package it for others. Thanks Dad.

What are the three to five most important things to keep in mind when developing an exercise/health plan for your clients?

The most important things to know in developing either a workout program or a dietary/lifestyle plan are:

- A. Is this program realistic for the person's current lifestyle, are they able to stick with it?
- B. How much time do they have until their goal date (wedding, reunion, sports team tryouts, etc.)?
- C. What are their motivations, and are they internally or externally motivated?
- D. What, if any, allergies or injuries they have/had.

What is your organization's most important priority?

The organization's most important priority is getting positive results for the client's individual goals. The client's success is my success.

What have been some of the most important aspects of your success?

Thinking outside the box and being an active listener. Guiding a new client through a workout can be difficult because both of you communicate a certain way already, and now you need to find dialog that works for the pair. "You know what I'm saying?" is too ambiguous for this line of work. I feel like a talk show host with new clients because I want to know where they're coming from, what's their story, what's important to them. Having the knowledge of how a person ticks gives you info on how to best coach them.

What do you see as your biggest challenges for yourself and your profession in the future?

I think the biggest challenge for me personally is this huge uptick in adolescent sport specialization. The emphasis on specializing early is causing more harm than good. Physically because the movement patterns are repetitive, and the body doesn't have new stimulus to adapt to. Overuse injuries are more common nowadays in kids. Psychologically because if they don't "make" the team they're trying out for, their career is over before it even began. Plus, all their eggs were in that basket. I'm all about being competitive, but this pressure to choose one sport/activity as a child doesn't serve them best. Most athletes that compete professionally were multisport athletes when they were younger. Look at Bo Jackson, Deion Sanders and Michael Jordan (even if it was just AAA ball). ▲

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