

## 5 YEARS AND COUNTING....

Wow! ASF is entering its sixth year (we opened in June 2006) and I decided to take some time to reflect on where ASF has been, where it is, and where (I think) it's headed.

## EARLY ON...

I entered the health and fitness industry when I was 19 or so, at the Countryside YMCA in Lebanon, Ohio. I had been working out there, so I *must* be qualified, right?! They were opening a new Nautilus room and I was assigned the afternoon shift on teaching correct form using the machines. It was an easy gig, and I instantly knew that this was my calling: I loved to exercise and enjoyed helping people, so the match was very natural.

After graduating from Miami, my first job was at a commercial health club in the training (read: sales) department. I hated it and lasted one month. I decided that I could do this on my own, and landed my first client – a wealthy car dealer with a home gym. It took a few years but I had built a good clientele in the area, was making a good name for myself and finally landed at World Gym in West Chester. I started a sole proprietorship under the name of *Strength and Conditioning Consultants*. For the next decade or so, I trained exclusively out of World Gym and will forever be grateful to Ruth and Ken Reynolds for their support and belief over that time.

In the process of training adults, I was also being asked to train their sons and daughters, many of whom played sports. This was in the late 1990's and, while it wasn't my specialty, I found that I enjoyed working with young athletes more than adults. I instinctively identified with athletes while interning at Miami as a strength coach and had never lost that keen interest in athletes as a possible avenue to travel down at some point. As a former athlete, I always thought that since I could not play at a high level anymore, the next logical choice was to help others succeed.

## DREAMS SOMETIMES COME TRUE

During my time at Countryside to World Gym and everywhere in between, I still yearned for my own place. I knew nothing about running a business, so I kept waiting...and waiting...and waiting. There is never a perfect time to do much of anything in the business world, so, sooner or later, I would have to take the risk, or regret it forever, and that was not an option.

While in limbo around early 2006, I was searching on the internet for local property in West Chester and Liberty Township. The prices were outrageous almost everywhere until I came across a new development being constructed near Lakota East High School. I and two former colleagues at a now defunct training facility were contemplating our next move when I decided to check out the aforementioned plot. Since the building was literally just being built (it was nothing but mud), I talked to the builder and owner about my situation and we agreed on the price, size, buildout and terms. ASF was conceived!

I don't know what to call all the events that led to ASF, except a series of fortunate (and some unfortunate) circumstances; either way, I had taken a calculated chance and it worked out. Together with Andy Gaspar, Gene Toms and Leanne Gooch, we dove head first into the sea, with no life preserver. When I look back, we were trainers acting like businessman, and through perseverance made it happen. In hindsight, I made so many mistakes; it is pretty amazing that the place didn't fold in the first year! I think that when people believe in what you are trying to do, even if you fall flat on your face, they are willing to emotionally invest in its success on some small level. That is what was happening – a small, but very loyal following, was beginning to emerge.

Those days seem like a blur: everything happened so fast, including my level of mental and emotional fatigue. The first six months I had lost about 35 pounds and was regularly putting in the typical 60-70 hours of a small business owner. I loved every second of it too! The alternative scared the shit out of me, and my burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit was gaining confidence.

---

After continuously doing anything for five years, it is normal, almost expected, to become reflective on where you've been, and where you are going. I can honestly say that I have loved meeting so many interesting people more than anything else. ASF is a nice facility, with some cool toys and a good location, but the relationships are what I treasure the most. To know that in some small way you are part of a young mind's development is an extremely satisfying way to start, and end, each day. It is rare that people wake up and look forward to going to work each day...and not wanting to leave. I am fortunate to have found "*what I love to do and, thus, never work another day in my life.*"

ASF has been, and will always be, a tribe of friends, kids and adults both, that just want to be a part of something bigger than themselves; a chance to play, exercise, forge relationships and share the common energy that having fun naturally produces....

---

## THE FUTURE OF ASF

Statistically, ASF should have closed a few years ago, as most small businesses do not make it. In that sense, I have beaten the odds. I know the climb is still uphill and have a lot of work to do. I am a better businessman and trainer than

five years ago, one year ago, one month ago...but have a burning quest for more knowledge in both areas. There are so many choices in the New Economy that consumers are doing their homework, visiting multiple businesses and pricing out everyone and everything that each business has to offer. What separates us from the rest?

Ultimately, it is the degree of the relationship that we forge with each of you, and whether you reciprocate that, or choose not to and do business with someone else. I just had dinner at a local restaurant last night, and the food was very good, but the service was lousy...we probably won't be back. The second way that we will continue to differentiate is through always improving our knowledge base as it relates to young athletes and skill development as well as adults (including fat loss, weight loss, strength, unorthodox training, metabolic conditioning, nutrition, supplements). Isn't that what you are paying for? I honestly think that the best coaches in this field are the learners and doers, that constantly strive to acquire more knowledge than their peers.

So, there you have it: a quick summary of the inner workings of my brain child for the last five years. If you have made it this far, thank you for taking the time to read this; and for being a part of the ASF family.

---

## THINGS THAT I HAVE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

- Owning your own business may be the hardest thing that I have ever done. The American Dream of owning a business is not for everyone and will test your spirit every day. The books, internet and self-help gurus may help some people, but I think most of it is all bullshit.
- If you treat people right, give them a great experience at a fair price and are great at what you do then they will likely do business with you.
- The Grind never ends; if it does, then your business likely ends.
- I love working with kids. Not so much the sports side of the equation, but the fact that I may be making a difference, an impact, a spark, in a young person's life. If they get better at sports, that is almost a side-effect rising out of the Big Picture. There is nothing better than to see a child laugh, watch him/her "get" a new skill or movement, see their faces light up when they are praised or just to be a friend along the Way.
- I am excited every day to go to "work". I am equally as sad to leave.
- As mentioned above, I have made many mistakes, and will continue to do so. If anyone has the answers, please let me know! Out of the ashes of doing things wrong arises lessons on how to do things right. I continue to learn something new every day and have relaxed much more, enjoying the Process as much as the Outcome.

- There will always be people who want to bring you down. It doesn't matter what you do, they will be hoping for your demise.
  - Perceptions are really all that matter, for better or for worse. I am an intense, passionate and fiery guy. I don't know any other way (to train someone). If I try and be something else, I will lose all respect for myself. I do my best to be transparent for the athletes, parents and coaches that talk with me.
  - I cannot compete with larger competitors dollar for dollar; but strive to provide the best value.
  - Everything is marketing.
  - The more I think I know, the less I really know.
  - Core values are what matter to me more than anything: honesty, fairness, integrity, having principles, values, and work ethic, to name a few. If you try to please everyone, you will get walked on every day. Not everyone will like me or talk to others about ASF in a positive manner. That is their problem, not mine. As long as you stay true to who you are, everything will be fine.
- 

## PEOPLE THAT HELPED ALONG THE WAY (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER...)

- Suzanne Poggiali, Heather Poggiali, Lewis and Dorothy Poggiali
- Gene Toms, Andy Gaspar, Leanne Gooch
- Lex Cawdrey, Jay Norris
- Dave Hildreth, Dee Guttadore
- Steve Nicolai
- Scott Fasse, Chris James
- Joe Lochard, Sara Piepho, Nigel Price, Kevin Hollabaugh, Dave Ewen, Tex Melotti, Shelly Patterson
- Dawn Weatherwax, Sheila Lee
- Pat Rigsby
- Lee Taft
- All the coaches that "get it" when it comes to strength and conditioning
- Finally, all of you who have believed and trusted in me to help your son or daughter become a better athlete and person. I am eternally grateful and humbled that you have stuck by me for five years running (pardon the pun). I have always said that I can't thank you enough, so I hope you don't get sick of it ☺