

Background and aspirations

Where do I begin?

As a 39-year-old mature student I have had my fair share of life experiences, some good, some bad, although in reflection it was the periods of life that were challenging that built my resilience, skepticism, and thirst for knowledge.

Throughout my life I have worked hard and always wanted to be the best at what I was doing, weather it was operating heavy plant on building sites or erecting scaffold in areas throughout south Wales. Having said that, even though I enjoyed working up to 50 hours a week in the construction industry it never fully satisfied me, and I knew within myself I had bigger aspirations.

Alongside work, I have always trained, I never really knew why until recently, as I had never really thought about it, but alongside keeping me fit and relatively healthy, training has always given me structure, something that I lacked in my youth.

It was my love of training that caused my life to change direction, as I enrolled on a personal training NVQ course in 2015 after quitting my job. Best thing I ever did, sometimes you have to take a leap of faith, "he who dares wins".

The course was liberating and although challenging as my academic skills weren't up to much at the time, it gave me hope for the future that I could achieve something with my life.

Following this I used my addictive, all, or nothing mentality for good at long last and set myself up as a personal trainer, opening a small training facility where I trained clients alongside working on construction sites to improve my financial situation. Again, as I reflect, it all fell into place, I used personal experience of training and rehabilitation methods of my own recent injuries to build a positive reputation for myself, although shaking off the old one has not been easy.

Since becoming a personal trainer in 2016 my ambitions have continued to grow and although working with the general public and recreational athletes has been extremely rewarding, providing me with the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge and understanding of how best to apply the principles of training to individuals and specific populations, there has always been a dream to work alongside the best coaches and athletes in professional sport.

Once again, a spontaneous decision on a lovely summer day took me to UWTSD campus to enquire about furthering my education in sport and exercise science. It happened just like that, and before I knew it, I was attending my first lecture not even knowing what an assignment was.

Since that day I have continued to develop as a personal trainer, and a person, "I think", as gaining knowledge on the science of how training and nutrition effects the health of the human body has opened my eyes to the reality, that I don't know everything, "The further you go from shore, the deeper the water gets". This thinking has not only improved the way I live my own life but also how I train my clients.

Additionally, being back in an academic setting has allowed me to adjust to working in a digital era. Becoming digitally literate has supplied me with the confidence to express my thoughts and professional work online, allowing me greater flexibility to work at any time or day, and if needed with clients and colleagues remotely from any area of the country or even globally if required.

Furthermore, being apart of an institution such UWTSD and surrounding myself with positive likeminded peers and mentors keeps me driven and passionate about sport and exercise science,

whilst also going some way to improving my communication and teamwork skills, an area in which I know I need to improve.

As for my ambitions, firstly I would like to keep improving as a person so that whatever choices I make in the future I can be confident that they are the right ones, not only for me but also for the small circle of family that I support.

Having said that, if everything went to plan, I would like to continue with my academic learning firstly, with a masters in exercise physiology or possibly strength and conditioning. I see this taking place in Cardiff Metropolitan university which is a realistic and exciting prospect. Alongside the masters I will continue to develop my business as a personal trainer, which will hopefully flourish due to the opportunities and network connections available to me from my affiliations at Cardiff Metropolitan university, and also UWTSD where I hope to continue my relationships with my fellow peers and mentors through work in the recently established sports academy.

As previously mentioned, the dream is to one day work at the highest level in sport and exercise, in which role I have still not decided, perhaps leaving fate decide maybe best, as the road to this point since quitting my job in 2015 has been prosperous, and possibly due to the fact that although in the driving seat, I have trusted others to navigate, "ignorance is bliss", within reason.

The point in my life that I complete my masters, my family responsibilities will 'touch wood', be a little less demanding, opening the door to the possibility of finally getting to see some different regions of the world.

This will hopefully take place through working in professional sport or possibly even attending a university abroad, as another aspiration of mine which really excites me is staying in an academic setting and going on to work alongside experts in the field of sport and exercise science as a researcher, with the hope of someday gaining a PHD and having people address me as DR. Morris.

Needs analysis (1)

JOB/ROLE	SKILLS REQUIRED	CURRENT SKILLS	NEEDS
ENDURANCE COACH	• Experience in endurance sports	7	9
	• Knowledge and understanding of exercise physiology	6	10
	• Communication skills	6	8
	• Empathy and likeability	5	7

Strengths

As an endurance athlete myself I feel this is a logical path to take as I have firsthand experience of the characteristics needed to achieve success in this discipline. Additionally, what I have come to realise is, as sport science is a relatively new concept at sub-elite level, my continually evolving knowledge in this space puts me at a superior advantage to other coaches currently involved in this role. Furthermore, it has also come to my attention that even the coaches and athletes with reasonable knowledge on how to improve endurance performance still do not understand the benefits of strength training, something that I myself am a huge proponent of. With my experience

in strength training and rehabilitation strategies I feel that I can help athletes improve performance through not only endurance training but also injury prevention.

Weaknesses

As a personal trainer I have worked with numerous clients looking to improve all aspects of health and fitness. With this said, I have limited experience in training athletes to improve endurance performance. This may put me at a disadvantage when compared to experienced endurance coaches in the immediate future. Additionally, as I am a firm believer in “practice what you preach”, there still needs to be more success in my own endurance career to give potential clients a reason to want to train under my supervision. More so, to successfully gain and also retain client’s long term, I feel I still need to improve as a person, becoming more approachable and empathetic, although not too much as “nice guys, finish last”.

Opportunities

As this would be a self-employed job, the opportunity is in my own hands. It could be as easy as prescribing to an online coaching app and advertising my services on social media.

Threats

As the opportunity to take on this job is relatively easy there will also be a large amount of competition, and with Southwest Wales being a relatively small catchment area, building a large enough clientele to make the business profitable maybe problematic, especially within the current economic climate.

Goal setting

Short (1 year)

- Complete undergraduate degree in sport and exercise science with a first-class honor.
- Enroll on master’s degree at Cardiff Metropolitan university.
- Gain competency in endurance coaching application (Training peaks) through the interaction with subjects during my dissertation.
- Enlist at least 10 clients. This number is realistic, attainable and will allow for quality over quantity, thus providing clients with a superior service.
- Integrate the endurance coaching alongside the personal training, thus giving clients the best experience possible.
- Build a new website not only for advertisement but also to provide clients with pre-intervention health screening, surveys, and payment options.
- Achieve personal endurance goals to gain respect and credibility within the endurance scene in South Wales.

Medium (3 year)

- Completion of master’s degree.
- Gain part-time employment at UWTSO undertaking a position in the sports academy.
- Build a network of affiliations including therapists, nutritionists and event organizers that can liaise with the business to offer a higher quality experience to my clients.
- Enlist 30-40 clients between both businesses.
- To support the workload my aim is to employ at least 1 other coach.

- Continue to raise awareness and credibility through the completion of personal endurance goals.

Long (10 year)

- At this point in my life, the business will be 16 years old and will have a fully established reputation of delivering results. These results will be presented independently through the website.
- Employ at least one other competent coach/trainer to handle day to day running of the business.

Needs analysis (2)

JOB/ROLE	SKILLS REQUIRED	CURRENT SKILLS	NEEDS
STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH AT ELITE LEVEL	• Experience working with athletes	3	8
	• Knowledge and understanding of exercise physiology	6	10
	• Working as part of a team	4	9
	• Communication skills	6	7
	• Empathy and likability	5	6
	• Flexibility to travel and work away from home	6	10

Strengths

As I have over 20 years' experience in resistance training and 6 years' experience in personal training, I feel I am well under way in gaining the skills required to become a successful strength and conditioning coach. Once again, from what I am learning and experiencing with my own eyes is that only at elite level are strategies employed correctly, and with sport science evolving at such a rapid pace, old, outdated methods are being discounted, giving sport scientists more appreciation in the competitive sporting environment, and therefore adding to my own value.

Weaknesses

A weakness in this area is also a massive regret of mine, in that I did not play more competitive sport myself. This has left me at a significant disadvantage, not only in understanding key elements of different sports but also as I have been unable to build up a network of associates and affiliations within sport itself, as sometimes it's "not what you know, but who you know". In addition, as elite sport requires the coaching staff to be flexible, due to commitments such as be international travel and varying schedules throughout different stages of the season, I feel until my children have 'fled the nest', then I may not be the best candidate for the role at this point in my life.

Opportunities

With regards to myself gaining a position as a strength and conditioning coach at the elite level, I feel this may be difficult due to the weaknesses that I have already mentioned. With this said, life is all about taking your chances and if I continue to place myself in the right environments through internships and professional practise initiatives within sports academies, then maybe I can get a break.

Threats

Although the thinking in competitive sport seems to be shifting towards a more evidenced based practise approach there still remains an ideology that you must have played in order to coach. To a certain extent this is true, and without doubt, playing the sport will significantly improve your knowledge of that sport, but when it comes to strength and conditioning the knowledge of how the human body adapts to training is more relevant. Having said that, until the old guard have given up their grip on strangling progress, I feel that individuals from within the sport will always be at an advantage over someone like myself.

Goal setting

Short (1 year)

- Complete undergraduate degree in sport and exercise science with a first-class honor.
- Gain experience working with athletes through the accumulation of professional practice hours at UWTSD, including working with a para-athlete.
- Enroll on master's degree at Cardiff Metropolitan university.
- Increase the current business reputation through upskilling my methods to include profiling and periodised programming for local sports teams as well as clients.
- Build a new website not only for advertisement but also to provide pre-intervention health screening, surveys, and payment options to clients.
- Enlist an additional 10 clients to current workload.

Medium (3 year)

- Completion of master's degree.
- Become a certified strength and conditioning specialist with NSCA.
- Gain part-time employment at UWTSD undertaking a position in the sports academy.
- Work with semi-professional sports teams and organisations as a strength and conditioning coach.
- Enlist 30-40 clients between both businesses.
- To support the workload my aim is to employ at least 1 other coach.

Long term (10 year)

- Gain employment as an elite level strength and conditioning coach.
- Employ at least one other competent coach/trainer to handle day to day running of the business.

Summary

To summarise, I see myself prolonging this journey I am on through enhancing the reputation of my own relatively successful business through the integration of professional practice, academic learning, and fate. Furthermore, I am fully aware that my short-term goals are most important as they will provide the steppingstones for further success. As previously mentioned, I feel the overarching requirement to success in whatever path you choose, is passion and the belief that you are doing something worthwhile, as a result, I know I am fully equipped to reach my goals and fulfil my aspirations.

