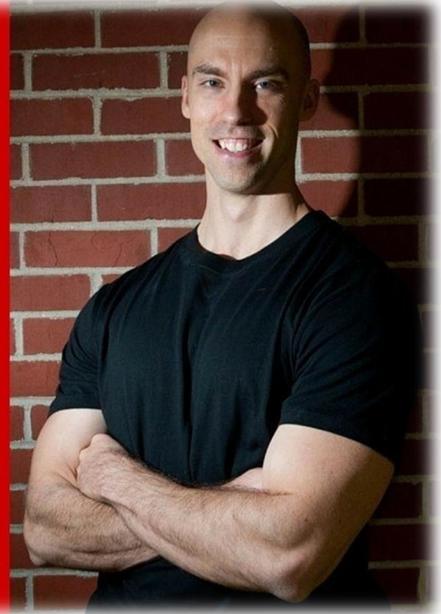


Tony Gentilcore

How to Be an Effective, Successful Coach



Episode 132



Danny Lennon:

Hello and welcome. My name is Danny Lennon and you are listening to Episode 132 of Sigma Nutrition Radio, a podcast that gives you access to weekly discussions with the world's leaders in evidence-based nutrition, health and performance. And today, I'm delighted to have Tony Gentilcore on to give a bit of an insight into his philosophy and approach to coaching, which I know will certainly be useful to a number of you who work in fitness or nutrition or one-on-one with someone in any capacity. But I also think that the ideas here are transferrable to many other areas as well, so for those of you outside of that fitness industry realm, listen with a kind of open mind and maybe pick apart some useful bits of wisdom that Tony does get into around sort of his philosophies and how he structures things.

For a bit of background for those of you who are maybe unfamiliar, Tony is one of the cofounders of Cressey Sports Performance, which has just an outstanding reputation in the strength and conditioning world. And in more recent times, Tony has actually moved to another facility closer to his home in Boston where he continues to work in the trenches every day with all sorts of clients. And Tony is also really, really top-level when it comes to putting out written content. You can find it all over the web but particularly if you go to his blog at TonyGentilcore.com, you'll see some really good not only quality information but really well-written stuff and accessible for people.

So we're going to get into the show. One last thing: Remember, you can get the show notes to this episode at SigmaNutrition.com/episode132. So if you go there, you'll have a bit more background on Tony, link up to anything we mention in this episode, and also have availability to get transcripts to each podcast episode as well. So let's get into this week's episode with Tony Gentilcore.

Tony, welcome to the show. How are you doing, my man?

Tony Gentilcore: I'm well, I'm well. I know we have a five-hour difference, so it's kind of early on my end but I'm ready to go.

Danny Lennon: Good. That's what I like to hear.

Tony Gentilcore: Brain is functioning, I got caffeine in hand, so we're good to go.

Danny Lennon: That's always a good start, so you're winning already.

Tony Gentilcore: Yes.

Danny Lennon: Tony, I'm sure many people that are listening to this will have come across some of the work you've put out and will know your name or have come across some content that you've produced. But just for those that maybe are unfamiliar with your work, just to give some context for the rest of this discussion, can you maybe talk us through some of your background, where you've kind of come from, where you've kind of got to the point where you're at right now?

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, of course. I try not to be too presumptuous and think that everyone has come across my content, although I have put out a lot of content. But I'm originally from a small town in Central New York and I've been in the industry for, man, I think I'm coming up on about 15 years now, and I went to school to become a health teacher. My background is actually in health education, and I joke because my major in college was health education; I had a concentration in health wellness promotion. So I had to do my student teaching in college. So I worked with high schoolers and I worked with seventh, eighth graders, which are like 13-, 14-year-olds. And then, after I was done with that, I had to do an internship and I happened to get one at a gym that was close by to my hometown in school.

So when push came to shove, when it came down to choosing between a career where I had to put on a tie every day or put on sweatpants, it was an easy decision. So I ended up going into personal training, which then parlayed into strength and conditioning when I hooked up with Eric

Cressey back in I think 2004, is when he and I originally met. And we met online, so we knew each other through various fitness forums. And funnily enough, he got a job when he graduated school at a gym in Connecticut. He knew I was kind of itching to get out of New York and was like, “Hey dude, you should come to Connecticut. They're looking for another trainer.” So I had to tell my mom that I met a guy in the Internet and that I'm moving to Connecticut to [laughs] pursue a career in strength and conditioning, and she was like, “What?” But it all worked out well.

So he and I along with another business partner, Pete Dupuis, we opened up Cressey Sports Performance in 2007, and that's grown into a pretty well-renowned training and fitness facility particularly with the baseball crowd, overhead athletes. But you name a sport, we've worked with them, and we of course work with a lot of general fitness clients too. We have a nutrition guy in our staff, a massage therapist. I'm not going to mention all the physical therapists and strength coaches we have a network with.

And I was there for eight years. This past fall, I left to—I had some opportunities that came up in Boston where I opened up this small little studio that's literally a mile from my apartment. So I don't have a 45-minute commute to work every day anymore, and yeah, I'm basically just training more general fitness clients now, but now that summer's kicked in a lot of the baseball guys that are home from school now during the summer, a few of them have started to train with me this summer as well.

But yeah, more or less, I've been in the industry 15 years training. I've trained a lot of pro athletes in the past as well as regular people and I do a fair bit of writing, and yeah, that's about it.

Danny Lennon: Awesome. And at the risk of this being quite a vague question, how would you summarize your coaching philosophy and how has that changed over the years?

Tony Gentilcore: As a strength and conditioning coach, I obviously like to get people strong, and that's subjective. Like I understand that when I say, “I want to get you strong,” that doesn't necessarily mean we're going to be striving for a three-times-bodyweight deadlift. Some people have no interest in that whatsoever. I think it's pretty cool, but not a lot of people are interested in pushing that much weight. And then, who's for me to say that, have you ever been to a Cirque du Soleil show? Some of the stuff they do is quite impressive, some of the shit they can do.

Danny Lennon: Mm-hmm. Unbelievable.

Tony Gentilcore: And that's strong too. So when I say strong, I understand that it is subject, but in the context of what I do, certainly when I'm writing programs for people and I'm coaching people, I just want to see that they're improving with the loads they're lifting, and if I can use strength as a corrective modality to help them move better and to feel better, that is a win to me in my book. Like I understand this whole connotation of corrective exercise and to me if movement is correct that is corrective. So I just coach people, so squat, deadlift, pushups, rows. I mean, I keep it pretty basic.

Back when I first started, I think the biggest thing that I've changed as far as my approach is keeping my mouth shut more often than not. Like I think a lot of fitness pros try to win conversations with their clients, like where they say, "I did this with my trainer in the past," and me, I would be like, "Oh, that's stupid. You need to do this instead," and I just think that's a big mistake. So a lot of times I just keep my mouth shut, I listen, I ask questions, and then I just say, "Yeah, we're going to go deadlift."

So it's a compromise. Like I think if I can get people to of course take into consideration their roles, and then it's my job as their coach to formulate a program that's going to get them there in the safest, most time-efficient way possible. That's what I am there to you. And there's some compromise. Like certainly, I work with a fair number of guys who are my age, a little bit older, a little bit younger, where if there's a five- or 10-minute window at the end of a session it's gun show time. "Hey, let's just cross your arms for 10 minutes." Like you did the workout, let's do some stuff that you want to do, and it just gives people a little bit more of a choice and it keeps them motivated and a little bit more engaged in their process. So it's a little bit of give and take. Like certainly I want them to do the stuff I feel they should be doing, but at the same time what I've changed a lot in my philosophy is like there is a fair bit of compromise involved too and it's about we are a service industry, so they are paying me for a service. So there is a degree of me giving them what they want to do as well.

Danny Lennon: Right. I think that's really an interesting aspect to this because so often I think as coaches, and no matter in what field, we kind of see this maybe conflict sometimes between what we feel a client needs and what they feel they want at least initially before they get some education around it. So I think trying to blend those two and being able to, like you say, make some sort of compromise, just helps with allowing that person to buy into the whole process, right?

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah.

Danny Lennon: And be more compliant over time.

Tony Gentilcore: It definitely...I 100% agree and it does take time. Like it took me 10, 15 years to figure that out, [chuckles] so.

Danny Lennon: [Chuckles]

Tony Gentilcore: And you know, there's a lot of new trainers in the fitness industry, professionals coming into the field, and obviously there's a ton of information out there and different methodologies and different approaches, and everything more or less works and it's about finding what is the best fit for that particular client but then meeting them where they are. Like again, like going back to my basic philosophy, like yeah, I want people to squat, I want people to deadlift, and more often than not every program I write is going to have that in their program, but I'm using the assessment to figure out what variation is most applicable to that person, because certainly I don't hold everyone under the same spotlight where on day one I expect everyone to deadlift conventionally from the floor because some people just can't get into that position, they can't do it correctly. So why not let's do a cannonball deadlift or a trap bar deadlift or something that's going to be a deadlift but it's catered to their current abilities and their current needs and goals? So I think that's a valuable tool that I've learned over the course of my later years of coaching that's worked out well.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think that kind of ties into this difference between getting people doing certain movements that we...like most people will feel are important like any of those kind of compound movements, but the difference between doing certain movements versus having someone doing those movements correctly...

Tony Gentilcore: Sure.

Danny Lennon: ...where stuff like either not only knowing progressions for movement but knowing regressions, which you just talked about there and is super-important.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, I often state I have never written a perfect program, that I haven't scribbled or crossed something out or, you know, sometimes I'm a little bit overzealous and I overshoot someone's abilities or maybe undershoot their ability. I can't tell you how many times—at the end of a month, a program

is not the same program. [Chuckles] I'm not that pompous to think that I'm a perfect strength coach and you have to do it this way. Session by session is always different. So I think it behooves any fitness professional, personal trainer, physical therapist, strength coach, what have you to definitely be willing to tweak things and substitute things and alternate things on a day-by-day basis.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I think that whole understanding of the coaching process and any sort of program, whether that's training or nutrition or...is and should be dynamic in nature. And it's one of the things I've said to people who have come to me looking for some sort of like a one-off plan to go and do, the reason we don't do that and the reason we have like an ongoing relationship with a coach is because you get so much more once there's a dynamic thing where you can change over time. And the same thing goes with my own training since I've been working with my coach, Gar, who does my programming. We kind of revisit stuff on a weekly basis and doing that change recently has been huge for me that each week we can make tweaks to kind of a general structure we had in mind, but to be able to change that dynamically is so important.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, and I'm assuming you're more engaged in the process as a result of that, and it's all about building autonomy. Like, whether we're talking nutrition, whether we're talking strength and conditioning, my goal as someone's coach is to make it so they do not need my services, in the not-so-distant future. Like I got bills to pay, like I want you to pay me of course, but—and the funny thing happens that I make them autonomous, I'm coaching them, I'm teaching them, they're learning the ropes, they become autonomous, and it's funny that they usually end up staying anyways because I'm upfront with them at the get-go, like, “I want to make it so you don't need me after six months or three months or whatever.” But just developing that relationship and, for lack of a better term, giving a shit, and having the ability of course to on the fly be able to regress or progress an exercise. Or maybe they come in on any given day and like say, “I have heavy triples program for squats,” and they had a super-long night, whether a bad day at work or their kid was up all night, whatever, I need to be able to tweak on the fly and know my client but still give them a training effect, still feel like they accomplished something. And more often than not, they have no clue that that's what I'm doing. They're just like, “Oh, I'm here for my session.” So being able to do that in a seamless manner where I'm not like, “What are we going to do?”—like I'm running the show and I think that that semblance of authority does

come with time, like certainly new trainers aren't necessarily going to have that. Like they got a—

I think Mike Boyle had a perfect analogy back in the day where he likened program design to a chef and a sous-chef and a master chef. Like the regular chefs who run the line, like they're not writing any recipes or cookbooks. They're following the master chef's recipe. Then, as they get a little bit better, they become a sous-chef and they a little bit more autonomy. They can make substitutions. They can regress an exercise, progress an exercise. Then eventually, over the course of a few years, they become an actual executive or master chef where, yes, they are writing the program.

And I think that's a beautiful analogy because it definitely does apply to the strength and conditioning and personal training realm where a lot of new trainers are coming in whether they're working in a commercial gym or a private gym and, yeah, I mean, they should be following the programs that Mike Boyle writes or Dan John writes or myself writes or Eric Cressey or Mike Robertson or Bret Contreras. We've been doing it for a while, and it took us a while to get there too. Like I'm still following programs that Mike Boyle's written. I don't consider myself a master trainer yet. I'm at the border of maybe sous-chef and master chef. But I do think it's a pretty cool analogy and makes perfect sense.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think the whole idea there where you mentioned that you were able to make changes seamlessly without even like clients realizing that these changes were made, I think that's really important. It kind of ties back to what you said earlier around that—and it's something I've certainly been guilty of in the past and I've mentioned to people—when you first get into the industry and especially when you're learning all this new information and you find it so exciting and we forget that like, yeah, we're really involved with all this fitness stuff and to us it's really interesting and we're getting all this knowledge, and it's very easy to fall into the trap of when you sit down with a client of trying to just dump all this information on them and trying to get all this stuff done, when really like they don't care about most of that stuff.

Tony Gentilcore: Nope. [Chuckles]

Danny Lennon: And even if they did, they're not going to take in all this stuff you're trying to jam into their head. So it's about, like you're saying, like that almost the

less you kind of say the better, and be able to just distill that into what actionable stuff do they have to do.

Tony Gentilcore: That is a perfect summary of coaching. You know, like again, a mistake I used to make back in the day was overcoach, throwing like all these different cues at somebody where they're looking at me like I'm speaking Klingon, like, "I have no idea what you're talking about." And I think I stole this idea from Mike Robertson – after each set I limit myself to one, maybe two cues to help clean up movement, and a lot of times if you just focus on those one or two big-rock cues, everything else kind of falls into place right after that so a lot of other things tend to happen. So whether I'm looking at someone keeping their back from rounding on a deadlift, I can just say, "Show me the logo on your shirt on the way down," and then lo and behold they keep their chest up, they're keeping their spine extended, they sit back more. Again, things just kind of fall into place. And you're right, it's simplicity is the key to coaching. That can't be reiterated enough.

Danny Lennon: I often think when we get into these discussions of the value of a coach, particularly I think in-person coaching for someone that has a lot to clean up with their technique, why it's so much more effective is that when you see someone that has maybe multiple issues with, for example, let's take a squat and there are a number of things that you would spot right after that lift to change. Like you said, for that person to start making those changes, it's likely that they can only really focus on one or two at a time, which when you have them in person you can probably correct from set to set or focus on one thing, whereas you probably maybe don't have that with an online component where you're seeing videos every couple of weeks. And so I think the problem may become if someone gets like a laundry list of issues to change, they're like that's really hard to implement when you're about to do a squat of, "Okay, I have to change...my hand position is wrong. Is my upper back tight? Am I keeping a neutral spine? Like am I bracing properly?" like all these different things that maybe they've been told to do as opposed to if they have one thing to correct, then that's something to actually work on, and that's where kind of maybe the skill acquisition piece comes in.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah. There does come a time when a lot of it's just kind of like picking the one thing you think needs to be most addressed because honestly, like you said, you mentioned hand position on a squat. Like to me, if somebody is rounding their back or falling forward on a squat, even though they're registering a bad position, like I want to address the pink

elephant in the room first before I address like hand position. So sometimes it's like it's a little bit of give and take where of course if you feel like they're going to hurt themselves, then yes, address whatever needs to be addressed, but I don't expect perfection in week one of a program. I mean, there are elite-level powerlifters who are still tweaking their squat technique and deadlift technique after years of lifting weights. So, I mean, there's always some level of tweaking and modifying and experimentation, so yeah, so you're objective as a coach is definitely to pick your poison, I guess, and yeah, use your own train of thought to figure out what's going to best suit your client's needs at that particular moment.

But you're right, inundating him with a ton of all these different cues, praise, pull down on the bars, spread the floor, chest out, I mean that just becomes very, very, very intimidating for a lot of people. So a lot of times I just say, "I'm going to be a fly in the wall." Especially when I'm coaching, like sometimes I'm silent. They get done with a set and they look at me like a deer in headlights, like, "How was that?" I'm like, "Hey, you're fine. If there was something wrong, I would have said something." [Laughs] So a lot of times the best thing I can do as their coach is to just shut up and then, yeah, if I think they're going to cause irreparable harm or whatever, then yes, I will address it or stop the set short. But yeah, I'll wait till after the set before I say, "Hey, on your next set, let's do this."

Danny Lennon: And does that to you have to become a very kind of intuitive in-the-moment-type thing as you're watching it or do you have a kind of predetermined hierarchy of things that you're looking for already?

Tony Gentilcore: I mean, there are certain things I look—I mean, certainly it depends on the exercise, of course, but as far as like what I'm looking at, but since we're on the squat, like certainly there are certain nonnegotiable things I want to see happen. Like I don't want to see them falling forward, I don't want to see them rounding their back under load, I don't want to see the knees caving in. So if I see stuff like that, then yeah, I might need to regress the exercise and say, "Hey, we're going to do goggle squat or we're going to do bodyweight squat with a band around the knees."

I need to show them success any way I can, so where they feel like they're accomplishing something, they're doing something they felt they couldn't do prior. That is another key aspect of coaching, is showing success to your clients. But yeah, of course there is a little bit of intuition where I can't say there's some magical formula I follow like that says, "Okay, X

doesn't happen, do this, and then this is going to happen." So yeah, there of course is a little bit of intuition and certainly preference. I mean, you talk to me, you talk to any other different coach and everyone has a little bit of a different style of how they coach a deadlift, how they coach a squat, how they coach a bench press. So, I mean, there's a little bit of I guess bias where to me there are certain things I look for whereas this particular coach might say, "Oh, these are the things I look for," but honestly, 95% of it is all the same. We like to argue over the 5% on the Internet.

Danny Lennon: Right, yeah.

Tony Gentilcore: That's where the drama comes from. Like, "Oh, this coach said this, but you're saying this. What the hell?" And I'm like, "Okay, like he's not wrong. That's just his preference. Like, not a big deal. Relax." I mean, you know how the Internet is.

Danny Lennon: So with that then, once we have technique or movement patterns nailed down with someone, to a certain degree that first period of where they're progressing over time is going to be just actually getting the movement down, skill acquisition, getting used to recovering from those.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah.

Danny Lennon: One issue that kind of crops up from time to time, and this is generally more for people who maybe go their own way with training and aren't working with, say, a competent coach and a competent program, that once they're at say more intermediate level where actually doing the movement isn't as big an issue as it was at, say, the beginning stage, people then, maybe they've gotten stronger to a certain point but then it just doesn't seem that they're progressing anymore and it seems to be a fairly common issue. Do you kind of identify any kind of common reasons why most guys and girls who stop progressing at that kind of level strength-wise, what kind of generally tends to be the issue?

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, that's an excellent question and that's something that can probably be spent an entire day on. But I think a few things pop out in the forefront, is, first and foremost, more often than not especially when we're talking to intermediate lifters, technique is still going to be component. There's always going to be some kind of like little technical flaw or weakness that's happening. So that's why it is important to have other sets of eyes on you or, if you don't, like videotape your lifts. Like I advocate people videotape their lifts all the time because, especially from different angles –

from the front, from the side, from the back, you need to—when I do workshops, I always tell trainers to coach at 90-degree angles because what you see from the posterior aspect is going to be different from what you see from the side, it's going to be different from what you see from the front. So it is important to coach at 90-degree angles. But then if you're videotaping or filming your lifts, then doing it from different angles is going to give you a lot of feedback too. You might spot something you had no idea you were doing and then that will help.

I think from a program design standpoint, taking technique out of the equation, I think the biggest mistake that a lot of trainees make is that when they're choosing their supplementary or accessory lifts they're just kind of haphazardly choosing them. They're just like, “Oh, I guess I'm going to do this exercise.” Whereas to me, those supplementary and accessory lifts need to have a purpose. Again, going back to the big three – squat, deadlift, bench press, those accessory movements should be addressing some form of technique flaw or weakness in those lifts.

So for example, if someone is missing a squat in the bottom, in the hole, they're missing all their squats in the hole, what accessory movement is going to address that? So maybe they need to be doing more pause lifts or more pause squats. Maybe they need to be doing more direct quad work to put more force into the ground to get up. I think that's the flaw that a lot of trainees have, is like they'll do their main lift of the day, which is great, but then after that they're just like, “Okay, I'm just going to do these exercises,” where to me I'm like, “No, those exercises need to have a purpose.” Like what is it that they're going to address? If your goal is to get strong, those movements need to address some form of weakness or technique flaw in those lifts. That to me is kind of like the main point that a lot of trainees tend to gloss over or tend to miss.

Danny Lennon: And I think it kind of comes back to when you see the people who are being successful, making progress and have, say, got some solid programming down from a coach, you often see just what you said that everything is there for a specific purpose, and I think a good way for people to screen that is when they look at their program, can you actually give a reason as to why this is here?

Tony Gentilcore: Mm-hmm.

Danny Lennon: Can you critically say, “Well, why is this here?”

Tony Gentilcore: And it doesn't have to be like this dissertation.

Danny Lennon: Yeah.

Tony Gentilcore: It could just be a sentence. Like it could be like, why are dips or why are band pressdowns in my program? Well, you suck at locking out in your bench press. You need more triceps. There you go.

Danny Lennon: Yup.

Tony Gentilcore: So it doesn't have to be like this elaborate dissertation where you're throwing these keywords that sound smart. It just could be keeping it real, like, "You have no triceps," like, "You need some more tricep strength." But yeah, it is an important point. I do feel like you should, as a fitness professional if you're writing programs, you should be able to—it comes out of that question why. Ask why, ask why. If someone asks you why, you should be able to give them an answer why is this exercise in here.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think many of the people that listen to this podcast are fitness professionals, S&C coaches, gym owners, etc., and obviously if they're listening to a 45-, 50-minute podcast, then they're I would say likely ahead of the majority of the people in the industry who oftentimes just don't strive to continue learning.

Tony Gentilcore: Sure.

Danny Lennon: So when we think about just how big a component that drive to continue to learn is, obviously there's going to be a huge element to...I think it ties back in what we're just saying that you're actually better able to understand how to do all the things we've mentioned so far. But do you think there are any best ways to go about continuing education to actually make sure it does transfer over well into being practically a better coach?

Tony Gentilcore: I don't know if there's any one best way because, I mean, if you go into the research everyone has different learning styles. Some people are more visual, some people are more tactile. I honestly think everyone's a mix and match of a lot of things or not just like one specific thing. So I guess it comes down to whether or not if going to a workshop or a lecture is more your bag where you just sit there and listen to somebody talk, then cool, which I find value in now, but I also find value in going to other facilities or going to observe other coaches and just kind of being a fly in the wall and shutting up and just watching. I gain a ton of insight from that, just watching other coaches in action, how they cue certain exercises, where they put their hands, how they interact with their athletes or their clients. That to me is of high value.

And I find value in everything. Like I find value in reading people's blogs, I find value in watching digital products, I find value in reading books. I kind of immerse myself in a wide array of learning modalities – going to workshops. I present a lot. Like even when I present, like I learn. I learn how to better articulate the points I'm trying to put across, even the questions I'm asked, like—

And it's always an honor for me to speak in front of other fitness professionals and I always tell them, like, “Listen, I'm talking about like my way, my process and what works for me. That doesn't necessarily mean we have to adopt it or that I'm right. Unfortunately, there are a number of fitness pros out there who are that narcissistic where they feel like it's like this way or the highway or this is the only way to do this.” Like it drives me bonkers when I see people, “You have to squat this way,” or “You have to deadlift this way,” and I'm just like, “No, it's bullshit. No, they don't.” Everyone is different based off their anatomy, their leverages, their anthropometry, their experience level.

I lose a little bit of respect for coaches that are that dogmatic in their train of thought. I gain a lot more respect for people who are open-minded, are willing to admit when they're wrong in this component and change their viewpoint or just being able to say “I don't know.” Like I think those there words are a powerful thing too. Like if I'm asked a question by a client, I don't know the answer, I'll, “I don't know, but I'll get the answer for you.” Like I'm lucky enough to have this pretty vast network of fitness pros that I can reach out to, whether it's nutrition-related or injury-related. I think clients find value in that too. Like they say, “Oh, he's willing to say that he doesn't know something and he's not just tossing something out of his ass, but then he's actually going to pursue an answer for me,” which again, that's another way of adding value to your services.

So as far as learning, like I take it upon myself to try to attend four to six workshops a year. I present a lot workshops myself and I learn from those too, but also I'm constantly getting digital products and books and DVDs. I mean, I don't know about you but I have like this stash of books and DVDs that are like just waiting to be read and watched. I'm like, “Oh my God, there's so much information I need to read!” It's hard to stay on top of everything.

But yeah, I think it's all value. Like I don't really say one is better than the other. I know it's a very open-ended answer but that's kind of how I approach it.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I agree and I think even the intention is probably the important thing, right? The fact that you're trying to...

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah.

Danny Lennon: ...accumulate more knowledge is probably just getting out and doing something and trying to get it from somewhere is more important than spending time thinking, "Oh, which is the best way to go?" and kind of end up doing nothing and being frozen in action.

Tony Gentilcore: Right. I mean, and too, like I mean even when people ask me about writing, for example—not that I consider myself a writer writer. like I do write fair amount of writing. I'm a strength coach that happens to write. Like I don't consider myself a writer. I think there's a big difference there. But I get asked all the time like, "Oh, how do I start writing?" or "How do I start a blog?" or "What do I need to do to get my name out there more?" and I just want to be like, "Write." [Chuckles] Like, "Stop emailing me, like what you need to be doing and just do the activity that you're asking to do."

And same thing goes for like I can't tell you how many clients I've started with, distance coaching and in-person, who were like, "Oh, I'm really bad at squatting." So I'm like, "That's what we're going to be doing for six months, we're going to squat," and then lo and behold, they're like, "Oh my God, my squat feels so much better." It's because they did it, you know?

Danny Lennon: Right, yeah.

Tony Gentilcore: So it's really that simple. On anything and anything. Whether we're talking nutrition, mindfulness, training, anything, it's just you got to do it.

Danny Lennon: I think you said a really important thing around the open-mindedness piece of this, and actually just a great example of that was when you talked about going around and seeing other people, how they do things. I think that's a testament to that open-mindedness that you obviously have and the way of learning of not getting to a point where, I think I see it with a number of coaches, where they almost feel that they have everything sorted and everything is down and that they know what they need to know, and that becomes then where you seem to shut off from trying to learn from others. So if you see value that you can learn from pretty much anyone just by, again, like observing, that's a powerful tool.

Tony Gentilcore: And that's an important point. Like you can learn from everyone and every book you read. Like another thing that drives me bonkers is when I see...I get on Facebook or Instagram or I see reviews for whatever books and they're like, "I didn't learn anything." That's bullshit. You just chose not to learn something. I mean, there's nothing new per se in the fitness industry, like I don't feel like there's anything revolutionary out there, like everything's been said and done and tried, but how different people articulate a certain point or how they present it or...that always changes. So, I mean, yeah, there's nothing I've written on my website that is new or revolutionary, but I articulate it in a way that might resonate with a few people like that might get them, "Oh, that clicks. That makes sense. My light bulb just went off" It's bullshit whenever someone says, "Oh, I've learned all there is to learn." And I have come across fitness professionals who have said that.

Danny Lennon: Oh yeah.

Tony Gentilcore: Like I remember distinctly my first job here in Boston when I worked at a commercial gym, there was a higher-level personal trainer who was working there. He literally said, "Oh, I don't read anymore because I've learned all I need to learn," and I basically just rolled my eyes and didn't really interact with him after that. I was like, "Whoa, that's bogus."

Danny Lennon: Yeah.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, like I'm not going to learn anything from you if you're that close-minded.

Danny Lennon: Yeah. I think even the aspect of when you observe other people particularly in person like you mentioned, and you said there around how they interact with clients, I think that's one of maybe the biggest things that gets forgotten now where we can access so much information online around program design and how to actually implement all this stuff and exercise selection and volume and everything that people are trying to do with how they're going to put together a "perfect program" for a particular client, and I think at the end of the day the practical aspects, the coaches that have really impressed me is actually when I've seen them with people in person of how they actually not only get across the information but just how they actually are with that person. How that person buys into them just as a personality and a person is so much more successful than no matter what program they were doing with them that program almost becomes irrelevant to a certain degree.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah. I mean, and not to toot my horn but I do remember a scenario when I was still at Cressey Sports Performance just last year because we always had people coming in to observe the staff. I mean, it's like every week we'd have groups of people come in or one or two here and there just to "just observe." And I remember at the end of a particular day one of the people, one of the guys there who was observing, came up to me, like, "I just want to let you know that I've learned a lot from watching you from across the room." Like he had observed me coach somebody through a Turkish get-up and he wasn't even next to me listening to what I was saying. He was just watching me where I was putting my hands and like where I was pointing, and he said he learned a lot just from that, which obviously I took as a huge compliment. I was like, "Thank you." Like that to me is like the highest compliment I could ever receive. But it does prove a point. Like you are always being observed as a coach. The fact that I am a very active coach—like I'm always moving. I'm not just standing there like counting reps and, "Yeah, that's good, two more." I'm not that kind of a coach. Like when I'm watching somebody squat, like I'm like getting on the floor and I'm looking... Like it gets awkward sometimes. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: [Laughs]

Tony Gentilcore: Like I'm like "Sorry". Like they get it. Like I give them a little bit of a heads-up if they're new.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, disclaimer.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah. I haven't been sued yet, so that's good. But yeah, I just think that that was a very, very cool compliment that I received and I think that's the way coaching should be. It should be pretty active like that.

Danny Lennon: Tony, one question I'm interested that I've asked a couple of people before, and sorry to put you on the spot if this is a bit of a big one, when it comes to messages that we see within the fitness industry right now, is there one that comes to mind that is commonly perpetuated at the moment that you wish was less prevalent or wish people realized was maybe a bit misleading in how it's put out?

Tony Gentilcore: Oh, man. Like when it comes to the squat, for example, like there are some coaches out there and some systems out there that said, "You have to do it this way. Like this is the only way to squat if you want to be successful in it." And I don't agree with that. Like I think a lot of it comes down to obviously goals. Yes, I get it, like if someone's goal is to lift as

much weight as humanly possible, a competitive powerlifter, there are certain ways to squat that lines him up for the best success possible. However, we can argue over low bar versus high bar, we can argue over optimal foot widths and like whatever, but at the end of the day it's going to come down to what feels best, what feels strongest, where it puts people in better positions. It really comes down to respecting people's anatomy.

Like when we talk about the hips, everyone has different hip structure. If we're talking about the way the acetabulum is facing, what the femoral neck is doing, what the femoral head is doing, anteverted, retroverted, anterior tilt, pull, I mean, there are so many different hip structures that to say everyone has to squat this particular way symmetrically, it doesn't make sense. Like Dean Somerset and I do workshops together all the time. That's one of the messages that we relay where sometimes people are going to have a staggered stance when they squat or one foot's going to be pointed out more than the other and it feels good, it feels better, they feel stronger, and then they're like, "Well, isn't that going to create more of an imbalance?" And we argue, "Well, don't you think by forcing them into a symmetrical stance that doesn't fit their anatomy, wouldn't that be creating an imbalance?" They're like, "Oh, yeah, I guess that makes sense."

So that to me is one of the messages that gets put out there where some people are very dogmatic and very narrow-minded with their approach where you have to conventional deadlift or you have to low bar squat. And I can respect their points of view and I can respect the biomechanics and I get it, like hey, they're not wrong, like I get it, but I can't with good conscience say that I'm going to put everyone I work with into this one category where you have to do it this way because some people just aren't going to be able to squat to X depth or put the bar in this position or deadlift this variation with much success. Like I have to set them up for the best success possible and, I mean, of course that's where assessment comes in and me being a coach comes in.

Danny Lennon: Right. And I think that's it. Whenever you speak in absolutes you by nature are discounting any context like individually what is the scenario here if you talk in absolutes all the time.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah. Yeah, I remember Michael Mullin who's a really good physical therapist here in the States. He's located in Maine. He actually does a lot with PRI. But he came into Cressey Sports Performance several times, did in-services, and I remember one line he said in particular really resonated with me. He's like whenever somebody uses, whether they're talking,

whether they're writing an article, if they use three words, if they use “everyone,” “always” and “never,” his red flag goes up.

Danny Lennon: That's awesome.

Tony Gentilcore: So whenever someone says, “Everyone has to do this,” or “Everyone always has to do this,” or “You should never do this,” he immediately has his red flag go up. And I just like, that really resonated with me.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, it's awesome.

Tony Gentilcore: So that to me is perfect. Like that is so true.

Danny Lennon: Tony, we're coming just close to time here, so before I get to the final question, perhaps now would be a good time if you let people know where they can find you online and where they can get more of your work.

Tony Gentilcore: Well, home base for me is my website, which is my name, TonyGentilcore.com. So there is where I do my blogging every week. It links to all the articles I've written for various sites, T Nation, Men's Health, Women's Health, etc., links to pictures of my cat, stuff like that. It's just, you know, that's home base for me. Social media, that would be the easiest way to find more information and get a little bit more insight on my approach to training.

Danny Lennon: Cool, and I will link up to that in the show notes for this episode for everyone listening, so make sure you go and check out more of Tony's stuff there. And with that, Tony, it brings us to the final question that we always end the show on, and this can be to do with any topic outside of what we've discussed today and it's simply if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would have some positive impact on some area of their life, what would that one thing be?

Tony Gentilcore: Get more sleep. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: Excellent.

Tony Gentilcore: That is a very simple answer, but I think if people got more sleep and they went to freaking bed, they probably feel better, maybe more productive.

Danny Lennon: Hundred percent.

Tony Gentilcore: My wife and I, we joke. Like we joke about how lame we are that on a Saturday night we're in bed by 9 o'clock, 9:30, but it's awesome because when we get up at our normal times on a Sunday, before 8 o'clock we've

had the laundry done, our grocery shopping done, food preps done, and we have the whole day to just kind of do whatever we want. So you go to bed early, you get up early, you'd be surprised in how much more productive you are.

Danny Lennon: Oh yeah, for sure.

Tony Gentilcore: Not to mention recovery and just feeling better.

Danny Lennon: There's literally not one I think system in the body that poor sleep is going to not negatively impact. It's crazy.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah. Go to sleep, people. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: Yeah, yeah. I love that. Perfect. Tony, this has been an absolute pleasure to have you on.

Tony Gentilcore: Yeah, great.

Danny Lennon: Some really good information. I'm sure people are going to get a ton of value from it, so thank you so much for your time today, man.

Tony Gentilcore: No, it's my pleasure. I hope to come on soon.

Danny Lennon: So there we have it. That was Tony Gentilcore. Remember to check out the show notes to this episode at [SigmaNutrition.com/episode132](https://www.sigmanutrition.com/episode132). You'll get links to everything that was discussed today and also you can get transcripts to the podcast as well.

If you want to show your appreciation for the podcast, then I'd be honored if you considered doing anything that helps the show, whether that's sharing it on social media, particularly if you enjoyed this episode; leaving a review on iTunes really, really helps. And we also have the ability for you to become an official supporter of the show on Patreon, which is like a \$1 patronage for a podcast episode. And you can get more details of what that's all about and what we're trying to do there if you just go to [Patreon.com/sigmanutrition](https://www.patreon.com/sigmanutrition). And just thank you to all of you who are already supporting the show in some capacity and for all of you considering to do so as well.

And that's us for this week. I will talk to you in the next episode and, until then, have an amazing week.