

SNR #113: One Thing To Improve Your Life

A collection of the best guest answers to the question:

“if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would improve their life in some aspect, what would that one thing be?”.

Danny Lennon: Hello and welcome to Sigma Nutrition Radio. I am Danny Lennon and you are listening to Episode 113 today. And today’s episode is a slight deviation away from our usual format of an in-depth interview with a world-class active researcher or coach or practitioner and instead it’s something that we’re going to address the whole topic of how to make our lives better or what actions or concepts or thoughts to include that are actually going to make a big difference in the quality of our lives, and it essentially comes from the final question that I end every single show on and that’s asking people, if you’re going to advise people to do just one thing each and every day that would lead to a beneficial impact or improving someone’s life in some aspect, anything and it could be outside of nutrition, it could be outside of fitness, anything that’ll have a beneficial impact, what would that one action be?

And it was kind of sparked off to do something like this because Sam Sackett, who does a ton of cool stuff especially on social media, he has a really cool Facebook group where we talk about fitness and nutrition, etc., which I’ll link to in the show notes for this episode—you should go and check that out—Sam does an awesome job of curating tons of content from around the place for people in one handy area to discuss, and so definitely go and look at that. And in that Facebook group, Sam essentially posted to people asking them how they would respond to that question that we always end the podcast on, and lots of people put in various different answers and it was kind of cool to see. And so I thought I’ll go back and look at some of the answers I’ve been given on this show because I know they’ve particularly impacted me from hearing that from all these types of different people, and certainly there have been a lot of common threads from a lot of different areas. For example, one you’ll probably see is this idea of gratitude or thankfulness, is one I’ve heard numerous times across

the show. But I thought I'd go back, listen to pretty much all of them again, and pick out my favorite answers to that question or ones that I think have been particularly impactful thoughts or one that I particularly agree with, and some that give quite a bit of context to it. So, obviously I've had to leave out a ton of great answers, but I've got it down to some that I think will be pretty useful. So that's what I'm going to do and I'm going to roll out those clips over the next 20, 25 minutes or so, and hopefully, if you just come and listen and think about where these people from all these different backgrounds or all these different life experiences who have essentially spent their lives like in the trenches doing research or helping people on the front line coaching, and they've all these, like from all parts of the world, like all these different backgrounds and yet they distill everything down into kind of this one solid answer, and to me the big intriguing thing that you'll probably come across is that we spend all this time particularly on this show talking about the nitty-gritty details of nutritional science and getting very specific and spending whole shows looking at like the impact of one particular protein or we're looking at metabolic pathways and enzymes, we can get really dialed in on so many different aspects.

And I think that's all really, really cool and I think eating a good-quality diet obviously has a huge impact on your life and training can have a huge impact on your life, but that said, I think the idea of remembering all the other things that have a much more fundamental picture that doing all the kind of health and nutrition stuff at the expense of some other important things is kind of missing the point. And so just listen to some of these answers that people give and think about, is that something that you're doing on a consistent basis? So we'll get into the show. I will list out in order all the people whose answers are given here on the show notes page so if you want to go back and maybe you can't make out someone's voice, I'll list the episodes that each of these are taken from in order so you can go and check these if there's a particular one you enjoyed, but apart from that, I'm just going to let them roll through one clip into the next. And remember, it's coming from that question of asking people if there's one thing you could do or if you could advise people to do one thing each and every day that would have a beneficial impact on their life or improve their life in some aspect, what would that one thing be? So let's get into some of my favorite answers to that question.

John Berardi

My head goes in so many directions, you know? I think...I'm going to compartmentalize here. I'm going to say for your own emotional health, you got to hug at least one person a day. I have three little children and another one on the way. I get loads of hugs every day. I didn't know what I was missing until I got them. So get a hug every day. It doesn't have to be from a little person. If you don't have little people, I'd advise you not to try and get hugs from [laughs] little people because it'll be creepy. So that's on that side.

From a mental sanity and health and work productivity side, I would say take five minutes of like quiet reflection. I'm not going to say meditation because that turns some people off. In fact, it still turns me off, and I do meditation. And I'll give you an example of how I do it. In the morning, I wake up, I do all my bathroom business, I go out into the kitchen, I turn on a pod of hot water for tea, and while the water's boiling—it takes three to five minutes—I just sit on the counter, close my eyes, breathe deeply, and just try and clear my mind. And when the teapot flicks and does its little whistle, that's when I'm done. So I have a little discrete time block—it's three or five minutes—where I just clear my head to start the day. When you're busy, it feels like that's a real luxury, but it's actually very, very useful and important.

So get a hug, get some quiet time from yourself. You can think of your quiet, focused meditation time as like your own internal hug.

And then the last thing is I just think movement. I think we all in fitness take it for granted until we can't or until we see people who don't. You don't have to exercise. Again, kids has done a tremendous value of this for me in my life. They get me running around and moving. We go to a park to play at least once every day. Get some kind of movement, preferably outside, even in the winter. I mean, you can go sledding or build a snowman.

So hug, quiet time, and some movement in fresh air. I think if you could do those things every day it'll markedly improve the quality of your life especially if you're not doing them now. If you are doing them now, then I just contributed no value to your life and [laughs] apologize for that, but in my experience most people know these are good things but they don't get them every day, and the conscious seeking out of these things every day, that might change your life, looking for that time of self-care.

Eric Helms

Sure, man, I've been fortunate enough to have a lot of great mentors and right now kind of the person that's popping into my mind is my PhD and master's primary supervisor, Dr. John Cronin. And I'm going to go out on a limb and give a little bit of his personal story and hopefully he either doesn't hear this or doesn't care, [chuckles] but he recently overcame a fight with cancer and this was kind of in the midst of him being a very, very active professor rising through the ranks and really doing a lot in the field of strength conditioning, and he had a very close brush with death, to put it straightforward. And he told me when we got out here that it's all about balance. You have to keep yourself healthy. You got to take care of yourself first before you can help anyone else or really address the things in your life, and if pushing towards personal achievements destroys your life or degrades in your life, then you've kind of got the equation wrong. The whole reason we do these things like competition or education or all these other things, all the things that are supposed to enhance our life, if they're not actually doing that, then we need to kind of go back to the drawing board.

He also said look at your life and are you putting something positive onto the world, and if you're not, then why are you here? You're making the world a worse place. He said you don't have time to hang around negative people and to be doing these negative things. That's only going to be life-destroying and bring disease. So I think just the positive mindset and evaluating what I do on a daily basis of am I building people up or am I tearing them down I think has been invaluable to me.

Michael Ruscio

I think for an audience such as yours that's educated about health, what I have noticed is once people are in this sphere, they tend to be in the right ballpark for diet and hopefully for lifestyle, but I guess the one thing that sometimes is left out of the equation is taking time for fun and taking time for yourself. People usually are sleeping enough, they're eating really well, but sometimes the urge to learn more and more and more about their health kind of creates this syndrome where they don't take enough time for themselves, they become a little bit less fun, and I think just to remind people that this health stuff hopefully should be in pursuit to make you

healthier and more energetic and more vibrant to then go back to the life that you're trying to enhance and your friends and your hobbies and your socialization. So I would urge people to commit some time and energy to that because I think for this audience it's probably the one area that can yield the nicest dividends.

Bryan Chung

I think for me it's going to be a little bit a roundabout answer. I think where I've come from and the things that have sort of shaped me the most have been really involving death and the fact that everything dies, right? And so it ties into your ongoing theme of gratitude, it ties into a lot of different things and positivity and that sort of thing, but I think it's hard for me to shape this into words and I think the way I want to put it is that I think that it's important that we always learn from death because it is around us and it is something that our culture and our society does not like to talk about and makes very uncomfortable. But there is a book that was written by a palliative care nurse that really changed the way that I looked at things and, you know, in dying there is a fundamental gift that the dying give to us which has to do with gratitude but also has to do with just forcing us to understand that we will eventually all die. And it has to do with not taking everything for granted, has to do with living for the now or all those little sort of psychobabble types of things, but it really encompasses the idea of what is important and how should you spend your time. And that's not necessarily so that you can't spend it on things that other people might consider frivolous, but nobody on their deathbed that I have attended to when they're dying has ever wished that they had worked more, that they had ever wished that they had owned more. Almost to a T, the wishes of the dying are that they had more time and that they had spent it differently, and usually it has to do with spending it with loved ones and not taking your loved ones for granted. And I think that that is something that always has stuck with me just having gone through this weird journey that I have had the opportunity to go through, and always to keep that in mind, to understand that to really...before you decide you're going to do something, to think about whether that's really important to you or not, and in the grand scheme of things, is it really important to you or not, because if it's not then you really shouldn't be doing it.

Ben Esgro

I think the hardest part of that question is that everybody who might be listening may see the world differently than me, so I can only really give my own subjective response to that, and for me it really is appreciation, so appreciate everything that has happened in order to get you here living, breathing, listening to this, the technology, the investment of people's lives who have designed a computer chip, who have designed circuit boards and televisions and everything like that. Because I think if we lose sight of that, I think we become ungrateful and we just kind of almost like excessively entitle, and it will be the end of this huge technology rise we're on and then that'd be so painful for me to see because, man, I think humans as a collective have so much potential. If I'm not...I'm usually lost in so many other thoughts, but a lot of times that's the one thought I get planted in, is like this world is so beautiful and complex and so harmoniously woven together. Like we can't lose sight of that just because someone wants to argue with us on social media or like something didn't work out our way or like just small things like that.

Nia Shanks

I'd like to tell people, and this is again something I do for myself, what can you do today that is awesome? I mean, it can be something as simple as calling somebody you haven't talked to in a long time or going to your favorite restaurant or doing something spontaneous. Just what can you do today—it doesn't have to be big—that's going to make today awesome? Because we have no guaranteed time on this earth. Nothing is guaranteed, no tomorrow, nothing. So make the most of what you can do today. Do this one thing to make today worth it.

Lyle McDonald

I don't know. I think the problem is I don't know that there is a single thing. I mean, I guess if you want to talk what most people, just pick something, pick a—I remember I read an article I think on some website making the point that over time small changes add up to enormous results and, if someone has a goal...there's a contradiction between making small changes that are sustainable and seeing results quickly enough to be happy, and that's kind of a contradiction that's in the way. But it's in all

behaviors, right? I think as adults we forget how long it took us to learn the alphabet. We forget how long because we were young and time didn't mean anything, right? The fact that it took three years to learn a basic skill when you're 5 doesn't matter. When you're 35 or 28 or 45, the idea of taking a year to learn to become basically competent in guitar or to reach your goals or to learn a new language, that's just completely foreign to us because we don't...time is of the essence and who wants to wait that long? And I think accepting that, realizing that not only is it going to take longer than you think but that very small incremental changes have profound long-term results and reconceptualizing at least part of your approach to behavior change that way, like not saying that there can't be larger changes, but for a lot of people big changes equal big failures. Or, I guess, to be even more general, if there's one thing I would recommend people realize or do is if you keep doing the same thing and failing, do something else.

I think that's the one kind of really tying into weight loss. People, they go on an extreme diet, they lose weight, they rebound, and then they do it again and again and again. Like I'm all for it. If it works, fantastic. If intermittent fasting works for you, great. But if intermittent fasting makes you binge by the time you've tried three or four times, move on. It's not for you, maybe for somebody else but it's not for you. If "if it fits your macros, makes you binge and go off the rails, quit doing it, right? People fall into this trap of like this is the best approach for everyone and that's not true. If you've done something three or four times and you failed at it, try a different approach. If fast dieting doesn't work for you, try slow dieting. If slow dieting makes you get bored, try a little bit faster. Just, God almighty, if it's not working, just do something different.

Phil Learney

Compliment someone on what they do for you. So just thank you to someone for the help that they give you, whatever it might be. I think that's always a...because I'm always a big fan of that what goes around comes around, and I think there are so many people helping so many people out that I think sometimes you don't...people don't get acknowledgement that they deserve for the stuff that they do, and I think a lot of people particularly in our institute do a lot of stuff which is, you know, it's not required, it's not necessary for them to do, but they just do. If somebody writes an article you like, I think you just thank them for it. I

think we've kind of lost that element. People just click "Like" and that's it. But I think people in your workplace, people who help you out, your peers and the people that surround you, I think just thanking people really for what they bring to your table.

Susan Kleiner

We understand so clearly that when we do something nice for someone else it has such a positive impact on ourselves. There really is a biological as well as an emotional payoff to doing good, and I kind of like to pass that on that if you do good [chuckles] for others in an active way, not writing a check, not handing off money but actually doing something good, we activate the centers in our brain that give us both an emotional satisfaction as well as a biological boost. And so that's kind of my thing. I always, you know, not that we need to get a payoff from it, but it's kind of nice to know that you actually do. And so doing well by doing good is kind of a little saying that I have.

Kirk Parsley

You can probably guess that I would say get as much as sleep as you can possibly get. I don't think there's any faster way to improve yourself and I don't think there's any faster way to break yourself than to neglect sleep. So yeah, that's my shtick, man. I think it's the most powerful thing we have going in any area. It's neurocognitive, it's athletic performance, it's body composition, it's mood, personality. Like you name it, it's sleep. Sleep in my mind is the most important aspect of all of that.

Martin MacDonald

I honestly think one of the best things that people can do and I'm not good enough at it myself but it's trying to be thankful for something every day, and I'm lucky with some of my employees, will kind of highlight something. I'll say oh, you know, I feel like a failure in some aspect or, you know, in terms of whatever, not winning X contract or not, you know, these kind of things, not being asked to speak at X conference. You feel like a failure and then they'll bring it back, "Look how much you've achieved. Be thankful." And I think if people did that more, it would just

make their whole life better just realizing what you can be thankful for. At the minute, I'm so thankful for my new daughter and it's really...like that's a really blatant one for me to focus on and I'm just like, I'm really happy. But I think at the other times it's like I've done a degree of be thankful for that I had the money to do it, had people around me supporting me, have got this job. Yeah, I think if people were more thankful just once a day, focus on the good in your life, everyone would have, I think in your words, an all-around kick-ass life.

Bryan Walsh

Love yourself and other people and all of life, actually. That's about all there is. You could add things like forgiveness and whatever, but just love yourself for everything that you do including your mistakes because they're loveable too, whether we think so or not, and love the rest of life, man. I mean, it's a short, short little stint we get here on earth and I think we can make the best of it, and to do so is, you know, it's not about nutrition, really. Nutrition's great and medicine's great, but in reality, I think when you look at your legacy, is how many people that you loved and how many people loved you back. And so if you can do that and there's a high number [of people] at the end, but I think that's a good life no matter what you do with it.

Brad Schoenfeld

I think it would be to take a given period of time for self-reflection. Now, I would call it mindfulness, something I've adopted more recently. It can be meditation, but mindfulness really is just getting within yourself. I think people tend to be so focused and stressed in aspects of their lives that taking a good 10 minutes out of your day in a quiet environment and just being mindful of the surroundings and whether it be through meditation or just deep breathing or other practices that you de-stress, decompress and allow yourself to breathe.

Brent Pottenger

But at the end of the day, what is it all about? And it always goes back to people and it's about relationships. And I think that the most important

thing at the end of the day is to be thankful for the people around you and to be thankful whether it's your family, and how I would define family can be different for every person, but for me I will often say family first. So without the people around you, you wouldn't be who you are. None of us are autonomous individuals. We're all interconnected. And I think that the modern society, there's a lot of hubbub, there's a lot of distractions, and I think part of what we're trying to do at the Ancestral Health Symposium and Society is bring people back to something that's fundamental to being human, which is that we're social animals who are dependent upon human relationships to survive and thrive. And so just being thankful for the people around you is something I'm always working on and trying to be mindful of the people around you because you can be a positive force in anyone's life at any point during any day if you're keeping your eyes open to the people around you and being thoughtful about your relationships with them.

Mike Mutzel

Gosh, that's a one. Yeah, I would...I'm kind of torn between honestly just being present and chewing your food. I go to a lot of medical conferences and these are practitioners that are helping a lot of patients and they sit down and just gobble down their food, and some of these people don't have the best blood sugar regulation or they have too much weight to lose. And I think it's something that we're never really taught, is to be very present, to chew 40, 50 bites per swallow, and be mindful and grateful about the food that we're eating and eat with groups of people. And I think that one thing, I know it's so elementary and it's so simple, but it's...I mean, me, I, like you, Danny, live this, breathe it, work 10,12 hours a day and I struggle to be very mindful sometimes because sometimes it's like going and fueling up your car, you just want to eat and get back to what you're doing and onto the next thing. And I think that's something that is so powerful for digestion, for blood sugar balance, for release of gut hormones, and even just that psychological relationship with food. I think if people could just slow down, chew, and eat their food and take a lot of bites before each swallow, I think that would be...would improve the health of a lot of people.

Alberto Nunez

You know what? I was going to say the selfish thing but I'm not going to do the selfish one. I would say that one thing that I really get a kick out of doing every single day—and I am on a three-year streak with this—is I will go out of my way to make someone feel really good about themselves. And that can just be a random compliment, helping someone out, and especially when it comes to acknowledging some positive behavior you've seen from someone. Quite often it's even strangers. I think it feels wonderful and if you do it long enough it just becomes a good thing.

James Maskell

I'm sure you agree with this, Danny, is that how different is your life when you're actually doing something every day that you actually care about? And that is the biggest thing that I would say to people about their health actually, is that find some way to do something that you care about, whatever that is, because it is really a life-changing experience. And you know, what I decided when I left the bank is I just wanted to have one life, not the life at work that I sort of didn't like, and then the life of home where I tried to fit as much fun stuff into those hours as possible to make up for the fact that I hated my job. As soon as that changed, everything else changed, and I feel like people are hungrier for that than almost anything else.

Shawn Wells

You know, right now for me, I would say because I work probably about 80 hours a week, I have to find ways to settle my mind down to get proper sleep. I know when I get too ramped up and I turn out the lights it's almost like my brain goes haywire because now there are less distractions, and I found that doing just some regular meditation, I've been using this app Headspace which is a whole other discussion, but it's been extremely helpful for me every day to—and there are people like Tim Ferriss with The 4-hour Workweek that has some great approaches on how to approach your work and be more efficient, prioritizing your work, organizing your work, not going down the rabbit hole of chasing fires, those kind of things. And I found myself being able to get more done more efficiently in less

time and be happier doing it, and that's the key to really lasting for a long time and staying on track with doing what you love.

James Krieger

Ooh, that's a really good question. Maybe it's just the golden rule of treating people the way you want to be treated, in a way. So I think the way we interact with people and stuff and I think the way we treat other people, you know, if we treat people the way that we would want to be treated, I think the world would probably be a better place. So I think from a personal perspective, I think nothing beats just hard work. Whatever it is you want to achieve or whatever it is you want to do, you just got to be willing to put the work in. I mean, I know every area in my life that I've been successful in, it's because I had to work really hard at it. I mean, yeah, there are natural abilities there too that certainly come into play, but when it comes to just kind of achieving the goals that you have for yourself, nothing beats just putting in the sweat for it.

Brad Dieter

You know, I'm a big believer in trying to be as thankful as possible as you can be and just knowing that life happens and it gives us all a lot, sometimes more than we can handle, and how we respond to things is really important. And so I think one of the best things to try to improve your life as just a human being is really to try to think about the things that you're grateful for and thankful for. In all of our lives, we have at least one or two things that we're really glad that we have, whether it's our health, whether it's our family, whether it's our job, our kids, if it's our dog, if it's your morning cup of coffee. Just really trying to focus on the positive things and not letting the details and the nitty-gritty stuff kind of consume you, you know, Danny, like we're talking about when it comes to the nutrition piece. Focus on the real basic broad concepts and try to do those consistently. You know, in life, try to focus on the big important things and not let the rest of the stuff get to you too much.

So that would probably be one piece, and then the last piece I would say, the last piece of advice would just be try to find a way to do what you enjoy doing every day. I think that brings a lot more happiness and fulfillment in your life than chasing a paycheck. So, I mean, I'm in

science. Science is not one of those jobs that is super-lucrative but it's one of those things where I get to get up every day and go and try to find answers to really hard questions and try to make a difference. And so that kind of what...that's what drives me. So those would probably be the two things I would suggest to people.

Danny Lennon:

So there we have it. They are some of my favorite answers to that final question. I hope there are some big things that jumped out at you there and things that you can take and things that I think that we just need to keep in mind more often because, at a certain level, a lot of those really most important things are things we know we should be doing. They're the kind of things that we know have a big impact. They're the things that we know are important to us, but we let all the other little things in life get in the way of those and kind of cloud those or not see them for what they are or maybe take them for granted. So I think it's good from time to time to remind ourselves of just those things that actually do make a difference. And coming from all these various successful people, I think it's amazing to hear that no matter how in-depth people have gone in terms of their coaching pedigree, how elite they are in the academic fields and the in-depth research they're doing or the extensive amount of work they've done with athletes or all the knowledge they've built up through years and years in study, all this, when it comes down to one thing that's going to improve someone's life, you see the type of answers people give and that's the stuff that's important. So hopefully this was valuable to you. Remember, the show notes will list out everyone that was included in this episode and I'll link to each of the full podcasts for each of those.

If you are enjoying the show, please, please, please do go and review the show on iTunes—makes a tremendous difference to the show—and also then please consider supporting the show on Patreon at Patreon.com/sigmanutrition, and you can find out what that's about there. There's also a link on the website. So please go and support the show if you possibly can. And until next week, thank you so much for listening to the show again. I really, really do appreciate you.