



DANNY LENNON:

Jacob, welcome to the podcast my man.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Thank you Danny. It's an honor to be on this show man. I've been a long time fan and listener of the Sigma Nutrition podcast, so it's a privilege to be here. Thank you.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah. It's great to have you, because I think we are very much aligned on a lot of our thoughts around not only coaching but also generally health and fitness ideas and how people should think of them because I think there's different ways people view their goals and they tend to change over time. I think certainly from what I've seen you discuss I think we're very much aligned on a lot of ideas, so I'm looking forward to the conversation. But maybe before I get into any kind of specific questions for you maybe lead off with an introduction to yourself for people just so we have some context of where a lot of this stuff is coming from, so maybe your own background in coaching and fitness and all that type of stuff to give us some good context for the show.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, for sure. I guess your listeners are very much used to having experts and those who are very scientifically inclined on academic. Whereas, I tend to fit on the opposite end of the spectrum I'm a coach first and foremost. I have two facilities in Melbourne, Australia I'm sure many of you listening would have picked up on the accent by now. We're in different

ends of the world Danny and I, but yes so I've been in the coaching game since I was 19. So, near on 8 years now. Got into the whole lifting thing, because I was chubby when I was like 15 I wanted to look like Greg Plitt as most young males did back then, and I got pretty good at starving myself and working ridiculously hard in the gym. And so it evolved into something where I had a lot of people and abundance of people asking me what I was doing. I was doing it looking for advice and asking for programs and stuff. So, I began writing programs when I was 18-19 like 15 colors of pop albeit they were horrible and I look back with shame now at what I was advising people to do as I'm sure many practitioners and coaches do upon reflection. But I thought hell maybe there's something to this, maybe I'm half-day snouted and yeah I got into coaching officially in 2010 and like many fitness professionals I started on a gym floor cleaning equipment, showing members around. Washing the sauna was always a lot of fun and I got my first clients back yeah 2010 and still working with that individual to this day. So, I guess I'm a coach. I work with a lot of bodybuilders and power lifters. I have had quite a bit of experience in both sports personally and with clients, and soon after working with people for quite a while realized how multifaceted this whole coaching thing is and became entrenched in learning and know more about it and tried to figure my way through what is the plethora of information online and soon realized that it is quite confusing and diverse career path. But somehow managed to make it through unscathed and I guess you know given the average tenure of coaches is around 6 months going on 8 years is quite a feat if I do say so myself. Now I have my two facilities in Melbourne. I'm fortunate to have 15 coaches work under JPS and we have around 500 to 600 sessions a week at both our studios. So, we're working with quite a high volume of people now, but always just looking to improve what I do as a coach from the way that we go about things our processes and what not at JPS, but also our understanding of what it means to be a good coach and I guess that's what we're going to talk about today.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah. So, that actually leads me into something I was interested to ask you and this again quite a broad question and I realize that there's probably many

ways you could take this. But I think it gives a sense of maybe some interesting area to dig into. So, when you think of what the role of a coach is? That sounds to maybe some people like a very simple question, but I think there are many layers to that. So, with all that you've done and your experiences and your current I suppose philosophies around coaching and training and improving someone in the grandest term of improving. What do you see as the role of a coach?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah. That's a really good question. I think the role of a coach is going to depend primarily on what the client wants. I think we as coaches are quite biased in what we perceive to be our role, but at the end of the day clients want results and that assumes a very different meaning of every client but fundamentally I perceive coaching to be a service, which means that we are required to meet or exceed our customer and our clients' expectations. So, I guess if we break that down we first need to establish what the clients' expectations are that's going to be at the forefront of the coaching process first to then be able to identify our role in working with someone. So, to provide the highest valued service we need to align the practice that we adopt with that person whether it's nutrition, training and to improve them whatever that might be with what they want. So, the question becomes how do coaches improve their ability to meet and exceed the clients' expectations and over time we need to ensure that we have both the capacity and capabilities to give our clients what they desire and I guess this is something I've been thinking about a lot lately to be honest. And like I said work with a lot of coaches and fortunately I had to mentor – you know I've mentored over 50 coaches around Australia and now globally which is pretty cool. Hence the way that I guess I perceive coaching philosophy or my philosophy at least is that coaching is all about the value that you can offer your clients and that encompasses three pillars so experience, knowledge and your own personal success as a coach as well as your clients' success. And I think the more that we can improve or raise the height of each of these pillars it improves our value ceiling over time and that allows us to become more valuable and to provide a service that the client wants. Again, it's going to meet or exceed their expectations if we're continually improving our

experience, we're increasing our knowledge, we're becoming more educated and we personally achieve better results and our clients are deciding to get more and more results over time. So, I think that each of these three pillars are indispensable in the role of a coach and the higher the ceiling becomes the more efficiently and effectively we can apply our knowledge and our experience to the clients' wants, their preferences, goals and all of those things which is what I guess encompasses the role of the coach to answer your question.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah. I think few really interesting things there. I think the one thing that stands out immediately is your clear focus on how do I give as much value to this particular client as possible, and then replicate that across everyone that you work with as opposed to trying to have an end goal as just pure success on your part, right? How do I make X amount from coaching, how do I build X, Y, and Z and really all of that kind of success or at least from what I've seen of coaches that are becoming really, really successful is that that's almost like an after effect of that initial focus that you just mentioned of trying to give as much value as possible. And you said one of the things you try and do is exceed people's expectations and I think this leads into an area that you've come across and I think it happens quite a lot where a client comes in and obviously they have some of the goals that they're trying to achieve like you've mentioned we have to set up our coaching to try and help them in best way possible. But I'm sure it happens quite a lot where clients actually end up finding things that they're improving or they get new goals or they get some sort of benefit from that coaching experience or just getting into fitness in general that they hadn't really thought of before or beyond that kind of surface level goal that they first thought of. And I suppose a lot of that comes from this exceeding their expectations of they might have an expectation that you can help them get in shape but what you do is such a – if you have a service that goes way beyond that you tend to have this knock on effect where they get way more than that in terms of the benefit for their life. Is that something that you are quite conscious on and have seen with your client base and are kind of consciously trying to foster I suppose?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yea 100% you're on the money there. And it is very much the case for most people to hire a personal trainer with a very superficial goal of looking better, getting stronger, building more muscle. Now, if were to break it down people don't really hire a coach, not to say they don't in some cases, but most of the time it is very much about aesthetics, body composition or strength whether it's power lifting and so on and so forth, what they often realize is that a coach could offer far more than just the tangible results that come with those objective metrics that we see on the scale, DEXA scans, physique photos, you know training, performance markers all those kind of things and what they soon realize is that this process of coaching is about far more than just those surface level results that they initially came down to receive. This comes down to again how much value a coach can offer and I think a good coach, there's a clear distinction in coaching versus a personal trainer, and this is something I highlight a lot to my mentorship students and the coaches at JPS is that any fool, and I think it was Mel Siff who came up with a quote that I'm going to absolutely butcher but bare with me, "Any fool can create a difficult program that challenges even the toughest of maries, but it takes intelligence to create a program that gets results with the least amount of work." I think that quote in essence summarizes the difference between a personal trainer and a coach, and then extending beyond that I think coaches not only provide those tangible results that the client comes down to receive and that they want but surpasses their expectations and shows them a higher road, so to speak, teaching them many skills that they can apply to many facets of their life, such as preparation, meal planning all these kind of things that carry over into other areas of what they're doing on a daily basis. They can improve their quality of life by helping them feel better, educating them about nutrition so that they can lead a more enjoyable life whilst achieving their goals. So I think once clients realizes that there is a lot more to this process than just looking better that they soon realize that there's many ways that a coach can provide value to not just their fitness journey but their life in general.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, totally. I think one thing that you clearly operate of is an approach of evidence based practice, and as we just kind of mentioned before we started recording this is obviously an area that is thankfully in one sense growing more and more or at least more people are aware of this being a good starting point of how to base your recommendations and what you do. But at the same time there does come a number of challenges I think and I think I talked about a couple of these before or at least the traps that people can fall into when we're thinking just purely about rolling out more and more evidence based practitioners and making sure people are actually to "Doing it correctly." For you and the way you've put your practice based on evidence and how do you think trainers or at least how do you explain to them of what evidence based practice should actually look like and how it should lend itself to actually working in the real world practically on the gym floor with people?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah that's a brilliant question and one that I can confidently say I don't have the answer to, but I think the more that it's discussed and the more I think about it we can start to identify clear issues with this movement of evidence based practice, and I think for the most part it's definitely a positive thing because it's helped eliminate a lot of unsound, risky, and bias advice the coaches have in the past been guilty of putting forward into their clients' programs, and diets, and things like that. But again for listeners just to establish some definitions for those who may not necessarily be aware of what evidence based practice is it's simply an interdisciplinary approach to practice and it has been getting a lot of popularity in the fitness industry and it comes as three main tenets, which is the evidence, coaching experience, and then client. I think it's important when discussing any theoretical model to understand where it comes from, so that we can recognize its intended view. I think this is where a lot of coaches go wrong is that they just don't understand the origins of concepts like this much like periodization and things like that. So, to draw parallels with periodization that stems from the Olympics and the whole 3 to 1 paradigm being based on the 4-year period between competition for Olympic athletes. Similarly, we have the evidence based practice model which stems from the medical

practitioners so that doctors were better able to prescribe medication and I think it originated in the late '80s and early '90s something like on those lines and it's been transferred across to the allied health profession such as psychology, physiotherapy and it's making its way into exercise science and our personal training. I think previously before this movement sort of started to make waves in the fitness industry there was a huge gap between exercise scientists who have that tertiary qualification, and then personal trainers and I think the evidence based practice movement has gone a long way in bridging that gap and obviously guiding coaches' decision making process and improving the practice that we're adopting and making sure that it is in line with what the science is telling us as well as our experience obviously and context, characteristics, needs, values and the preferences of the clients. But the way I see it is most off of it checklist and I think first and foremost coaches who are on the gym floor putting barbells on people's backs and advising their clients how to avoid eating a stupendous amount of calories on the weekends. We must first satisfy the client element of the model and I think from there we can start to look at what the science is telling us and our experience, but I think if we ignore the client as coaches that's a fundamental mistake because the client should come first and then dictate what relevance the science has and what parts of our experience have relevance to the problems that we're dealing with. I think it's important for all coaches to be able to justify what they're doing, but I also recognize the bias they have towards any facet of the evidence based practice model. I see there to be four main issues with the movement. I think, like I said, it's done a lot of good for the industry, but upon reflecting myself as a coach and looking at my practice and some self evaluation I realize there were four things that were issues for me hence I realize that they were probably also problematic for other coaches, and like I said, the first one is the definition of evidence based practice and understanding the model itself, and that like you've mentioned the colloquial definition that we see thrown around in Instagram buyers and on coaches' websites now that is they are "Evidence based practitioners" or whatever it is and this definition is quite murky but there's also the theoretical definition

which is quite objective and clear-cut. And I think there are issues here in the way that coaches apply the evidence based practice model, because they don't understand that it's a step wise process and for those listeners who may not be aware there are five steps involved. The first one is asking questions, second is finding information and evidence to answer whatever that question you are seeking to answer, third is critically evaluating and looking at that information through a very critical lens, the fourth is integrating the evidence with your experience and clients' preferences, needs, the context all those things I mentioned before, and then the fifth step is evaluating the outcome and what's happening and then repeating the cycle. I think there are issues in each of those steps for coaches because there are not enough coaches asking questions of themselves or science. The access to information like you know and I'm sure many of the listeners know it's quite perplexing there's an abundance of information online and it's very difficult to interpret and disseminate what is right, what is wrong, what is and isn't important, and what does have relevance on the gym floor, what's going to see the most immediate benefit to what we're doing with people. Then the third issue I see is the ability to evaluate that information you know not a lot of coaches are equipped with the education that's necessary to interpret research and instead would just read abstract, so they might read an article or a blog they don't realize the inherent flaws and bias that comes with opinion and things like this. Few other issues are insufficient experience, you know not a lot of coaches have the experience to draw back on and look and reflect as to what should best guide their future decisions with clients. I think the most important thing Danny that many coaches are sometimes blinded by is the importance of being reflective with your practice. Very hard in a fast paced industry such as ours being the fitness industry, because we're always trying to look ahead, and stay up-to-date, and do what's going to be in our best interest moving forward. But I think there is a lot of value for coaches to be reflective in what they're doing with their clients both from a programming standpoint looking at the effectiveness of their program, for example whether their strength is improving, why, why not, what factors are limiting

that, same with dietary interventions, but also assessing how their practice has evolved over time and their bias, their ability to understand information and become more conceptual in their knowledge. So I think they are the issues that I see with applying this and I think that's important to discuss first, because then we can start to move towards knowing what evidence based practice will look like. And again, I think that although the goal is to bridge the gap between the academic world that is exercise science, nutritional science, physiology and all the rest of it. There are a lot of issues there, but I think fundamentally the goal is to educate coaches how to read research at least understanding the high quality research that does have the greatest impact on what we're doing day-to-day with our clients, but to remove bias or at the very least be aware of what our biases may be and to use an example, I am very much Helms fan and what he says in my opinion is taken with great value but I recognize that that's a bias of mine and that shouldn't influence all the decisions I make as a coach and what I do with my clients. But again, I think the end goal is to improve the practice that is coaching and to be able to move towards a global service that is providing a service as a whole that avoids pseudo science and charlatans and can be a little more "Optimal" that's really what I see to be some of the issues with evidence based practice. And again, we have a lot of coaches who are not aware that they're consuming information. It's unintentional and unconscious for the most part, because you just jump on Instagram, YouTube and there's information there but we don't know necessarily when we're first starting out anyway what is good and bad information. Hence, the reality is that we start consuming this information and we may not necessarily be doing ourselves or our clients any justice in doing so. Hence as a result we do see a lot of personal trainers who getting regurgitating sound bites of information that they don't necessarily understand which is an issue. But I think more of an issue is that there are a lot of coaches who don't realize that their role is to coach and that they're not researchers. Obviously, it's quite time intensive and laborious to sit down and read an article from start to finish which I think many coaches don't do and I am sure that you would agree with me on that one, and I

was one of them. I would sit down and read one article and thought I was King-Dick and knew everything that I had to know about a certain topic. But at that time I didn't even know what a p-value was and how much this influences the significance and the weight of the evidence. So, I think there are a number of issues here, but it fundamentally comes down to coaches recognizing their role like we spoke about earlier. And on the other end of the spectrum we have those who are very esoteric and ignore the clients and the value of the experience, and they place science on a pedestal and I think with the evidence based practice movement whilst fundamentally a good thing I think there are a lot of fitness professionals who are indeed well versed with the literature but don't have sufficient experience in the gym hence that obviously limits the effectiveness of their coaching. Citing the latest research as Gospel, and be-all and end-all is one thing, but there's a glaring juxtaposition that is just in the fitness industry as present between the brows so to speak and the PubMed warriors and this inadvertently leads to less than ideal outcomes for not only the industry because then we see people wasting time on discussing what evidence based is like what we're doing now. Like I see this is a waste of time, because coaches should be focusing on improving coaching not semantics of definitions and things like this. But again, that's the point coaching is coaching. It isn't research and whilst we do know science is important, the shortest way to the truth, it is a starting point and it should help guide our practice it isn't our practice. And I think that education of what this model is, what it's intended to do and how we can improve our education as a whole to further our ability to get results for people, because at the end of the day like we said at the start of this episode the goal is provide a service that surpasses the clients' expectations and I think appreciating the research guides our practice but isn't our practice is fundamental to that.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah. I completely agree and I think a number of excellent points there, particularly drawing beyond those two extremes and I suppose really hammering home the importance of understanding evidence based practice. Not just for the sake of knowing it, but that is a very crucial thing of how we're going to go

and apply these principles and actually use it effectively and the key I suppose the end goal in mind is to actually just help people with our coaching. And so, with that you mentioned that word improvement and how really the goal we want to be focusing on improving in a coaching capacity over time. Just as a way to maybe explore that I'm interested is there any one skill as a coach that you feel that you've developed over time that you are particularly proud of or that particular comes to mind as one thing that you've either worked particularly hard on or that has improved over the number of years you've been coaching that you think is a particularly important one that you're proud of where your skills levels are?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, you've got me thinking now and I'm going to become a little bit more introspective than I would have liked Danny. I would dare say that my knowledge has not improved vastly over the past 2 to 3 years. I think my understanding of things has definitely improved, but the knowledge itself hasn't necessarily improved. So, I think the areas that have really evolved for me are emotional intelligence which encompasses compassion and empathy. You have to be able to put yourself in your clients' shoes to understand where they're coming from, what issues, limitations, obstacles and prior experience they're bringing to and respect that and then to be able to help them. I think emotional intelligence is something that is highly underrated in discussing what qualities make for a good coach, but I think it's very much fundamental to being successful as a coach and it allows us to better help people whilst it is I guess, not necessarily within the evidence based model, it is something that will allow you to apply that model and that process of coaching a lot more effectively and with emotional intelligence comes better communication. I think that's something I've definitely been working on recognizing that my words need to hold meaning with my clients for example, if I'm giving them a cue such chest up in a squat we know what that means but they don't necessarily know what chest up means unless we take them away from the squat and show them you know get tactile with them, give them the audible cue of chest up but also kinesthetic awareness of what that feels like I think that's something that I definitely improved over

the last few years, and being able to say less but have a greater impact I think earlier on in my career like many coaches too we get a little bit excited with old Dunning-Kruger effect we know a little bit and we think we know it all, and we start telling our clients how much we know. But I think being very selective in the words that I use and how much I teach people at any given time has definitely improved. I think that does come down to my self awareness and emotional intelligence as a coach evolving. You could say it's maturity having two kids definitely helps you mature a lot quicker than anything else you could do in life. But I would definitely say the emotional intelligence side of things, I think IQ is definitely important as a coach, and there are a lot of really brilliant academics out there who are also coaches and I think that they're exceptional in this regard. But I think to be successful with working with another human being and I think that's important to remember is that we're not dealing with robot we're working with humans. We need to understand the role that psychology plays and how we can best handles ourselves to make the biggest impact and influence change in a positive manner. And I think again just the skill of being able to build rapport with clients, asking them for feedback, setting expectations, listening and creating an environment of trust to establish buy-in from them all under the umbrella of emotional intelligence has been something I've definitely improved I guess inadvertently over the past couple of years. It hasn't been something that I've sat down and thought, "Hey, I'm going to go research emotional intelligence and try to be better in that regard." I think experience has been a great teacher in that sense, so yes that's probably one area but I would also say my ability to think critically has definitely been a big focal point for me. I don't want to be another coach who just, like I have mentioned, regurgitates information. I want to be somebody who can be resourceful, use the tools and information around me, think outside-the-box a little bit for example, with my clients who gym pop busy people, they got to be in and out of the gym you know I create a little system of my programming, it's priority system so we have P1, P2 and P3 exercises. So, within the week all my clients have to get in, you know the gym pop clients, have to get in their P1 exercises and at the very worst their P2 exercises and

if they don't have time to get in their P3s then that's cool. They can either roll them over to subsequent days or just leave it for the next week. But again, these would be – the P1 movements are things like squats, bench, pull ups, rows all those big compound movements that you're going to give them the most bang for their buck in terms of a stimulus in a short amount of time. But yeah being able to be resourceful with the knowledge I have, the spirit and experience I have, but then do something a little bit different that may not necessarily be “evidence based” but a priority system such as that definitely ticks off that client's facet of the evidence based practice model. And I think that has been – a big goal of mine is to be a coach who doesn't just try to fit a square peg in a round hole and apply science in a hard and fast manner but to instead problem solve in a multitude of ways that encompass critically thinking, so not necessarily following a system or process time-and-time again and just repeating that. But using logic and trying to identify ways to work around complex issues which is what we do for the most part with our clients. Human being is so complex like I said, so a lot of my mentorship students what's below the head is quite simple and that means the physiology you know we know the calorie deficit relate to fat loss and we know that progressive overload will lead to certain adaptations in strength and hypertrophy. But we've got this thing between ears that sort of muddies the water and makes applying that a lot more difficult. So, I think one skill definitely improved for me Danny has been to think critically and understand that we have at the top level in terms of the hard and fast science what's theoretically optimal. But then, we also have at the bottom there what's practical in a real world so trying to take a client and move them closer and closer towards what is theoretically optimal over time is something I've been working on quite hard and I think that's an area that I'm pretty proud to say I have improved and I can give the case example which I think can just highlight this point and that is I had a vegan client who was eating 50 grams of protein a day and she weighs 60 kilos and wanted to build muscle. And we both know and many of the listeners know what's theoretically optimal in this case would be 2 grams of protein per Kg, and again that's not necessarily going to come from meat or anything like

that but she was well below what was theoretically optimal. So, instead of prescribing her, “Hey well you need to have 2 grams of protein per Kg every day. You’re going to start having your soya protein shakes, you tofu this and that.” It was more so a case of, “Cool let’s just aim for 70 to 80 grams,” and then over the last 12 months she’s gone from 60 kilos to 63 and she now hits around 100 grams of protein per day. And I think using my ability to think a little bit more outside-the-box and problem solve in a way that I guess deviates from science initially can allow us to move closer to the science and yeah I think that’s definitely been something I’ve improved over the last few years. So, I hope that answers that question?

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, and I suppose a real critical thing that maybe it’s often overlooked is just the importance of remembering that coaching is a human-to-human interaction and there’s a lot that goes into that, and really the skill sets like you outline there that have probably even the most benefit a lot of the time can extend well beyond just knowledge and probably more into the area of just human relationships and how you’re actually able to deal with another person and actually communicate things, get through to people, build trust all that type of stuff that weaves into that umbrella of being in I suppose a good relationship with that person. So, I think they’re excellent points and certainly something that I’ve seen be a huge part of coaching. Jacob we’re just coming up close to time here. So, before I do get to the final question maybe first you can let people know where they can find more about your online, where they can track you down on social media, information on the gym all that type of stuff. What is the best place for them to go?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yes. So, on Instagram just Jacob Schepis JPS and on YouTube JPS Health and Fitness, same with Facebook and Instagram and obviously website jpshealthandfitness.com.au because we’re from down under but yeah that’s where you guys can find me.

DANNY LENNON:

Great! And everyone listening that’ll all of course be in the show notes of this episode which you can check all that stuff out and that brings us to our final question which we always end the show on. And it’s simply if you could advice people to do one thing each day that

Jacob Schepis

would have a positive impact on any area of their life what would that one thing be?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

One thing to improve the quality of their life smile more. I've been saying that a lot lately but I think it's highly underrated Danny I think the more we smile the more we can wear those positive glasses and it can change our perspective of the things around us as circumstances and obviously how we interact with the world. So, guys if there's one thing I can leave you with it's turn that fan upside down.

DANNY LENNON:

Great way to end it all. Jacob thank you so much man for the time today and for all the information you've given I think it's going to help a lot of people, particularly those who are practitioners working in the field with people across the number of different areas. But I think a lot of this stuff is going to apply regardless, so I want to thank you for the information and thanks for taking the time out to come on the show today man.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Not a problem. Thank you.