

#427_ Jacob Schepis – Evidence-Based Coaching_ Desirable Goal or Unattainable Burden for Fitness Professionals



DANNY LENNON:

And here we are. Welcome to episode 427 of Sigma Nutrition Radio. I am Danny Lennon, and joining me today, for what I believe is his third appearance on the podcast, if my numbers are correct, is Jacob Schepis, who is the director and owner of JPS Health & Fitness and JPS Education based in Melbourne, Australia, where he has a physical gym, where they coach a number of clients, but he's also been involved for a long period of time now in coaching many coaches and mentoring them worldwide at this point through his mentorship program, through various online courses and in person courses as well as several conferences, much of which we'll probably get into at some point. But we've had discussions in the past that pertain to aspects of coaching and improving the quality of coaching in people going forward, and that's going to be much of our focus today. But before we get to that, Jacob, welcome to the podcast.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Thank you Danny, for sure.

DANNY LENNON:

We have much to talk about, and some of these things I think are relatively meta level ideas related to coaching more broadly, and some that you brought to my attention that I think is actually a good ground to dive into, and there's a number of pieces to this that I want to get to,

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but essentially, the first place I think might be interesting was a point you made in some of our exchanges via message was around how evidence based practice should fit into a framework of coaching and coach development. I think one of the broader points that we're probably going to discuss throughout this whole episode, and was one of the things that we had touched on was even thinking about, at this point, what does evidence based practitioner mean in the context of the fitness industry, is that even something that's desirable, and then, how should coaches think of this, because it's obviously become quite the buzzword. So maybe as a starting point, before we get into each of those individual pieces, can you maybe just lay out some of the things you've been thinking about lately that got you thinking about what this means to have evidence based practice within a larger framework of coaching and coach development, what was the idea that you've been churning over in your mind?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Over the years, we've obviously seen the popularity and the rise of the evidence based practice movement, and that almost coincided perfectly with social media back in 2009-2010, I believe. So you've got not only greater access to information with obviously technology improving, handheld mobile devices, people can access internet science a lot more readily, but you've also got people communicating a lot more. And with that, I think the fitness industry was in dire need at the time of some big reform. Prior to that, we had a lot of malpractice, and at least, in my opinion, and from what I can tell, the evidence based practice movement was almost like a rise against bad practice in the fitness industry, specifically, and to try and course correct some of the stupid things that a lot of fitness professionals were doing, and to bring the science into fitness. Now, with that, we've obviously seen things go a little bit too far, I believe, but for the most part, I think the evidence based practice model is a very useful

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one. And I know you had David Nunan on the podcast back in December, and that was a really illuminating conversation I think for your listeners who are very studious; for the most part, I think that's a podcast they should definitely listen to, because he does teach a unit, specifically covering evidence based practice, and I think he'll be much more able to explain what that is. But I think evidence based practice is something that coaches should try to incorporate into their practice, however, it's not the only model that should serve to guide their decision making, or at least, be a focal point in their development. So I think, for the most part, it's something that we need to pay attention to, because it can course correct, and help eliminate a lot of bad decision making essentially, and unscientific practice that the fitness industry has been privy to for many years prior to, I guess, the rapid increase in science communication on social media.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, so at this point, there's like two different points that we could tackle or two different directions we could go with this. One is to some degree may be looking at the semantics of what it actually means to be an evidence based practitioner and how stringent do we have to fall in line with the kind of evidence based medicine model that was originally proposed and the kind of strict criteria that would define a practitioner as evidence based, at least, in that context, versus probably what now most people colloquially are calling being an evidence based practitioner or saying I'm an evidence based coach is not necessarily in line with that original criteria, but more so saying that the practices and the recommendations and the guidelines I go by are ones that have good evidence to support them, rather than are just made up, kind of, nonsense or based on kind of weak mechanistic data or "broscience" solely that they have some grounding and evidence as being good. So there's that distinction that we can maybe get to if you think that's important. But then the second thing, like you said, is that, and I think this is

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one of the things that David Nunan highlighted is perhaps where people get lost in the weeds is realizing that evidence based practice within that evidence is necessary, but is not sufficient on its own for good quality decision making. And many other factors tie into what it means to make an effective decision either in clinical practice or in, as we're discussing today, within a coaching context in the fitness industry. And so, maybe that's also a second point to get into. So I don't know if there's anything based on anything I've thrown up there that you think is a good avenue for us to explore here.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, I think, firstly, there's a lot of important distinctions to be made between the medical field and then fitness professionals, personal trainers. Firstly, we are highly under qualified for what we do in comparison. The level of education for most personal trainers, just is insufficient in terms of our ability to actually read research, understand what evidence based practice even is. I'm pretty sure the basic qualifications and certifications that you get for personal training don't even cover evidence based practice. Now, not that that is the be all and end all, but essentially, the fitness industry, you've got a bunch of young kids for the most part who haven't got undergraduate studies or higher education, and they come into the industry running their own show. There's very little regulation, which means that we can do essentially what we want and how we want to do it, and for that reason, we have seen a lot of poor practice in personal trainers who are doing some dubious things with their clients, with their training programs, with their diets, whatever the case may be. And evidence based practice, I think, as a model and the fundamental tenants of those three pillars that everyone hopefully knows about the evidence based practice model, such as the scientific evidence, the coach experience and the client preference do provide a useful starting point for coaches to make decisions, and it does bring to the attention of a coach the relevance of scientific evidence.

Now, as I said, I think a lot of personal trainers are just not adequately trained to be able to understand and appropriately apply the scientific evidence. And obviously, the evidence is basically scientific proof, and we need a substantial amount of that evidence and converging lines of evidence in order for us to have something that we can rest our hats on, so to speak, and using practice, and have some confidence that that evidence is sound. However, I don't think that for fitness professionals, the role of evidence is the same as what it would be in the medical field or even in dietetics and nutritional sciences, because, for the most part, we're not qualified to do or create interventions that work with people where that evidence is consistently changing; for the most part, our role is very general, we're working with people at a very basic level, which means we should be relying on principles. And there's a big difference between principles and facts and a lot of the "evidence" that people are talking about whether it's online, a new study came out covering hypertrophy or fat loss diet, intermittent fasting, for the most part, that's just providing facts and information based on that specific study; it's not really giving us a principle or something that we can use to guide our decision making – we shouldn't, unless there's a lot of evidence. And again, personal trainers aren't really qualified to look at a single study and understand the limitations, statistical analysis, all that kind of stuff.

So the way I see the evidence based practice model is that coaches should understand the role of science, but look to the evidence to identify and observe and hopefully learn principles. And there's fundamental principles, which are universally applicable phenomena, that's very rarely or never violated, and they've got general principles, which are just common observations. But essentially, principles are just truths or propositions that serve as a foundation for a system of belief. Right? So that's what coaches should be looking for

through the evidence. And the knowledge we gain from science can obviously help us understand how things work, such as the human body, but essentially, we want high quality evidence that continually finds something exists after decades of investigation, and that body of knowledge often finds an immutable truth and the principles. So we can be extremely confident in the knowledge that science has provided, things such as energy balance for bodyweight regulation, the principle of specificity and exercise science, progressive overload, these are the principles that the science should be providing coaches to inform their practice; and if their practice is grounded in these principles and universal truths, for the most part, they're going to be great coaches. And I think that takes care of a great chunk of what it means to be a "evidence based practitioner". However, you've now got a lot of people trying the major and the minors, they're getting into the weeds with all these things, and they're missing the forest for the tree, right? They've just completely lost sight of the principles, and I don't think for fitness professionals, and the latest study on hypertrophy should be where their attention lies, it should be one of the principles of exercise science, how do I better gather information from my client, improve my communication skills, my ability to empathize with my clients, how do I actually pay attention with the people I'm working with and understand the data and information that I'm collecting so that I can develop my skill set and actually have meaningful experience. Because I think people throw the word experience around way too loosely just because they've observed something or they have spent 10 years in the gym, that doesn't equate to experience, experience is paying attention and actually having direction and purpose with what you're doing being quite scrupulous with how you go about things. But I think, yeah, the evidence in my eyes should be viewed through the lens of what are the principles of exercise science, nutritional science, human movement, and

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then, teach personal trainers that, then teach them how to pay attention to the things that matter in their practice, when they're in the trenches so that their experience is meaningful, and then, how do we improve their information gathering processes, communication skills, ability to build relationships. And if we view personal training or coaching in that manner, I think, yeah, I think, coaches will be a lot better off.

DANNY LENNON:

That brings up a number of points that I'd love to dive into a bit further, one actually circles back to the original point I'd made around the semantics of this issue, and this is particularly interesting to me, because I think now more than ever, there's almost a pressure on personal trainers and coaches to be evidence based; and I'm sure you've seen that as well, and we can certainly talk about whether that's actually helpful or a hindrance. But if we're thinking about evidence based practice, as it was originally came from evidence based medicine, and then it spread into other healthcare fields, one of the kind of criteria of that original assignment was to read and interpret and appraise research. As you've quite rightly said, that is something that is probably beyond a lot of people within the fitness industry, and for good reason, because their training isn't in that, they have clients to work with, they're not going back to learn how to read research necessarily, although some will decide to do that. But the bigger question then throws up of two things, one, is it necessary for a coach to read primary research themselves. I would probably say no, that's certainly not required to be a good coach. And then second, therefore, does that mean that this evidence based practitioner title that we're chasing actually might not be one worth chasing, because if that means a certain specific thing, but yet, we are saying, actually, you don't need to do that in order to be effective, maybe that's the wrong goal to be chasing, of getting really good at appraising studies or citing studies, necessarily, as opposed to, as you've

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outlined, having a broad understanding of core principles of how to train people and relate to coaching, that then maybe from time to time, you can hear from other people give informed opinions about their analysis of the research, as opposed to this almost pressure people are feeling to be evidence based. And I don't want to admit, I'm not evidence based, even though, as I've just said, that's probably not a bad thing.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

I couldn't agree with you more, firstly, Danny. And you know what's funny? When I look around a lot of put, like the personal trainers here in Australia, at least, where I go to a gym and I see the personal trainer who's got a full client list, usually, they do a lot of things that aren't "evidence based one", and usually they wouldn't claim to be an evidence based trainer, because being a successful coach, and obviously, semantics, again, depending on how you define success as a coach, I would say, it's a couple of things. Firstly, it's the number of people you're able to help; secondly, it'd be client retention and satisfaction; and third, there's obviously financial component, because you have to be able to make a living out. Right? So I'd say if you tick those three things off, you're doing pretty well. But to do that, you don't necessarily need to be evidence based for reading research as a personal trainer, and I'll dare say, some of the best coaches or most successful coaches in the world aren't necessarily evidence based, they're just really good with people. Because people don't buy, in the fitness industry anyway, they don't necessarily buy your program or sessions, they buy the coach. Right? And that's what keeps them coming back is that relationship, and I think, yes, chasing the title of evidence based practitioner is a worthy one given where we were probably 10 years ago, and the state of the industry, because it has weeded out all of the malpractice and the harm that coaches were doing, and there was almost like a social – the evidence based practice movement almost acted as an adjudicator of the fitness industry

to try and stamp out all of the unscientific broscience and whatnot, which is a good thing.

But I don't think we need to aim to be an evidence based practitioner. I think we can still use the pillars of evidence based practice, but you don't need to read research to be evidence based in the fitness industry. I don't believe, I think some workable definition of evidence for fitness professionals is necessary. I don't think evidence necessarily needs to mean what it does in other fields, because we aren't trained to read it, we don't know how to interpret the data and apply it; but we need to know fundamental principles, but that is still evidence, and that is useful evidence for us; that's going to prevent us from doing harm, help us get better outcomes for our clients and make informed decisions. And that's essentially what evidence in the medicinal field is trying to achieve. But in our field, it's just got a different objective. It's how do we just get these coaches to do a pretty good job and not hurt people and learn how to make decisions that, nine times out of 10, are going to lead to good outcome. And knowing that they're not trained or qualified to read direct research, we need to rework that definition of evidence for fitness professionals, I believe. And in doing so, the obvious issues with the evidence based practice model, you know, the overemphasis of evidence that we have seen, and I know that you spoke about that at length with David Nunan, but as we've discussed, it assumes coaches are scientifically competent.

Firstly, most coaches can't even access research. Like, I remember when I was coming up through the evidence based community, and I tried to access papers, it's like, I'm not sure without Sci-Hub, but I could not access papers. I couldn't find any. I'd be reading abstracts. I don't know what abstracts were at that point. I didn't even have any literacy skills, when it came to reading research. I'd skip to the conclusion 5-10 years ago, whatever it was. I'd rely on low quality sources of evidence. I didn't

understand the hierarchy of evidence. I'd just read a study, and oh, it says this, and, well, that's the answer. And if we're trying to get coaches to be evidence based, but we're promoting evidence based practice using the definition of evidence, and having that criteria, as you mentioned in the original model, that was I think 1994 when it first came out, that's going to lead coaches to make some pretty poor interpretations of science. We don't want that. So why don't we rework that definition and say, hey, evidence for fitness professionals is looking to the fundamental principles of exercise science, specificity, progressive overload, fatigue, management, individualization, all of these things, you know, the basics, teaching about energy balance, adherence, macronutrients, mealtime frequency, you know, principles and the big rocks of nutrition and exercise science, so that they can't make stupid decisions. And if we can do that, all of a sudden, evidence has a much larger utility that is almost foolproof. Right? And I think the real issue we have is the lack of regulation around fitness professionals, and yeah, the standards vary from one organization to the next, one country to the next, and no one's really managing anything, but I think it's really good to see a lot of personal trainers investing in their education and wanting to be evidence based, and wanting to improve and understand science, I think is fantastic.

Science is a beautiful thing, it's changed my life in many ways in how I do things, you know, JPS. But I also think we can help people get more out of it, and avoid making some pretty serious mistakes in their career, and that's a pretty serious thing, like, for a lot of people, this is their career. And if we can help them just better understand and better utilize evidence and know what's important, and not to waste time trying to read direct research per se, but having a subscription to MASS or having a subscription to Weightology and things like this where we're getting someone who's more experienced relay that information in a

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digestible manner, who we know is sort of acting in good faith, because that's important as well, that's going to be really useful. But at the same time, we then have the issue with, well, how do we determine who's the appropriate interpreter of the research to then teach personal trainers, and this is where it'd be great over time to hopefully have a worldwide or global body or institution that is working with the fitness industry, and I think a time will come where it's probably going to happen because it's necessary. And the way things are going in the world, I think, yeah, health and fitness is going to be something that we really need to prioritize if we don't want to become extinct, and basically, have just extremely poor health. But at the same time, it's a tall order. I don't know who's going to do it. I don't know how we're going to do it. But I think it needs to be done. Because at the moment, there's just a lot of issues in the fitness industry. But I think, for the most part, things are improving, but who knows, I'm solid for a lot of information these days, I'm in my own little bubble, and I don't know what goes on outside of that bubble as much as what I used to.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, so I think it's important to note that there probably shouldn't be a burden on people to strictly ascribe to evidence based practice, if that's something that becomes problematic, but I think, just to make it clear of what we're saying, it doesn't mean that people shouldn't follow practices that are rooted in evidence. In fact, we're clearly stating that's exactly what people should do. I would also go further as to say for people who do and can read research that can act as a significant advantage, however, just doing that alone doesn't make someone necessarily a competent coach. And conversely, as we've already said, someone who never reads a primary research paper, could be an absolutely fantastic coach, and there's numerous examples of that. So again, it comes back down to what we want to decide is evidence based, and how strictly we're going to

stick to a certain set of criteria. One of the things that probably could also act as one of those advantages to reading primary research is it gets around that question of, well, how do I know which experts to follow. So if I just follow someone to interpret studies for me, then I have to still pick who that is, but unless someone is going to go through the rigorous process of learning how to appraise studies, then they're going to have to put their faith to some degree in certain people, and there's ways that we can talk about identifying those. But even at that, it would be a fairly strong point, I think someone can make of given my limited time, if I'm working full time in fitness, and I want to make sure my practice is based on evidence, then it's probably actually much more effective for me to go and sign up to JPS mentorship or the MASS Research Review, etc., get that input from the science side of things, and then integrate that with how I'm operating in practice, as opposed to having to go through this other process. So there's a lot of moving parts, I suppose, it depends on someone's background, and their ability to be able to use different skills. So it just wanted to kind of put those out there. But one of the things that I'm keen to ask you about, given that you have a whole team of coaches that work for you, you've mentored a huge number of people at this point as well who are building their own fitness careers and businesses, I'm wondering, do you see at this point because of the, I suppose, regard that evidence based practice is held up in, and the, I suppose, as you've just talked about, maybe a poor way to do that is to over index in looking at individual research studies, devoid of the context of the overarching principles, is there almost a fear of someone talking about something that they don't have a citation for, or talking publicly about something they're doing that they know is effective, that a client of theirs is really benefited from, but they're maybe worried of what other people will say, because they don't have a citation that they can just throw, this is where I got it from, or this is research to back

this up, and I'm wondering, do you see that type of fear in people, and how counter-productive is that?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yes. So firstly, you raise a lot of really good points there, I hope I didn't make it seem as if I wasn't in favor of people pursuing primary research or better understanding of a topic through reading more and trying to interpret the literature. Because I think, as a coach, if you're trying to do those things, that's fantastic. It's just how much you then take from that to try and apply to your practice. In many cases, unless it's already confirming a very solid body of literature, it's probably not something that you should just take and try and incorporate in practice. And for that reason, it almost brings to question, well, what's the point of reading that in the first place, if it doesn't improve or change your practice. It's like, it's improving your knowledge, maybe, but for the most part, there's a lot of other things that most coaches could be doing that would have a much larger impact and benefit to their coaching than, say, reading a study that's just to, it's a novel area of research, and there's two or three papers out. It's interesting, but if they want to be the best coach possible, it's like, well, there's probably other things that you should be looking to instead of that. However, if you want to then get into research, and that's something that you might want to, or you want to go study, that's an area that you want to get into alongside your personal training, or after you finish your PT, whatever the case may be, then go for it. But I just think people need to be aware of how much stuff they put into reading the research as a coach, because at the end of the day, there's so many other things that many coaches from my experience and what I've observed, need to be working on that won't be improved by reading direct research, and obviously that's not important, it is. But you just need to know that there's a time and place.

So yes, Danny, I think the over emphasis on evidence, and the fact that we've seen this

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uneven balance between external evidence and coach the experiencing and client's context has come at a cost, because at the end of the day, when we're working with a lot of general population clients which is what personal trainers do for the most part, there's very few coaches who have a client list that's full of athletes. Most work with gen pop clients, and the training needs to be fun. And that could be evidence based if it's based on the client's preferences, right? You don't need a research paper for someone to enjoy training. And I think, yes, this trend towards a myopic view, and the belief that any topic can be best and most thoroughly understood from the vantage point of science is a huge bottleneck for a lot of coaches, and it's an applied science. So the burden of proof is now show me the evidence, or, where's the citation, bro. It's like, well, sometimes we don't have the research or that that coach might not even be reading research, for example. But again, I think the reason that we have this situation is because the fitness industry was in such a dire state, and the evidence based practice movement became the adjudicator of how coaches go about their practice to stamp out all the broscience and unfounded decision making that isn't evidence based.

So yes, I think coaches can be extremely hampered if they always look for research to support what they do, because that takes out a lot of the fun in coaching as well, a huge part of coaching is you get the broad strokes. As my mentor and colleague, Eric Helms, told me very early on, science paints broad strokes on the canvas; and in the client context, that's the finer details, and your coach experience, that's the finer details to give you the full picture. You can't have one without the other. Right? The science will always give you the starting point, but from there, yeah, there's a lot of creativity involved. There's a lot of being able to problem solve, and fill in the blanks, when you don't have information, you need to be quite creative and a good thinker and problem solver to be a

good coach, because you can try to fit square pegs in round holes your entire career. And eventually, you might just get round pegs and it fits, and then, you have survivorship bias, and you're a great coach, because everyone you work with gets amazing results; but really, you're just getting the crème of the crème. And they're all elite genetic freaks, so you look like an amazing coach, but you just got the right population over time, so you look great, they make you look good. But for most coaches, you got to learn how to fit some pretty funny looking pegs into pretty funny looking holes, and you got to make those holes for those pegs, like, they don't just exist, like, holy crap, you can have the best systems and methods that you're trying to get your clients to fit within, and obviously, every client is going to need some tweaking of how you apply that system or method to them, that's the importance of individualizing the protocol or intervention. But in many cases, has some people just don't fit – what are you going to do, just turn you back on and let them go to another coach?

It's like you've got to think laterally, like, I've had so many clients, like, holy crap, I've had to create, even now that I'm back coaching a little bit more since COVID, I've had to create training templates that I never thought I'd have to create again. I've got these tracking spreadsheets that are designed for power lifters and elite level bodybuilders tracking RPE, volume load, all these kind of things. I've got some hands – I've drawn stick figures on a program to show my client what exercises are, because he's dyslexic. Right? It's like, I've never had a dyslexic client before. Science isn't going to tell me how to coach a dyslexic client. It's like, I sent him audio notes which I do with a lot of my clients, but it's just completely different. I've got another client who, he works like 18 hours a night, and it's just like, he has one meal some days and four meals three other days a week, and it's like he sleeps everywhere, it's like putting together his nutrition like trying to – it's like, I can't tell him, yeah, man

just fast, and until lunchtime, decrease your eating window, have three servings of protein. It's like, that just didn't work. And this dude didn't even know what protein was. He's like, he had no idea.

And how do you problem-solve that without being able to think your way through things? I think that's a huge part of being a good coach, and an effective coach is problem-solving. And knowing that the evidence can help you solve a lot of problems, but it won't give you all the answers, and paints in broad strokes, it can shine the light on how things are in most cases for most people, but you're going to work with some people who just aren't average person, and that's going to require you to integrate your experience and pay a lot of attention to their preferences and needs as well as their response to things, personality traits, all of the things that make up someone and make them different to you. And when you get all that information, oftentimes, you got to be scratching your head, because there are no answers, you've got to step in and create solutions that haven't been created before, or, at least, aren't made publicly available, because there's very few people who would ever need those solutions or would express those problems online.

So I think a huge part of the evidence is knowing that it's a starting point, not having to have a study for everything, because you won't, and that's not the point of hiring a coach, you don't hire a coach to have everything you do be referenced. That's what writing an essay for university is for – you hire a coach to help you solve problems, to improve outcomes. If you are improving outcomes, at the end of the day, as long as you're improving them in good faith, and you're doing things that aren't going to lead to long term harm, so you could get improved outcomes by putting someone on 500 calories and making them do 20,000 steps a day, but there's long term harm; provided there's no long term harm to the approach you

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take, and you're acting in good faith, you're not trying to screw people over, and you're solving those problems and the outcomes are improving, well, you don't need a reference, you're a good coach at that point.

DANNY LENNON:

I think it was Mike Tuchere who said something along the lines of coaching is creative problem solving, and that was a kind of phrase that always stuck with me, because that's what the best coaches are essentially doing. One of the points you made actually raised a real pet peeve of mine, because as you pointed out really well that I'm obviously really a fan of practitioners being evidence based in the kind of colloquial sense that we've already mentioned of having that rooted in evidence, which is good, and one of the points that you made of when people can over index and go too far on trying to look to research as opposed to forgetting everything else is a real problem. And the thing with it is it's actually not evidence based at all, so you take an example of, and I'm sure you've seen a bunch of these people, that they'll have a post on Instagram, and maybe they're talking about one specific research study to probably not even interpret it correctly, but even if it is, they then don't place it in the context of the whole body of evidence and what the other research says, and then they start using this one study to make a claim about how people should be training or eating in some way. So doing that is not evidence based, just to be absolutely clear. Or someone then promoting a certain study to say how someone is training or coaching someone is incorrect, or the way we should coach people should all be this way. Right? So if we take an example of, let's say, you had a powerlifting client, and maybe they get wrecked on any sort of frequency or volume that's above the bare minimum, or they're just one of these people that responds on a volume that is way below the average we would see in, say, most research studies, and then someone comes along and shows you a study of strength gains in powerlifting populations, like, oh well, look,

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this person isn't doing the amount of volume that was optimal based on this one study, that is not being evidence based, that's waving around one study that ignores real world data that you're seeing with an individual, and is actually going to be more problematic for that person trying to do it. And I think those are examples to me of people trying to use research, but actually working the opposite of what evidence based is, right? That's not evidence based practice.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, I totally agree, and I have a question for you Danny. What percentage of the evidence based practice community, small little niche that we are in reality, you think about the broader fitness community and how many people are in certain bodybuilding circles or whatever, and the evidence based community is [inaudible 00:39:41] but how many people do you think who are in the evidence based community would actually be aware of somebody pulling out just one study, and who would see them as, oh, well, you're not evidence based – do you think the majority or do you think there's still a lot of coaches out there who would feel that pressure you're talking about of, well, they've got studies, so they must be right because we are putting science on a pedestal, so anyone who does use science in that way could be seen by these people who may not have as much of an understanding as being an evidence based practitioner.

DANNY LENNON:

Right. I mean, that's why I said that's a pet peeve of mine, because you see these posts getting reactions or people seeing as, oh, this is really good, or this person is science based or evidence based, where as I've just said, like, what they're doing is not evidence based, that's actually just giving the impression that they are using research to inform what they're doing, but they're doing it in a problematic way. Right? They're over indexing on what one study says or they're disregarding what's happening in the real world based on one particular study,

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and nothing should be based on one particular study really ever unless it's the only study we have to answer a particular topic.

JACOB SCHEPIS: Unless it's vaccines, right?

DANNY LENNON: Yeah.

JACOB SCHEPIS: COVID vaccine.

DANNY LENNON: Well, yeah, actually it reminded me, because there's a quote that I made a note of, from one of David Nunan, who we've mentioned a number of times, one of his written pieces, he kind of talked about this idea we've just highlighted, and he said, "Good decision making means being informed by the best available evidence not slavish obedience to it, it means evidence forms part of the discussions, but decisions can go against the evidence". And so, for me, this is the key thing for people to understand that when we have evidence based general sets of guidelines, and they fit into these wider principles that you've outlined, that kind of are going to inform our baseline of where we should start from, on any individual basis with one particular client that you're working with, you're allowed to deviate away from that in some way, that ends up being something that you couldn't really say is like "evidence based" or something that you do with everyone, it might, in fact, be an intervention that you only do it one individually of all your clients; but that can be something that you can back up based on how they're responding to it and so on, and you still use evidence as your start point, but then you can refine it from there. I think that's the biggest point that sometimes gets missed that there are other – there's one true way to do it, and that's whatever the evidence based way is, we'll work out that, and we'll just do it with everyone, which is obviously not what we're trying to do.

JACOB SCHEPIS: Yeah, and thanks for not answering my question before, man.

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DANNY LENNON: Sorry. It kind of got blurred out. What was that?

JACOB SCHEPIS: I just asked, out of the people who are seeing those practitioners who just hold up a study and over index a single study, how many do you actually think realize that they over indexing a study or see them as like the knight in shining armor as being evidence based, because they're upholding, I guess, the idea that they have to reference everything?

DANNY LENNON: Sure. No, I would suspect most of those people that are doing it believe like they're doing good, they are doing, this is what evidence based is, I'll go and find a study or I found something that seems quite cool, and I'll report these findings, which I have no problem with. I've discussed the findings of individual studies a number of times, but it's then how you make your conclusions based on that, and how you fit that in with their wider context of what people should do with that study. Very rarely does one study inform that you start doing things differently. Right? It either supports a certain set of ideas or refutes them, and then kind of leads us in different directions, but I don't necessarily think people are doing it maliciously, but it probably fits into what we said earlier that it's coming from a pressure to do that. Right? They want to be evidence based.

JACOB SCHEPIS: Do you think that a lot of people are aware that they're doing that, and not portraying the entire body of evidence, but they're just over emphasizing one study, do you think that people see that?

DANNY LENNON: The people that are doing it or people that are viewing that content?

JACOB SCHEPIS: That are viewing it.

DANNY LENNON: I would think most people that probably come across it aren't aware. I think, hopefully, people that are, let's say, aware of what evidence based practice actually is and are, I would say,

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evidence based in terms of the people that are going and actually either reading research or trying to fit in research into a kind of broader set of conclusions, they would be able to spot that, but I think a lot of people are going to be consuming that content are going to be other people, they're just going to be generally people are interested in fitness content. And so, to them, it's just going to seem like someone's talking scientifically, which is part of the problem.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, and I think that's a huge issue in and of itself is that when somebody places science on a pedestal on social media, and we obviously have this overemphasis of the evidence, currently, in the evidence based practice community, they're praised, and that creates that social norm that if you want to talk about something you need to have a reference for it, right? And that's where that pressure comes from is this social norm that's been created, where if you put up information, you have to have a reference, because if you don't, you're not evidence based. But a lot of people actually don't realize that that's not what evidence based practice is, and they've lost sight of everything that we've spoken about earlier that it's this multifaceted decision making framework where science is laying down the foundation to give you direction. And then once you have that direction, you can then start to look to your experience and the individual's response to the intervention, and that pretty much takes care of everything from there until you have a novel problem, where you don't have the data, for example, on a client or you don't know exactly what they need, and you have to go research that or you might not have experience in that regard, then you go back to the science, and it helps you to start solving that problem. But I think for the most part, humans are complex, and we need to be pragmatic as coaches, and I think a lot of the evidence based practice movement along with holding evidence in very high regard, and that pressure to reference and have citations for

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everything, I think we've lost the art of not only being creative, Danny, but pragmatic, and being able to apply the science in ways that can be easily understood and actioned out by the client. We have people talking about protein feeding in 0.4 to 0.5 grams per kg of body weight per meal; and, well, how well can you communicate that to clients – tell them how many grams of chicken breasts they need to have, tell them what they need to do to cook the chicken breast. I think when it comes to nutrition, a lot of fitness professionals that are “evidence based” at least from what I’ve observed, really lacked just some basic stuff around nutrition literacy. It's like, yeah, and teaching people how to be nutritionally literate. They can tell you all of the evidence based recommendations when it comes to calorie deficit, setting protein intake, protein feedings for muscle retention, body composition, all that kind of stuff, but they wouldn't be able to tell how to teach a client to go grocery shopping, and prepare meals in any real pragmatic sense. And I think that's something that we've also seen cover the cost of the evidence based practice movement, over emphasizing the science, along with stifling coaches' creativity and creative problem solving abilities, and that assumption that coaches can actually read research, and therefore, putting pressure on coaches to actually go read direct research, when maybe it's not something that is going to be as worthwhile for them, given their qualification and scientific competency, especially when for most coaches, I would say, working on their communication skills, focusing on how to better write programs and teach movements is going to have far greater impact on their development as a coach than learning how to read papers.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, and I think that maybe error that people are making that you just highlighted might, again, come from a misunderstanding of what it means to be evidence based. Right? So sure, they're citing accurate facts that we're getting from some nutrition science studies, but what

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is also evidence based that you would get from an area, like, say, public health nutrition, which is kind of widely known is that there's calls for when this is translated to the general population, or groups of people that there's a need for being able to translate this into understandable terms of food based interventions, as opposed to writing down the grams of nutrients or milligrams of micronutrients, for example. And so, being able to translate that into food based terms, that in of itself is evidence based to do, and, I guess, I don't want to beak too much just because I'm in the kind of odd position of most of my audience being people who want to hear detail, so I would talk to them differently as to maybe a coach has to talk to someone in the general population. So I have the luxury of talking in a different manner than maybe they do, but it's, yeah, it's well within an evidence based framework to say, we need to be able to take what's coming from studies and translate that into food based terms when we are talking to members of the general public in a way that that messaging is actually going to get through, and then realizing that in itself is evidence based, because we have tons of data in public health on that, we have tons of data in behavior change, etc., in communication of public health ideas. And so, yeah, it's interesting that that gets left out, AND instead we'd kind of focus on, again, maybe these numbers and so on.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, and I would say that probably like 80 to 90% of my coaching roster are coaches who are interested in the evidence based fitness information. Right? So oftentimes, I'm talking to them about muscle protein synthesis or training volume and using technical terms that, for the most part, I do feel sometimes out of touch from coaching the general population, although I make sure that I have anywhere between four to five real gen pop clients that I coach face to face, so I still have my finger on the pulse, and I don't lose touch. I don't lose my touch over time. So I see that happens to a lot of coaches. But man, it's different. My gen

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pop clients, they don't really care about training volume, they're just like, yeah, I want to train hard, I want to feel good when I leave, be part of being successful coaches, having clients leave you whether it's in person or online, with a sense of accomplishment, feeling as though they've achieved something, because that usually is a catalyst for consistency; and from that, you get progress, and then you get the results, and the outcome follows, but a sense of accomplishment. But for them, it's not learning more about training volume, it's not learning more whilst they're training with me about their RP or fatigue manager or anything like that; it's just feeling good and feeling I did an extra push up today, an extra rep, whatever the case may be – oh, I'm glad I got through that whole workout and didn't complain – like, that is an outcome that a lot of people would feel a sense of accomplishment from, but that doesn't require you to have that very quantitative evidence based hat on. You just got to be a real person, and moving with the client and adapting to them as they go through the session, or they go through the process of coaching and meeting their needs and expectations, and hopefully, trying to help them solve those problems that they're facing. But you don't always need to be super technical. A lot of the time, most of coaching should be very practical, and just being able to give people pragmatic, actionable tasks that they can go and do. And I think you're right, for the most part, that's where a lot of coaches I think have missed out on refining those skills by just worrying too much about the quantitative stuff that we get from the research.

DANNY LENNON:

So as we start to wrap up here, earlier on, we talked about how far someone wants to get into the kind of semantics of what it is to be an evidence based practitioner, and if we're being super strict, because that involves the use to some degree of appraising primary research that maybe that in itself isn't a desirable or even attainable goal for a lot of fitness professionals, and it might actually, and almost

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certainly isn't a requirement for them to be really, really effective; and you made the point that what's actually much more useful is them to be aware of what are the principles by which I'm going to coach by, and there's kind of a framework of various principles that, when I operate within this, then I can do that process of creative problem solving that we mentioned for each of my clients, as opposed to digging through research to answer these questions, there's this overarching framework that has been informed from the outside by evidence that's going to shape over the course of decades of research of what we know about coaching and strength training and nutrition that we're currently left with a general consensus of these kind of core principles. So with that, just to make it kind of clear, and I'm interested how you typically frame this to your students that our coaches of, from this point, okay, what would you say is the starting point for them in terms of going and being a more effective coach, like, what is the actual process of acquiring the knowledge of these principles, because, again, maybe people are saying, yeah, this all sounds great, makes sense, but what is the kind of best direction that you would point them towards of what it actually means to go and have a good understanding of the principles and the framework that you mentioned at the start, can you maybe going to give some concluding thoughts that would clear some of that for them?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Sign up for the JPS online mentorship. We start February 28. I'm not sure if this podcast will be up by then. No, I'm just kidding. But yeah, seriously, like, get a mentor who has a good understanding of this stuff, it doesn't have to be us, you could seek out Danny's expertise if you're someone who wants to get into working with people on the diet in the nutrition field. There's a lot of other great coaches out there who have a good understanding of the principles, and that's a really good starting point. But for the most part, the principles of exercise science, there's great books out there

that you can read, the science of strength training is something that's been written about at length, there's just several books that I think are really useful. But the Muscle and Strength Pyramids by Eric Helms, the Scientific Principles of Strength by Renaissance periodization, they're both really good books to start with for the training side of things. Nutrition side of things, you've also got the Muscle and Strength Pyramids. There's too many books to remember off the top my head, but reading and getting some basic understanding of physiology and anatomy, and then, from there, you will get the principles and the general consensus as it relates to the key concepts that govern how physiology and anatomy work, that will guide how you then apply the variables. So that's essentially the stepwise process is you have to have a basic understanding of physiology and anatomy, how the body works, you have to then find the principles that govern how the body works within the environment, or when we impose a certain stimulus whether it be increasing calories above maintenance, whether it's increasing training volume, whatever the case may be, and then, from there, you learn how to apply the variables, and you understand the variable. So for training, we have the principle of specificity, but the variables are intensity, volume, frequency, exercise selection, and we learn how to apply those variables once we have that foundational knowledge of how the body works, and we have a good idea of how the principles govern the operating system that we're imposing that stimulus on. I hope that answered the question.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah-no, that makes a lot of sense. I think having that understanding of those principles, and that framework is what allows people then to distinguish future information they'll come across as, is this good or bad, instead of having to ask someone else. So, let's say, someone starts to understand how all these principles fit together for a conducive training program, and they're looking at kind of volume, intensity,

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frequency, what is an appropriate workload for a certain type of client, how to work out someone's kind of maximum amount that they'll be able to kind of recover and adapt from, all that type of stuff, and they have a good understanding of that. Then suddenly, you don't have to – they don't kind of come across something like German volume training, and have to ask themselves, oh, this sounds really cool, should I just do this with all my clients; because now they can think through it in a manner of applying those principles you just named and say, ah, actually, maybe for this, this, and this reason, it's probably not a good idea for the vast majority of these people in this certain context. They're able to answer those questions as opposed to keep having to go back to scratch and find an answer to those. Right?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, So I think the principles are obviously something that we don't need to start, like, they're not studied as much like in a progressive overload. There are some studies on that, but it's just phenomena, as I said earlier, that we know exists. But when it comes to the variables, that's where there's going to be more direct research, because that's what research is. You have a dependent variable, independent variable, and obviously, trying to tease out cause-effect or correlation through observation or hypothesizing, whatever the case may be. And that's where you need to understand what the research is sort of telling us about those variables, whether it's intensity, volume, when it comes to training or protein requirements, when it comes to nutrition, the principles are really, they're much bigger than those individual variables. And if you understand the principles, you'll be able to apply those variables to create your own methods, and, as you said, Danny, you'll see if you have a good understanding of where the research is pointing to for each variable, whether it's set volume or protein requirements, you'll be able to identify when things are going against the consensus, and

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you'll be able to pick out the bullshit basically, and I think that's really important.

DANNY LENNON:

So with that, before I get to my final question or so, is there anything that we left an open loop on that you want to close, or, is there any other points that you wanted to get to, or do you think we got to everything that you were kind of hoping to cover here?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

I think we got quite a fair bit of it, I think, yeah, we had a good crack at it. It's probably your longest podcast ever, you're usually 46 minutes and you are out bro.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, I just don't work hard.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Yeah, you don't. You're not working hard enough, man.

DANNY LENNON:

So before I get to the very final question, let people know where they can find you on the internet, social media, and all that type of stuff.

JACOB SCHEPIS:

You can just search JPS health and fitness, and you'll pretty much find us on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or the internet. Google is amazing. I hate when people ask me how do I find your site. If you ask me that, I'm pretty sure you can be resolvable.

DANNY LENNON:

Well, that's the last time I'm asking you that question. All of those links will be in the show notes for everyone listening. With that, I'm going to give you a question you've undoubtedly got before, but people tend to change their mind relatively frequently on this question, or at least I do. So if I were to ask you what is one thing you'd advise people that they could do each day that would have a positive impact on any area of their life?

JACOB SCHEPIS:

Be better than yesterday.

DANNY LENNON:

Nice. That is something I regularly fail to do, but I will try to do better. I think I trend in the wrong direction quite frequently.

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JACOB SCHEPIS: Keep trying hard, Danny.

DANNY LENNON: I will try. Jacob, this has been great to catch up and chat again. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

JACOB SCHEPIS: My pleasure. Thank you.