

Exercise Instruction? or Conversation for Pay?

by Ken Hutchins, Developer of SuperSlow® Exercise

September 17, 2014

John Bussey. In 1993, I was working at the Lincoln Fitness Center in Maitland, Florida. At 5 a.m. on some mornings an instructor named Wendell Hobby supervised the workout of John Bussey, a local attorney. In these workouts, John used a Nautilus Multi Exercise machine to perform the heel raise (calf) exercise.

As any knows who is acquainted with this device, the subject must first place a belt around his lower torso, just below the waist and somewhat in the sulcus at a level that is just inferior to the iliac crests and superior to the greater trochanters and buttocks on the posterior torso. Then, while holding the belt thus so to the lower torso, he kneels and hooks the belt's large steel ring to the movement arm. Then, he simultaneously and slowly straightens both legs.

At this point the subject is cautious to not tip over the machine as its weight stack is located on the right rear corner—not directly rearward—and is not adequately counterweighted for the heavier weights that are often employed for this exercise. (Once he steps up onto the machine's first step—next in the procedure—his bodyweight stabilizes the system.)

Then, he steps up onto the machine's first step, thus requiring temporary unilateral loading of the pelvis (causing painful misalignment of the innominate bones of the pelvis in some subjects). Once both feet are in place on the step and the knees are straight (but not locked), he is directed and cautioned to lower his heels to a shallow stretch to pause and then commence the exercise.

I observed Wendell and John as John loaded into this machine for several mornings, as they simultaneously chattered mindlessly about whatever topic that arose. I was always concerned about the loading process into this machine, but this concern was heightened due to my knowledge that John had recently completed early-stage rehabilitation following knee surgery for an accident he had incurred during a recent ski trip to Colorado.

After several mornings (workouts) of biting my tongue, I went over—as John was just then donning the belt—and strongly chided both of them for mindlessly

talking. I warned them that someone was going to get hurt, because they were distracted from safe entry/exit procedure by virtue of the conversation.

John threw the belt on the floor in such a way as I thought we was going to hit me.

To my surprise, he came to me and shook my hand as he thanked me profusely and saying,

“Most people I know believe that I got hurt skiing. Yes, I was on a ski vacation when I injured by knee, but I was not skiing. I got hurt, because I was running my mouth and not paying proper attention as I was boarding the ski lift. As it departed the landing, my knee was torn.”

Lori Dickerson. A few weeks later, I told this story to my friend, Lori Dickerson, an attorney and wife of Don Dickerson, MD (radiation oncologist). Lori had recently injured her knee “while skiing,” and I thought she might enjoy the story regarding John Bussey.

As I finished the story about John, Lori began to grin, then admitted,

“I, too, was not skiing, per se, when I twisted my knee. Yes, I was on skis, but I was not skiing. I was merely walking slowly along as I was talking to my friend on my right, and my inattention caused my knee to torque.”

Choir Practice. Recently, I joined a choir in a small church in Montgomery, Texas. Just this past week, the director recognized the monumental work performed by the pianist and others to prepare for each rehearsal and performance. With this, she pleaded that we remain silent and not converse socially when she was giving instruction or when she was rehearsing with the different sections of the group.

The choir director has a challenging job. She directs volunteers, many who are retired musicians and/or have formal music degrees and training. However, it's difficult to corral 50 people in a room and get them to focus for 90 minutes. They naturally want to visit although they probably would not have consumed an evening of their week if it were only to do that. They left the comfort of their homes to do some serious work.

So the choir director must take charge. She makes them cognizant that the rehearsal process is difficult enough without the distractions, interruptions, and misunderstood cues that occur amidst the muttering

common during times when some sections sit out while others rehearse. Idle conversation obstructs progress.

The members, of course, are adult-enough to agree that she is correct, and that they are actually being rude to disrupt the rehearsal. They are not offended by the plea. They dutifully comply.

The same principle applies in any kind of rehearsal, be it an orchestra, a band, or a drama rehearsal. Irrelevant conversation and laughter costs a group valuable rehearsal time and can cause misunderstandings and missed directives.

Worship. Church and temple and mosque services are marked with a reverence. So are many yoga and other meditative sessions. Part of this reverence is quiet.

Imagine what it would be like to be in the midst of the Lord's Prayer as someone in the foyer of the sanctuary was waving and yelling through the sanctuary's main doorway to a friend who was standing in the choir loft. This is not condoned, even by nonmembers and people who want nothing to do with religion. Our culture recognizes this as inappropriate and disrespectful.

Civic and Business Meetings. Go to any civic meeting. A gavel is struck to bring the meeting to order. Whether in a court room, a city council meeting, or the United States Senate, the call to order resembles a call to worship in at least one way. It demands quiet. So too with the local high school football team meetings in locker room, the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club meetings, or the corporate meetings at Exxon.

And in some of these organizations a sergeant at arms is appointed or elected to police unruliness.

Schools. Talking, particularly idle chitchat, is the ubiquitous impediment of the school teacher. School teachers actually spend more time throughout their careers demanding quiet focus of their students than they do conveying educational information. I am amazed that so many former school teachers become SuperSlow instructors and then proceed to allow and even promote gossipy talk throughout their workout sessions.

Industry. Employee socializing on the job can cause expensive mistakes and fatal accidents.

I owned a machine shop for over ten years. For the last part of that term, I employed a talented manager who could not control his personal telephone calls to his family. He spent an average of approximately an hour a day talking on his cell phone—with much of this conversing performed as he walked around the shop performing various machining and assembly operations. He was counseled about his phone addiction several times. Eventually, this employee cost

the company so much that he lost his job, and we had to close the company. Fortunately, his bad habits never got anyone physically hurt.

Another employee was an older journeyman machinist. Like most older machinists, Don was very regimented with his work and avoided any kind of conversation during machining operations. If he saw me coming through the door with an apparent need to talk to him, he immediately cut off the machine's motor. He appreciated that it was common for machinery to maim or kill workers who were distracted for any reason—especially talking.

Don's adage was, "When the mouth engages, everything else disengages."

Exercise. At 6 a.m. twice a week, I supervised the SuperSlow exercise sessions of Lynn Singletary for several years. During this time—since it was so early in the day—there was usually no one else in the building.

One morning as she was doing a static neck exercise near the back entrance, Brenda, the other instructor, quietly opened the door and passed by us. As she did, she properly avoided making eye contact or greeting me or my subject. She knew that to do so is unprofessional and extremely dangerous, especially during a neck exercise.

After the workout, Lynn asked, "Was that Brenda, the other instructor who you sometimes speak of?"

Once I affirmed that it was Brenda, Lynn posed, "Wasn't it rude that she didn't say 'hello?'"

I answered, "No, 'rude' is if she had greeted you, thus causing you to hurt your neck." Lynn instantly understood my point.

I had inherited Lynn from a former instructor who had neglected to properly educate Lynn on proper conduct and safety procedures in the workout room. And I had failed to completely brief Lynn when I took over her workouts as I have learned that I must not trust others to do a complete indoctrination.

Perhaps the subject is, indeed, properly schooled with the required Preliminary Considerations by the instructor, and the subject merely forgets what has been explained, but I do not give this explanation much credence, because the proper negotiation of the workout area is an ongoing learning process that occurs throughout the exercise program. The subject is innocently ignorant, because her instructor has neglected his responsibility to educate. Misconduct in the gym is almost always the instructor's neglect, not the subject's.

Instructor Certification Content. I believe that the SuperSlow and SuperStaticsSM Certification Programs have done all that is possible to teach instructors their responsibilities to the subjects in regard to socializing during the workout. For instance, one question on the

test taken by all Certified SuperSlow instructors is:

9. When are injuries most probable?
- A. When moving too fast and suddenly.
 - B. When carelessly entering or exiting an exercise machine.
 - C. When socializing.
 - D. When all three of the above occur simultaneously.

Of course, the correct answer is D.

Here is another question from the same test:

30. It is one of your duties as instructor to:
- A. Keep the subject occupied with conversation so that they are distracted from the discomfort of the exercise.
 - B. Follow your subject's lead and discuss the topic of his choice.
 - C. Curb socializing so that the subject can focus on form.

Of course, the correct answer is C.

New Question. We have recently considered the inclusion of the following test question:

- XX. What is the single worst thing to do when exercising?
- A. Val Salva.
 - B. Chew gum.
 - C. Move too fast.
 - D. Idle conversation and/or Laughter.

This question demands careful rumination. At first, it is not easy to prioritize the separate conditions. As bad as the first three actions are, talking is often worse, because it blunts instruction and defocuses the mind away from the task at hand. For instance, John Bussey already knew not to be situated in the chair as he was when the lift started, but his tongue wagging distracted him from his compliance.

Only recently have I acknowledged the defocusing that occurs from laughter. When we laugh, our minds go away from the seriousness of any task. And laughter in the gym, like yawning, is contagious. Loud, boisterous laughter—regardless of the reason—must be strongly discouraged.

Gum chewing is a very bad practice for which

there is absolutely no permissible excuse, but intense conversation often obscures our memory about the gum.

Paying proper attention to detail is what SuperSlow and SuperStatics exercise is about. Attention to detail is the *sine qua non* of any valuable product or endeavor. And chitchat obviates attention to detail.

New Procedures. At the Renaissance Exercise Workshop in the fall of 2012, I took stronger steps to reign in the problem of idle talking during exercise. I started by telling the story of the novice exercise subject in Orlando who responded to her instructor with, “OK” 68 times during the introduction of only one upper-body exercise. Instead of the instructional requiring only three or four minutes, it continued for over ten minutes with the subject missing most of the details. Just imagine what it would be like to instruct 30-35 students in a class who all respond with “OK” or with some other verbal acknowledgment to every minute statement the instructor makes.

Response when no response is warranted nor requested interrupts the instructor, thus blocking the instructor's conveyance of the required commands and reinforcements. If the subject is speaking, then the instructor can't speak and be heard. We then say that instruction is thereby “blunted.”

Granted, many of us have highly-developed communication skills that require appropriate eye-contact and affirmative responses. These are a specific skill-set for an important application. With exercise, we strive to learn a different specific skill-set that clicks in whenever we enter the exercise area.

Another instructional challenge occurs when the subject asks questions during the instructional or during the exercise. Asking questions is never necessary during load. The instructor can see and address any external discrepancy in the performance of the exercise. And if the subject is asking a question, then the instruction is blunted again, even if the question is relevant to the exercise.

Note that an interrogative by the subject puts an onus on the instructor to make statements in the form of a reply. Marketing authorities often teach salespeople to “control the conversation” by continually asking questions. This is not a good approach for obtaining the precise and immediately pertinent information the subject requires from the instructor.

Also note that a policeman and other law enforcement officials ask all the questions. They keep an investigation on track by disallowing questions from the persons of interest.

A good instructor might see several discrepancies at once. He then must quickly prioritize the discrepancies

and address the most needful first. If he is interrupted with a question, then his efforts to reign in the discrepancies is side tracked.

Although the workout session time slot is the appropriate time for questions and open dialog regarding exercise philosophy and principles, it must not occur during the workout, per se, especially when the subject is said to be “loaded.”

Sometimes the subject must convey a concern and there must be an allowance for this. And this requirement is addressed with the following dialog rules that I presented to the workshop.

Dialog rules. Once the workout begins, only the instructor is allowed to ask questions and the subject has use of only five words. They are “no,” “yes,” “hot,” “cold,” and “ouch.” Avoid, “OK.”

If the instructor asks the subject a question—and it must be couched in the form of question that allows for a “yes” or “no” answer—the subject is to respond with a crisp “yes” or “no.” No nodding or shaking of the head is appropriate, and “uh-huh” and “uh-uh” are too close in sound for clear distinction.

“Hot” signals the instructor that a fan is needed. “Cold” signals the instructor to turn off or turn down a fan.

The last word in the subject’s vocabulary during exercise is “ouch.” It conveys that something is injuriously hurtful and prompts the instructor to terminate the exercise and enter into full dialog with the subject to explore the problem. “Ouch” is the subject’s back door, his request to stop and ask questions and make comments. “Ouch” is somewhat like raising one’s hand in class, but don’t raise your hand. Hand motions—pointing, waving, gesturing of any kind—are not wise to do at any time in the workout room.

Making It Happen. So what if your so-called SuperSlow or SuperStatics instructor doesn’t comport with the SS standards?

When I left Orlando, Florida in June of 2014, I sent 40 of my long-term clients (Some had been with me for 20 years.) to a dedicated technician that I had closely trained to be a SuperSlow instructor. I helped him set up a facility where the ideal exercise environment (SuperSlow) was possible, however it was used by other SuperSlow-certified instructors who ruined the environment for everyone with their gab sessions, boisterous laughter, and carelessly loud seat adjustments.

Later, my former Florida clients phoned me here in Texas to complain that their good money (\$40 per session) was for naught as they could not concentrate during exercise as I had taught them. They were no

longer able to internalize and mentally engage deeply into their targeted musculatures. Achieving an alert hypnosis or a Zen state as some of them could do was now impossible.

They complained to me that they might as well go join some box gym for \$10/month as the environment there was no worse than at my student’s new facility.

Also, they pointed out that having the best equipment in the world and an instructor armed with the ability to apply fine nuances to their special needs was useless in the so-called “zoo” (as some of them characterize the exercise room). Additionally, some of them are musicians who were outraged about the metallic pinging caused as the “paid companions” (not deserving of “instructors”) carelessly released the pop-pins, thus promoting ear damage.

Eventually, two of these former clients (separately) visited me in Texas and deeply embarrassed me in the presence of family by reporting that their workout sessions were much improved by my student’s addition of a stationary bike. After spending decades protecting these clients from the Aerobics/steady-state/cardio nonsense, this student had become a fitness whore.

Of course, many of his subjects like the bike activity. It’s a natural—and wrong—addition. I bet they would think it extremely kooky and out of place if I insisted they all play trumpet before they commence each workout. In this vein, the trumpet playing and stationary bike riding are equal.

We are all children in different ways. We all vacillate between what Richard Mitchell refers to as Appetite and Reason. He, with the help of Aristotle, defines a *child* as a person who lacks self-governance.

We employ self-governance—being an adult—whenever we will to do so. It is optional at all times. It is a choice. And most people—including doctors—choose Appetite over Reason when they enter the gym unless the instructor imposes governance.

I explained that their new instructor—although he is the owner of the business—had brought in—against my strong advice—the other instructors to enable the business to remain solvent. And these other SuperSlow-certified instructors are now so-called *rent trainers* under contract to him, and who he was loathe to complain to as he needed their rent money.

To avoid putting the owner in an awkward position, I urged these veteran subjects to complain directly to the other instructors and to their clients about their errant behavior. I told them to calmly and politely, but strongly and repeatedly, insist that the culture was technically incorrect, contrary to what the instructors were taught and certified to convey, misrepresentations of the

advertised program, morally wrong, rude, thoughtless, mindless, inconsiderate, and dangerous.

It worked! The mess was cleaned up in one week, however, I cautioned them that it would require a reminder on a routine basis.

Here is a statement to me from a friend who is a popular physician in Orlando, Florida:

I remember how hard I had to work at understanding your writings, how carefully I had to listen to you and concentrate on your explanations, and how at first, I too thought that you were too “rigid” in your standards. But because I put that effort forth, it wasn’t long before I saw that you were right on every level regarding the theories you developed and the rules required for effectiveness and safety.

—Sheril Stansberry, MD
Internal Medicine—

Other Aspects. Socializing is just one of many aspects of clinical control in the ideal exercise environment. I detail these in *SuperSlow—The Ultimate Exercise Protocol* as well as in *The Renaissance of Exercise—Volume I*.

Please read the articles, *Scratching an Itch* and *Hopeless in Texas*. These articles expose related focus issues.

Admittedly, my efforts to test for these understandings have largely failed to reap consistently high standards in practice. Hopefully, the new emphasis on SuperStatics will improve compliance.



In the main text, I briefly mention the rule to avoid pointing, gesturing, scratching an itch, rubbing a sore area, picking lint, etc., when exercising. In the recently published story of Paul Hanslik (“Scratching an Itch”) I underscore the assumed and incorrect necessity to commit these behaviors.

This woman subject is performing a dynamic overhead press exercise. As she was in the top position of the movement with her head and neck properly aligned (slightly flexed) as her torso was anteriorly flexed (correct), she noticed the toothpaste drooled onto the anterior aspect of her left malleolus. This distraction caused her to abruptly unload, thus dropping the movement arm and weight. I was in disbelief that she was not injured—due to embarrassment.