

25 Years, 25 Mistakes by Mike Boyle

This year I'll enter my twenty-fifth year as a strength and conditioning coach. Last month I watched Barbara Walters celebrate her thirtieth year with a special called "30 Mistakes in 30 Years." I'm going to celebrate my twenty-fifth anniversary by telling you my top twenty-five mistakes.

Hopefully I'll save you some time, pain, and injury. Experience is a wonderful but impatient teacher. And unfortunately, our experiences in strength and conditioning sometimes hurt people besides us.

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Mistake #1: Knowing it all

I love Oscar Wilde's quote, "I'm much too old to know everything." Omniscience is reserved for the young. As the old saying goes, you have one mouth and two ears for a reason. I'd take it a step further and say the ratio is four to one: two eyes, two ears, and one mouth.

To continue down the cliché road, how about this one: "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." When I was young I had many answers and few questions. I knew the best way to do everything. Now that I'm older I'm not sure if I even know a good way to do anything.

Mistake #3: Not visiting other coaches

God, it seems everything goes back to number one! I was too busy running the perfect program to attempt to go learn from someone else. Plus, when you know it all, how much can you learn?

Find the good coaches or trainers in your area (or in any area you visit) and arrange to meet them or just watch them work. I often will just sit with a notebook and try to see what they do better than I do.

I can remember current San Francisco 49'ers strength and conditioning coach Johnny Parker allowing us to visit when he was with the New England Patriots and then asking us questions about what we saw and what we thought he could do better. Coach Parker is a humble man who always provided a great example of the type of coach and person I wanted to be.

Mistake #18: Not taking enough vacation time

When I first worked at Boston University we were allowed two weeks paid vacation. For the first ten years I never took more than one.

Usually I took off the week between Christmas and New Years. This is an expensive week to vacation, but it meant that I'd miss the least number of workouts since most of my athletes were home at this time. I think the first time I took a week off in the summer was about four years ago. My rationale? Summer is peak training time. Can't miss one of those weeks.

I think **there's a thin line between dedication and stupidity**, and I often crossed it. I think in my early years I was more disappointed that the whole program hadn't collapsed during any of my brief absences. I felt less valuable when I returned from a seminar and realized that everything had gone great.

Stephen Covey refers to it as **"sharpening the saw."** Take the time to vacation. You'll be better for it.

Mistake #19: Neglecting your own health

This is an embarrassing story, but this article is all about helping others to not repeat my errors. Every year in February I'd find myself in the doctor's office with a different complaint: gastro-intestinal problems, headaches, flu-type illnesses, etc. I had a wonderful general practitioner who took a great interest in his patients. His response year after year was the same: **slow down. You can't work 60-80 hours a week and be healthy.**

Like a fool I yessed him to death and went back to my schedule. After about the fifth year of this process my doctor said, "I need to refer you to a specialist who can help you with this problem" and he handed me a card. I was expecting an allergist or perhaps some type of holistic stress expert. Instead I found myself holding a card for a psychiatrist.

My doctor's response was simple. I can't help you. You need to figure out why you continue to do this to yourself year in and year out. I went outside and called my wife. I told her it was a "good news-bad news" scenario. I wasn't seriously ill, but I might be crazy. Unfortunately, she already knew this.

Mistake #20: Not recognizing stress

Again I remember talking to a nurse who was treating me for a gastrointestinal problem. I seemed to have chronic heartburn. Her first question was, "Are you under any stress?" My response was the usual. Me? Stress? I have the greatest job in the world. I love going to work every day!

Do you know what her response was? She said, "Remember, stress isn't always negative." It was the first time I'd really thought about that. My job was stressful. Long days, weekend travel, too many late nights celebrating victories or drowning sorrows. A part-time job to

make extra money meant working at a bar on Friday and Saturday until 2 AM, and that was often followed by drinks until 4 AM.

Sounds like fun, but it added up to stress. The lesson: **stress doesn't have to be negative.**
Stress can just be from volume.

Mistake #23: Not taking naps

Do you see the pattern here? Whether we're personal trainers or strength and conditioning coaches, the badge of honor is often lack of sleep. How often have you heard someone say, "I only need five hours a night!"

In the last few years I've tried to take a nap every day I'm able. As we age we sleep less at night and get up earlier. I'm not sure if this is a good thing. I know when I'm well-rested I'm a better husband and father than when I'm exhausted at the end of a day that might have begun at 4:45 AM.

There's no shame in sleep, although I think many would try to make us believe there is.

Mistake #25: Reading an article like this and thinking it doesn't apply to you

Trust me, denial is our biggest problem.

About the Author

Michael Boyle is one of the foremost experts in the fields of Strength and Conditioning, Performance Enhancement and general fitness. He currently spends his time lecturing, teaching, training, and writing. For more info, visit his site: www.michaelboyle.biz