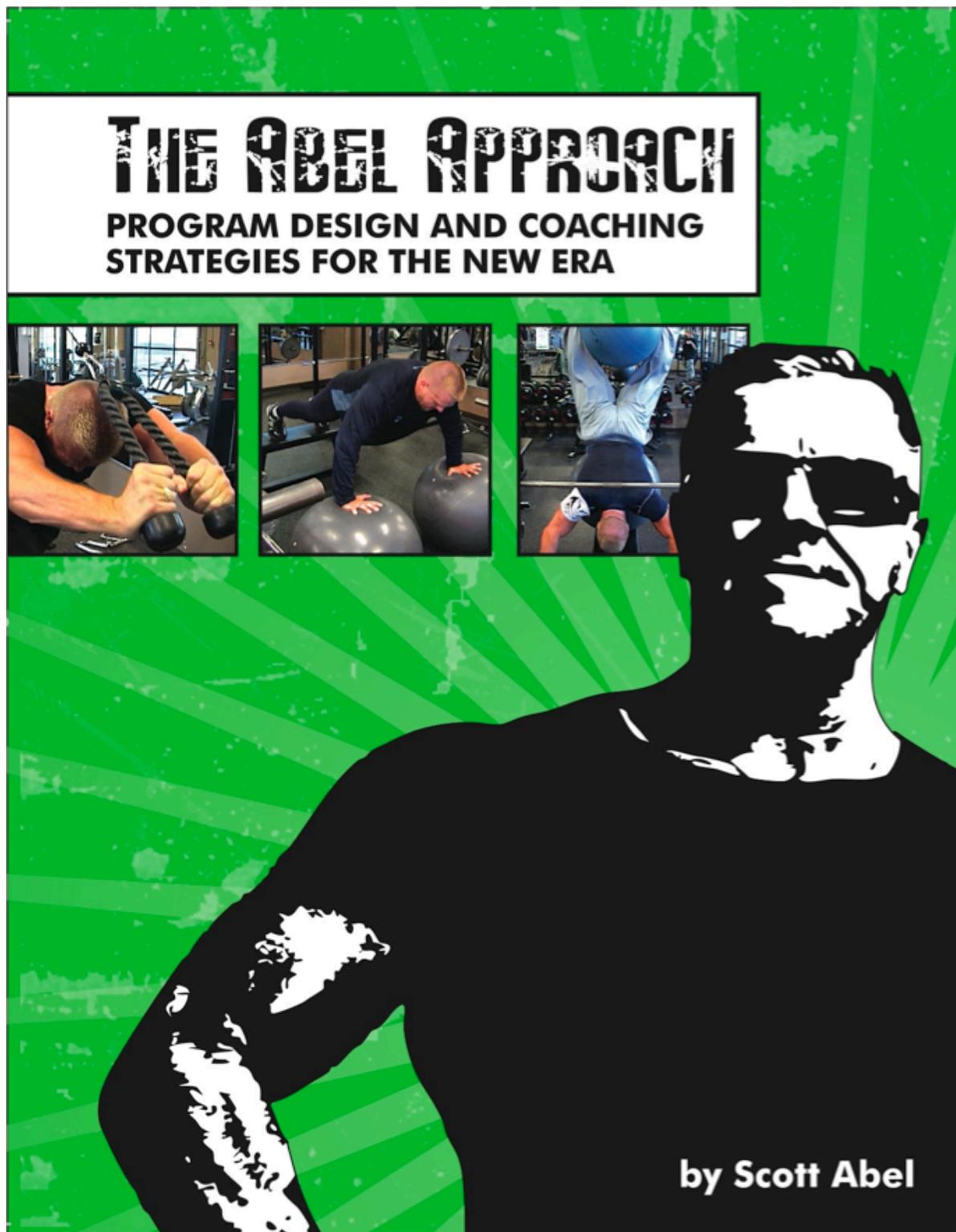


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<http://scottabel.com/>

# The Abel Approach: Forward

This book was a long time in coming.

Truth be told I have had a hard time initially, regarding what I would even write about: there is the diet dilemma, the supplement scam, my 25 years or so with bodybuilding “experiences,” and the ever growing need to comment on systems of training and the current trend to internet “Guruitis,” celebrity trainers, etc. The list never ends.

Based upon how well this book does, I would like to address some of the above topics. I would like to do a diet book based on the fact that there is genius in simplicity. I would like to do a book regarding “the case against all supplements” as a practice of mass illusion and in futility and weak thinking of inexperienced and even advanced researchers. And yes, I am talking about **all** supplements. From multi-vitamins to anti-oxidants, to whatever miracle of the month currently exists, the fact is 99% of supplements are unnecessary 99% of the time. But that is another story!

I will also definitely at some point do a book I would like to call “Mass Delusions” regarding my behind the scene experiences in this industry that have left me shaking my head for all the wrong reasons. As I write this, we are being made aware of the issue of a professional wrestler who killed his family and himself and all the surrounding interest as to what role drug cocktails played in this scenario. Anyone reading my website blogs knows I have been warning about what I have seen over the last few years as a scary trend toward polypharmacy of ridiculous proportions. I have seen a distinct and direct change in the character traits of people in this industry who begin this path for one reason, but continue it for another. I believe time will bear out my conclusions that an increase in crazy amounts of testosterone and testosterone-based androgens has created a need and demand for anti-inflammatory, anti-depressant, anti-anxiety medication and sleep medication, that has created and allowed for personality disorders and pathologies and medical issues to play out and ruin not only the lives of participants, but their loved ones as well. This has nothing to do with athletic development on any level. The reality of it saddens me deeply. I make a brief reference to this in the book, but I will get more involved at another time, in a totally separate project. But I can’t put everything in one book, as much as I would like to, because all such issues are somehow interconnected.

I settled on a book about modern program design and coaching strategies in the new era. There are so many people now wanting to train competitors that the talent base of trainers and coaches is getting very watered down. It has come to a point where trainees are not able to differentiate between real expertise and hype, just like with the supplement industry.

**I have read many books on program design and most fall short on several levels.** For one thing, there are far too many symposiums and certifications that are concentrating on the wrong aspects of training phenomenon. Learning funky new exercises and using terms like “periodization” and “hybrid” loosely has led to even more confusion. I am guilty of that one myself. A new exercise may be cool and may even be an added benefit to a training protocol, but it remains only a means to an end. In truth, the same principles have pretty much always been in existence, but get twisted all out of whack when misunderstood or misrepresented. I could train people with exercises and techniques used in the 60’s and still get better results than most seminar junkies today.

I have seen first hand the results of people who have attended a conference over a weekend and then come to see them apply what they thought they learned. For most people perception is reality and the fact is most people attend lectures that are too advanced for them and what they try to put in to action

makes little sense and only shows they did not grasp the subject matter on a real level. Moreover most experts seem to be speaking to each other rather than the grass roots trainer or trainee. While this makes for a great read or an interesting presentation, it does not further the knowledge base at the grass roots level in real terms. That is not a criticism of anyone; it is merely an observation on the “state of things.” I read and I have read most experts in this industry. All have something of significant value to add. But like many I gravitate to what speaks loudest to me and my experience. This is my filter of what Alwyn Cosgrove instructs as “absorb what is useful”. You will find in the pages of this book that I tend to reference the same people often. It is for this above reason. Very few experts I have found see this idea of training and program design as I do. As you will see, I move more away from being a slave to quantification than most of my compatriots. I may even be legitimately criticized for doing so.

But as most experts agree that coaching and program design is as much an art as an acquired skill, I have found little need for all these tools of quantification to apply my trade and to create champions. Anyone that has created as many champions as I have and continue to do is welcome to disagree with my approach and prove me wrong. There is ample illustration of my approach and difference from the test and re-test experts within the pages to follow.

This book deliberately leaves out many aspects crucial to the topic at hand. I did not discuss in depth much at all to do with muscle fibers and recruitment and activation threshold and such research. I just think that kind of discussion would have taken this book in an entirely other direction than the one I thought needed most, at least from my perspective. This is not to say these elements are not important because they are. I just think anyone studying program design and coaching should have some kind of working knowledge of these things already. If you need to hone this knowledge then you should indeed do so.

Toward this end I have also left out any photos of demonstration exercises for that exact same reason. I have read many program design books in the past and, frankly, I was quite disappointed that a book containing some 200 or so pages of content, often 100 pages were taken up by still pictures of “how to” perform exercises. To me that was quite disappointing.

I agree that technique is everything in exercise performance but exercise technique cannot be taught within the confines of a book and certainly not in still pictures. Moreover once again, it is my feeling that a book about program design and coaching should be allowed to “assume” a certain level of expertise of the reader. I expect most of you to know what a bench press is and how to perform it. Yes there are nuances to everything, but pages and pages of pictures of exercises for me is another book, for another group. Of course there are exceptions. Many of you will not be familiar with “movement” oriented exercises that are more functionally derived. But a still picture would not do these movements justice. A DVD would be more appropriate. (To that end, I have a YouTube channel with many of these demonstrations. Visit [https://www.youtube.com/scottabelcoaching/.](https://www.youtube.com/scottabelcoaching/))

Also many people call such movements by many different names. I think it is much more important to learn when, why and how to implement them and their variations and progressions, rather than to waste page space explaining, “this is a Superman” or an “RDL Dead lift.” **So this book is all about written content.**

Keep in mind that my experience base is with what I must label in a broader category than just bodybuilding/figure/fitness. My experience base covers almost all sports at some time, but my expertise I must say has to do with what I would label as ‘cosmetic fitness or cosmetic physique enhancement.’ So when you are reading this keep in mind that all things considered, this is what I will usually be referring to, when I talk about “trainees” unless I say otherwise to make an example or a

point.

Also keep in mind there are many exceptions to anything. A power lifter for example may read something I say here and say that it is wrong and doesn't apply to them, and their training. That is entirely possible. When making points in a book you can't reference every possible exception every time you want to make a point. And finally just know that I chose to write about coaching and program design because it currently excites me the most. The training landscape is changing. It's changing fast and it's changing for the better. This is one positive aspect in this industry right now. I would hope that I have added to it here. Most importantly is my passion for training as a rewarding end in itself. Most trainees do not understand the concept of real world in the trenches intensity. I hope this book gets across the notion that training intensity is the defining element to success and achievement in any program application.

# Innervation Training & Functional Training: Some Basics

While functional training in general and Innervation Training for bodybuilding and development in particular are here to stay, what is sorely lacking throughout the fitness and bodybuilding industry is the “proper and real” **application and integration** of these modalities in to programs that make sense in pursuit of whatever goal a client or athlete may have.

**I have always said that a “collection of exercises” is not a program.**

Yet many trainees and even trainers and coaches approach training as an “on the spot” phenomenon of going to the gym, and then choosing exercises for that day once they get there. Not much thought goes in to the actual “programming” beyond what day of the week it may be and what body part someone may be targeting.

That doesn’t bode well for anyone seeking real results. The real training “program” should always have a purpose and function around all aspects of the various types of strength and power, which may be a focus of a specific program. This cannot be accomplished by just haphazardly selecting exercises, rep schemes, and sets in an on the spot mentality without much focus on the whole “programming element” which may last anywhere from 4 weeks to 30 weeks or more.

Trainers and experts need to understand and get away from the mentality of one- dimensional approaches to program design and goal achievement. The truth is, for any given client or athlete, it may take multiple programs and diet tweaks over time to get a person to goal attainment. This linear point A to point B program and diet and supplement design mentality for goal attainment is far too simplistic and myopic and may set more people up for failure than for accomplishment. Often someone may need to go from program A to program B to program C progression over the course of months just to be ready to tackle what the initial training and dieting goal may have been originally. This is a reality that coaches and trainers need to grasp in earnest.

Trainers and coaches need to stop making miracle promises and inducing unrealistic “expectations” from clients and athletes that border on the same level as TV “infomercial simplicity”.

That is not to say that trainers shouldn’t expect more effort from their clients. But intensity is also a learned adaptation to imposed demands. Truth be told, very few people train hard enough even under proper programming. There is just a preponderant difference in the nervous systems of athletes or former athletes who have been training and trying out for teams since childhood. This type of neural demand forces adaptations in the nervous system, making such people capable of far more “workload capacity” than the uninitiated or someone who has not been active in “high intensity” environments for some years.

I will keep coming back to this point over and over as it seems to be what is missing in the whole strength world assessment of work based solely on understanding of strength without understanding nervous system adaptability, in both systemic and in local muscular performance capacity. For more research on these elements and variables read anything and everything by Dr. Digby Sale.

There is a substantial difference between a collegiate athlete playing football and competing to train and try out for teams since the age of 8-9 in real physical and strength demands vs., say a person who

plays casual tennis or softball year long in a leisurely start and stop and wait fashion. The former produces incredible neural and metabolic adaptations, while the latter produces little if any, even over time. Development of skill level in such activities cannot be confused with such nervous system adaptations that take place in sports or endeavors that demand real intensity over a sustained training time. These are important things to note and recognize when taking a client or athlete's history, before embarking them on a program.

Truth be told, in my opinion, these are the things missing from the modern day performance coach's analytical and theoretical viewpoint. There is far too much emphasis on percentage of maximum rep ranges, etc, and "numbers" testing, and not enough focus on nervous system adaptation over time to high intensity training demands. This requires a much more qualitative approach to program design and coaching. This qualitative approach in turn requires not just visual observation of a client or athlete, but also necessitates their own biofeedback as part of the assessment on an ongoing basis. With the over-focus in the modern training environment on the idea that everything must be testable, and observable, much is missed in terms of potential application of protocol and program design possibilities.

Furthermore, what is lacking because of all of this focus on "testing" and number crunching is the fact that coaching is as much an art as it is a science. To totally try to let science dictate the training protocols of any athlete or client is to also miss much in the "performance" aspect of program design and individualizing the same. The fact is coaching is as much an art as a science and the art exists in recognizing that it is the "**application**" of training regimens that makes a great coach from just a well informed one. I will say as many other performance coaches have as well, that while science is indeed the necessity to informed coaching, practice the "art" of coaching and program design cannot be taught. Science and a broad base of experience can only influence it over time. This again, becomes problematic in the whole sea of "certification courses" out there that cannot offer much beyond broad strokes of research and application. The word "certification" is more of a marketing tool for consumers than it is a measuring stick to expertise in the modern training environment. This is indeed most unfortunate, as the experience base seems to always be years ahead of the bureaucratic base who want a "system" for everything. I am more in line with J.C. Santana and Vern Gambetta and the like who suggest the modern training environment is more about the "systemless system" of training application.

Too many book smart trainers are doing more harm than good or at least inducing performance stagnation rather than performance enhancement by strict adherence to training protocols based on a great deal of "quantified" research. Much of this research has no bearing in the trenches of tried and true blood and guts high intensity athletic regimens. Too often Strength and Conditioning specialists and coaches are trying to get the client or athlete to "fit the program" rather than tailoring the program to fit the athlete.

**Just like short and tall athletes won't "fit right" in certain exercise machines, certain exercise programs should not be a one-size fits all premise.**

Age is another separating factor. Athletes in team sports are often doing the same "off season" type of training protocol based on their given sport and its functional demands. While that is well and good, the "function" of older athletes bodies may be compromised by training ways and volumes that do not consider long term joint stress vs. their younger counter parts, as well as more exact recovery needs. A case in point is the overuse of Power Cleans and Snatches for Power Development. Not only are such movements over used but they can compound joint problems for athletes who have been competing in demanding sports at a high level for many years. For instance many older veteran hockey players and football players would be better served in doing "alternative exercises" for power development at this

point in their careers. If they have lasted long enough to be “older veterans” in their given sport then their skill level must be adequate to above average. At this point when their bodies will get less out of such a training protocol, an aware coach will make more “qualitative prescriptions” for a given athlete or client. Much of this is missed with the modern approach of constant “testing and numbers crunching” This is not to say that such power oriented training of the Olympic lifts are not viable tools. They are indeed. But again, a good coach must go beyond just acknowledging the functional demands of a given sport for program design but also it is very important to consider the individual as well as a variable specific element within program design for that specific sport.

The same thing applies to the non-athlete or ex-athlete who is just looking for some new exercise program to be in better shape but still be challenged by training protocol. Again, forget all of this fancy testing. The program itself tells the story. Performance is the only testing criterion a worthy coach needs to address, whether in the field of battle or in the gym working towards performance enhancement.

My whole career I have seen training poundage go down while performance mastery is enhanced. Anyone using “lifting more” as a performance test would and usually do miss this entirely when their focus is only on numbers. The same is true of needless tests of assessment. Most of these are taught within certification courses and most are a waste of time to real world results. It slows things down. But again it brings back the modern emphasis that everything must be observable and testable, and not only is this unrealistic, it is myopic in scope. Qualitatively-based assessment, which again is more of an art, is much more efficient when we’re talking about real-world application.

So, as an introduction, let me reiterate: **there is too much focus in the strength industry on “number crunching” and testing and not enough on the “qualitative aspects” of the coaching relationship.**

This is made more difficult and is faced with greater “speculation” by most, simply because it lacks in quantification. To me that is the strength of a good coaching protocol and program design. And that is the proper marriage of the quantifiable with the art of coaching and program design. And that art exists within its application.