

Achieving physical fitness – A new approach

By Anat Baniel

David is an accomplished Marshal Artist. When we first met, he was already 4th Dan in Judo and 4th Dan in Nin Jitsu. Yet it has been over eight years that he has achieved these ranks, and all his attempts at moving to the next level were unsuccessful despite dedicated intensive practice. John is an amateur avid golfer. His handicap of 87-92 has not changed for years.

Sara found Yoga to be so beneficial that she became a Yoga teacher herself. Yet she cannot get past certain limitations in flexibility due to severe scoliosis and hip problems.

Did you have any experience like the ones just described? Is there any sport, exercise or fitness program that you love and do regularly, yet you are “stuck” in the same level for a long time? Or maybe you tried to join a fitness or exercise program just to find out that is too difficult for you, and quickly dropped out?

These experiences are very common. Why is the failure to accomplish the physical fitness goals we set for ourselves so prevalent? Usually people think that it is because they are “lazy”; “too old”; “a klutz”; “untalented”; “too injured”.

I have discovered over the years that we fail because we try to accomplish our fitness goals in ways that do not fit the way we are structured. Many of our beliefs as to what should work and the ways in which we try to accomplish our fitness goals, contradict our true nature and lead to limitation and injury.

Let us look at some of these beliefs and practices and see how we can change them for better outcomes:

Old belief: Practice, practice, and practice. We should repeat the same movements over and over again until somehow we will achieve our exercise and fitness goals.

New understanding: Human beings are learners. Human beings depend 100% on learning for movement. Unlike other animals, for human beings there is no pre wiring of voluntary movement at birth. Exercise falls under the same rule: we need to minimize rote automatic repetition and instead provoke and intensify the learning process. That gives us a true opportunity to accomplish our physical fitness goals.

Repetition is important for drilling in what we already know, not for providing new possibilities.

Old belief: know your goal, focus on it and try hard to achieve it. In all forms of physical exercise, the student is shown what to do and then encouraged to try hard to accomplish it. The further you are from being able to perform the activity, the more you feel, and are encouraged to force your way to an outcome.

New approach: Focus on the process not the goal: know your goal and let go of the desire to achieve the goal instantaneously. If you could do it, you would. Forceful repetition deepens what you already know and provides little opportunity for the discovery of new ways, i.e. it leaves little room for learning. As a result it doesn't move you towards your goal even if it feels that it should. By detaching from the goal, you become free to explore and discover new ways that will give you more of what you want.

Old belief: There is one "right" way to perform the exercise or the sport activity. Most physical fitness and sports use demonstration and imitation as the main tool for teaching. The student is shown the "correct" way of doing it and proceeds to imitate and repeat what they have been shown the best they can, over and over again.

New approach: Provide an opportunity for learning: In order to learn a new movement skill or improve on an existing one, our brain needs new input; new and relevant information. That requires the ability to distance ourselves from the goal and experiment with many variations, many different ways of doing the movement we are trying to learn. If you look to do the movement in as many "wrong" ways that are safe, as you can find, you'll be amazed at the speed at which you'll improve. Limitations seem to melt away.

Old belief: Mind and body are separate entities. Improving physical activity demands focusing on the body only and working it as hard as we can. Very often the mind is not even brought into consideration like when one walks on a treadmill and watches TV at the same time.

New understanding: Human beings are intelligent. The mind and body work as part of the same whole. As humans we rely a lot more on our ability to think, be aware and problem solve than on our physical power for our survival. So when we want to improve an area of movement and physical strength, we benefit enormously when thinking and awareness become an important part of our exercise regime.

Old belief: focus on the exercise and the outcome. Most people have very little clue as to the HOW they are doing the movement they are involved in. For instance, please sit in a chair and then get up. Stay standing and think: do you know how you stood up, do you know if and how you moved your back, where did you look with your eyes? Did you shorten your neck? Did you breathe in, breathe out or held your breath? Did you press equally on your right and left foot? Unless you are already trained in such self-observation you probably cannot answer any of these questions. Lack of this kind of awareness makes it practically impossible to reach excellence in performance.

New approach: Shift the focus to yourself. Yes, you are the one doing the movement. It is possible to slow down, reduce the effort and become increasingly more aware of how you do the movements. This awareness is the gate for new possibilities and improved performance.

The Anat Baniel Method provides the opportunity to improve physical fitness, exercise, and sports performance by promoting a learning process that is in harmony with the way human brains are built to learn and perform.

David, John, and Sara, all immersed themselves in the Anat Baniel Method. David joined a professional training program where he participated in a few hundred hours of Transformational Movement lessons and theoretical work. Even though the training was not geared towards Marshal Arts, when he returned to Japan, he passed his test for 5th Dan in Nin Jitsu on the first try and subsequently progressed all the way to the highest level – 10th Dan.

John lowered his handicap by ten points after only 4 weeks of doing Transformational Movement lessons both in seminars and at home from tapes.

Sara took private lessons for a few months and did the Transformational Movement lessons from tapes at home. She overcame her back pain and greatly increased her flexibility in areas where she was stuck for many years.

For more information on the Anat Baniel Method in Saskatoon and area visit:

www.bimt.ca

Or call Dan Ouellette, RMT @ (306)715-2354