



How I Became A Powerlifting Coach

By Josh Rohr

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I had never really considered the possibility of personal training and helping people as a profession. I grew up on a dairy farm in a small town in Northeast Ohio, working in the barns before school in -10 degree weather during the winters. I guess I always just figured that I would be a farmer when I got older.

My freshmen year of high school I really got interested in football, mostly because I saw the guys in the weight room working out and noticed how big and strong they were. My sophomore year, I decided to play football for the first time. I was way behind the learning curve but I loved it. I learned a lot about the game and myself. I also learned a lot about weight training and I started learning some of the things I had been doing wrong.

During my junior year, I decided to get a job at a local gym. I found a place that would let me sit in the weight room and clean up after everyone. I was pumped about this because it meant I could be in the weight room and get paid for it! While I was working I noticed that there was a personal trainer at the gym, always working with different clients. This sparked my interest and I began looking into it.

My senior year of high school I began studying for my personal trainer certification but was having a lot of trouble understanding a lot of the concepts. I knew I could repeat the information and pass a test but I didn't truly understand it. I kind of decided that maybe it wasn't for me and took a job after my senior year as a vending truck driver. I was working days and would go to the local gym right afterwards to train. My heart was always in the gym.

After that first year out of high school, I decided I wanted to go to college. I attended Ashland University in Ohio and majored in exercise science with a minor in coaching. While there, I began competing in powerlifting and that became my new obsession. I loved it and the best part was that my exercise science professors loved it too. They would work with me outside of class and teach me the scientific side of training and how the popular trends weren't always the best way to train. I ended up starting and coaching the team at Ashland. The knowledge and experience I gained there was invaluable. The more I learned, the more I realized I didn't know at all what I thought I did.

I graduated from Ashland University in May of 2007 as a 3x USAPL Collegiate/Junior National Champion with a degree in Exercise Science. I also got certified through the



American College of Sports Medicine during my senior year of college. I had all of this knowledge and was excited to use it. Shortly after graduating, I moved to Duluth, Georgia to work out of Quest Nutrition & Athletics, one of the premier powerlifting gyms in the country. The move was somewhat spur of the moment and wasn't planned out very well.

The first obstacle I faced when I moved to Georgia was the fact that I had no clients, and therefore wasn't making any money. I caught my first break when a guy called the gym looking for a powerlifting trainer. Sherman Ledford, the owner of Quest Nutrition & Athletics, happened to answer the phone and gave him my number. He was my first client and is still with me today. I began advertising on craigslist because that was the only means of advertisement that I

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could afford at the time. I was set on training exclusively powerlifters so I would advertise only for that. The problem was I was not getting any more clients. There just weren't as many powerlifters out there looking for trainers as I thought there would be.

I decided to give in and start marketing to the people that wanted to lose weight. Within a few weeks, I picked up about 4 new clients. I was finally able to keep my head above water. I had never worked with clients trying to lose weight before and I really didn't think I would enjoy it all that much. I learned all about how to design exercise programs for weight loss in school but it was never really my interest. It wasn't until about two months after I began working with my first "weight loss" client that I realized how much I loved my job.

I was doing a re-assessment for this particular lady so I took all of her measurements and to my expectations, she has lost 5 pounds and about 3 inches from her waist. I was expecting this. She followed the program and that was the expected result. What I wasn't expecting was the reaction. She started tearing up, looked me square in the eye and said "thank you". Up until that point, I looked at training as $A+B=C$. Do the work, follow the plan, and get the results. I failed to realize the impact that it would have on people's lives, and even more so, my life. Now, I look at everyday as an opportunity to impact someone and I'm truly blessed to have the opportunities that I do.

I now refuse to completely rule out working with anyone. Originally I was only going to work with powerlifters but have since found myself working with all types of people with all types of goals. I work with numerous high school athletes, helping them get stronger and faster for their season. I am working with a number of powerlifters now as well. I am also still working with a lot of clients that their main focus is to lose weight. The fun part for me is convincing some of my mid 50-year old ladies to try just one powerlifting meet. I use this as a motivation tool for them to lose weight. I tell them that they need to drop a weight class before the next competition. The rewarding part for me is that everyone that has tried a meet has asked me if they can do another one. As it turns out, I am training a lot of powerlifters after all.

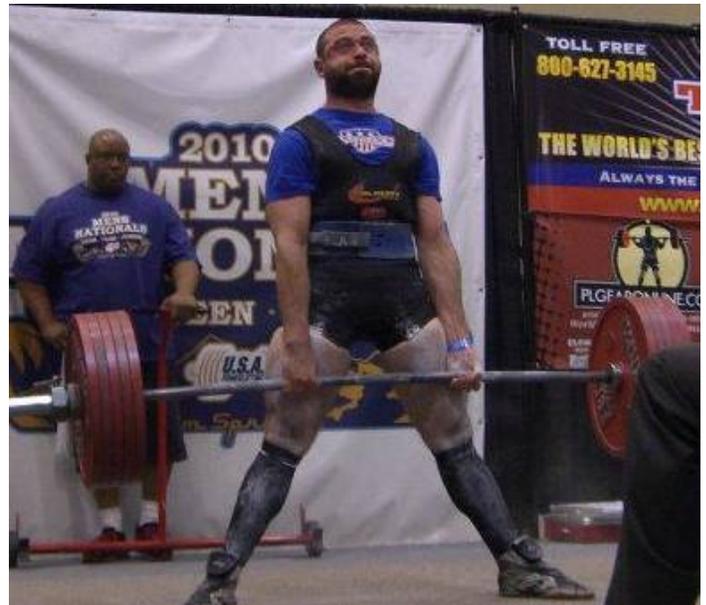
One of my favorite training stories/experiences happened shortly after the 2010 USAPL Alabama State meet in which I took 9 of my clients to compete. After the competition, I put up a picture of each of my clients that competed in my office and I wanted them all to sign it. During the following weeks, I asked each of them into my office. (Usually when I pull someone into my office it's to give them a verbal kick in the pants). They had no idea that I had a picture up and wanted them to sign it. Well, this one particular lady, in her mid-50's and the sweetest lady you'll ever meet, did exceptionally well at the competition. I was really proud of her. She had arrived early for the training session in order to warm-up, just like she always does.

I walked over to her and told her I needed to talk to her in the office. Her head dropped. She just knew I was going to have a talk to her about her diet. (It turns out she had one cheat meal after the meet and knew that I had found out). She followed about 5 feet behind me on the way to the office, dragging her feet and dreading the talk we were about to have. She was seriously devastated that I was calling her into my office. It was the first time I had called her in, but she had heard stories of other people who were slacking off that "got the talk".

As she walked in, she could barely look at me because she was so afraid that she had disappointed me. As she sat down, I reached over and handed her a sharpie marker. She looked at me with a confused look. I just pointed at her picture on the wall and said "I'm proud of you and I need you to sign that." She looked back at me, got a huge smile on her face, jumped out of her chair and came over and hugged me.

Now, I know a lot of people love their jobs, but I can't see how it can get any more rewarding than that. Watching people work so hard to achieve their goals and then finally reaching them has to be the best experience in the world and I'm really blessed to be a part of that each and every day!

So, what I would offer to you, who may be heavily involved in coaching or maybe you are just getting started: Don't quit and don't be afraid to expand your horizons. Opportunities come in all shapes and sizes, so don't get locked into assuming things will always end the way you think they will.



About the Author

Josh Rohr is a world-class athlete and coach. He is a 2x Collegiate National Champion and 1x Junior National Champion and still holds the Collegiate American Record deadlift of 644# in the 165# weight class. Josh has competed at the IPF World Championships three times: South Africa in 2004, Bulgaria in 2006 and India in 2009. Josh holds a Bachelor's Degree in Exercise Science with a minor in coaching from Ashland University. He has been a certified personal trainer through the American College of Sports Medicine since 2007. Photos: Josh Rohr

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