



SOLO TRAINING

By Mike Tuchscherer

March 2015

Photos by [Intelligent Strength](#)

Whenever am around powerlifters, the one question I get asked more than any other is how I train the way I do by myself. At first I was really surprised that so many people were interested in this, but it made me realize that I have come up with some pretty good ways to train hard and train relatively safe without additional “manpower”. The following is a list of tips that I have for lifters or other athletes who may be training alone. They are in no particular order and this is probably not a complete list, but it should be a good start.

1. Believe in what you are doing.

It almost sounds cliché, but you have to believe in your purpose more than anyone else. It’s got to be at the core of your being. That purpose doesn’t have to be becoming a world champion or anything extreme. I’m referring to belief in your purpose for lifting. If it’s to get in shape, to get

strong, to vent frustration, etc, it doesn’t matter. You have to find your purpose and truly believe in it. Why? This spawns dedication. When you have that purpose that you refuse to let go, and you know what you need to do to get there, you won’t let something like “no training partners” deter you from fulfilling that purpose. I hear people say all the time, “Good training partners are essential to reaching your potential in Powerlifting”. Whatever. I admit training partners help. Good partners help a lot. But that just means those of us that don’t have them will have to work that much harder and smarter to get where we need to go. Bottom line: No way can you let a little thing like “no training partners” stand in your way!

2. Do all your benching in a Power Rack

This one is a little more practical. As a safety concern, make sure you bench out of a Power



Training that adapts to you.



Keep in mind that with practice, you can get even very tight shirts on by yourself.

Squat and Deadlift suits are easier. You just have to work it on slowly and be patient. Use a barbell to pull on your straps if needed.

Suit/Shirt slippers are essential equipment for gear work. These are slick, spandex-type material that helps the gear slide on without sticking to your skin. For the bench, old plastic bags from the grocery store work well. These are invaluable tools for solo gear operations.

4. Set the safety pins!

We discussed how important this can be with benching, but it bears repeating. Make sure the pins are set correctly. And beyond that, make sure they are adjusted for movement variations. If you miss during solo 3 Board work and your pins are too low, you could pass out from pressure on your solar plexus. And I don't know what happens after that because I've been fortunate enough to never have that happen (but it's been close). That is easily avoided if the pins are set to the right level.

Same goes with squat and good morning type movements. If the pins are set right, you can easily bail out of a bad lift. Worst-case scenario is slight discomfort, which I'd take any day over severe injury. It only takes about 30 seconds to make sure your pins are set right – time well spent if you ask me.

5. Know when to quit

You have to know when enough is enough. This will really be common sense, but we Powerlifters tend to toss that aside sometimes. If you feel an injury coming on, stop. If you're not confident in hitting a weight, should you be doing it in training? If you're too tired to maintain focus, call it a day. The list goes on. These are really important for everyone, not just solo lifters. But for the solo lifter, the stakes can be higher.

6. Set up underneath the bar

Getting used to no lift off for bench pressing can take time. You can do what I did and get a setup with self-liftoff capability (breaker bench, crepinsek rack). But in the meantime, what should

Rack. I do all my benching in a Power rack and I have it set up so when I have my setup with an arch, I can bench with good form (i.e. touch my chest, etc). But if I get in trouble (injury, miss a weight, etc), I just un-tuck my arch and lay flat. The bar then rests on the safety pins and you can get up safely. The key here is having the pins set at the right height. But once you get your measurements figured out, it's easy to set up and essential if you want to train heavy safely.

On a related note, I would bench in a Power Rack even if I had spotters. People make mistakes and, especially once you add bench shirts to the equation, things happen very fast. Being in a Power Rack is just a safer option for training. Better safety = less injury = more training time = stronger.

3. Learn to use your gear without help

If you are a geared powerlifter training solo, meet prep can hold special challenges. It just takes a little setup and some creativity to overcome those challenges.

[I posted a video on YouTube](#) a while back that details how to get a bench shirt on by yourself.

you do? I still do the majority of my bench work off the conventional side of my rack because self-liftoff is a skill and I want to stay in good practice with it.

Some things to remember: set up underneath the bar. You should set up further underneath the bar (eyes or chin directly under) when you are by yourself. This is so your leverages are better for the solo-liftoff. Then, when you are ready to pick up the weight, take a deep breath and push with the legs (even to the point of raising your butt for the liftoff only). Once you are holding the weight at arm's length, let it settle for a moment before beginning to press. This is also demonstrated in the solo shirt work videos.

7. Focus on what you are doing

You would think this goes without saying, but if you're training solo you have to be extra mindful of your focus. It's easy to get lost in your thoughts or in the music or whatever. It takes discipline and concentration to remain oriented on the task at hand.

One way that helped me was consistent reinforcement. If I caught my mind wandering, I quickly re-oriented on the task at hand. I did a lot of positive self-talk. All of that seems to help, but remember that this is a constant battle. Your mind likes to wander and think of other things. It takes discipline to control your thoughts.

8. Be self-motivating

Don't rely on someone else to get you pumped up to train. Don't rely on music. Those things may or may not be at the meet you will be attending, but if you learn to self-motivate, you will never be left without. Build intense focus on your task and rely on your own internal motivation – not external surroundings – to motivate you. Internal motivation will still be there long after the music stops.

Once you get used to it, training solo can be a very enjoyable thing. Often I'd rather train alone than with a team because it allows me to focus on my own training. It lets me concentrate on being an athlete. That's not to say training partners aren't good – just that if you don't have them, it

can't be an excuse for you. It funnels back to #1 on the list. If you know where you're going and decide that no one will stop you, then that's what will happen. Find a way. Make a way. But one way or another, even training alone won't slow you down. I hope these tips help someone become more confident when training alone. That in itself goes a long way.

About the Author

Mike Tuchscherer is the owner and head coach at RTS. He has been powerlifting since 2001 and since has traveled all over the world for competitions. In 2009, he was the first man from USA powerlifting to win a gold medal at the World Games – the highest possible achievement in powerlifting. He has coached over a dozen competitors at the world championships, a score of national champions, and multiple world record holders.

