

## Learn the Principles; forget the exercises – The Press

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I am a trainer by profession and a powerlifter by choice. In the past I was also a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Mixed Martial Arts coach and competitor for 10 years, both by choice. I made my living by the results I got and the quality of my instruction in regards to BJJ and exercises. I no longer make my living through BJJ/MMA. Now I exclusively concentrate on training people and Powerlifting. However, what I learned in martial arts helps me do my job in training today.

It all comes down to principles.

### **Martial Arts**

I did Jiu-Jitsu/Ju-Jitsu in some way, shape or form for the better part of a decade. I started doing traditional Ju-Jitsu, specifically Danzan-Ryu and Arnis and then moving onto Yoshin-Ryu until finally finding Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (Thank God!). My first instructor was a great teacher, mainly because he would put up with my questions and inquisitiveness. There were 8 (I think) belts in Danzan-Ryu; white, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, brown (3 degrees) and then black. For each belt you had to demonstrate particular techniques, usually various joint locks, throws, strikes, falls, weapon disarms, chokes, etc. I think by the time you reached your black belt you learned roughly 100+ different ways just to break someone's wrist! Crazy! Imagine learning 50 different ways just to squat, and then multiply it by 2! And that was just the wrist; there was still the elbow, knee, ankle, neck, hip, shoulder and fingers.

But I was a good student (by that I mean psychotically devoted), I would learn all my "belt requirements" ASAP then I would stay after bugging my Sensei to teach me moves from the other belts to get a head start. Needless to say, I learned a lot of different ways to hurt people.

Then we switched systems, from a hard style with many techniques, to a softer style with only about 100 techniques in the whole system. My Sensei explained to us that learning 100+ ways to break a wrist wasn't practical, he figured out. If someone threw a punch, out of the 100+ wrist locks, you weren't going to pick the one that is best for the situation, you would pick the one you liked the best and make it work for that situation.

I didn't know what the fuck he was talking about, but he was my Sensei so I agreed.

It wasn't until about 3 years later after I found BJJ when I was teaching on my own that it finally clicked what my first teacher actually meant. Don't teach people the "moves" and techniques. Teach them the science and principles behind the techniques. That way, they will make up their own way to do an armbar or throw for the situation, instead of having to flip through a mental rolodex of moves. By then

it's probably too late to use "the lotus sweep" and now you have to move onto the "elevator sweep" in hopes that it's not too late for that. So I went to the Barnes and Nobles and found every technique book on BJJ I could, probably about 15. I laid them all out and found the one technique that they all had in common, an arm bar from the guard. They all did it different ways, but it all ended up the same way; in a submission. So I looked at the common threads between all the arm bars in all the books. All of them trapped the wrist and secured the shoulder, they all had a fulcrum at or near the elbow, they all could be done with no hands, there was an opposite push and pull movement on the arm, the hips were integrated, there was an extension or pulling of the wrist away from the shoulder, etc. I found tons! It was then that I developed the principle of the arm bar and everything started to click with my training and my competitions. I stopped trying to teach techniques that I had learned in the past from other people and started making up my own centered on and around the basics which illustrated the principles I was trying to get across.

### Lifting

Fast forward to today. I no longer do BJJ and now concentrate on Powerlifting. A lot of my clients perform the big three with many of them competing in Powerlifting meets. In fact, I have realized that my Powerlifting experience helps me explain and teach exercises to my clients. For instance the Principle of the Press;

1. Grab the bar as tight as possible
2. Arch as hard as your base of support allows
3. Keep your hips tight
4. The closer the bar is to your body, the more in line your knuckles should be with your elbows, or taken another way, wrists should stay along the same "line" as the elbow, not necessarily directly over top of your elbows but if an imaginary line was drawn horizontally from your elbows out away from your body, and a vertical line was drawn from your knuckles straight down, they should intersect.
5. As you move the weight away from your body you should strive to push yourself away from the weight.
6. When nearing lock out, if it's a max effort movement, "flare" or turn out the elbows hard and try to bury yourself into your base of support

I do not consider myself advanced; however, I do feel I grasp a good understanding of technique, or the principles behind the sport. The above is just one principle, and that principle is as it stands now. Principles are forever being refined, not changed, but subtly altered as understanding grows. For instance, I used to say to tuck the elbows at the bottom of the movement, now I just say keep your knuckles in line with your elbows because tucking the elbows does not work for everybody depending on body type and strengths. Tucking is something that I found people will naturally try and do if it feels comfortable to them. They might not consciously make an effort to tuck, but if they unconsciously tuck a little I will encourage them to try it harder.

People get so caught up in exercises and modalities, especially if they are brand new ones or “cutting edge”. I remember not too long ago how everyone used to be all about performing exercises on a “chaotic” surface, i.e. balance discs, bosu balls, stability balls, etc. I never liked that trend. To me it didn’t make any sense. It didn’t jive with many of the principles of exercise, i.e. the SAID principle, principle of specificity and even the principle of maximum muscle recruitment (how can you maximally recruit as much muscle as you can if you’re too busy trying to keep from falling down and cracking your skull open?).

Stick to the principles, people. I can teach someone the squat and deadlift by using principles and then have them perform an RDL, Good Morning, Zercher Squat, Front Squat, etc. with slight modifications perfectly. Don’t think of exercises as separate entities. All exercises can essentially be broken down and grouped into the principles of lifting. Discover those and you have figured out a way to accelerate your results and better grasp technique and form for all exercises, simply by learning a few common key exercises.

"Methods are many, principles are few  
Methods may change, but principles never do."

- Alwyn Cosgrove

Go get some principles.