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## Five Facets of Physical Fitness

A few years ago I attended my 30-year high school class reunion. I was feeling pretty good about myself since I had recently lost about ten pounds. Which was good in a relative sense but not an absolute one. A few months before I had reached my highest weight nearly 200 lbs (I am nearly 5' 7"). During a doctor's visit, my doctor commented on my weight. I asked her what diet she thought was best, the Atkins Diet was receiving a lot of attention at the time. Her response—a diet in which you “expend more calories than you consume.” Hum, thought I, I can do that.

At the time, we had just put an addition onto our house. Each evening, after my day job, I worked on texturing the walls and then painting them. As a result, I lost about ten pounds.

At the class reunion, I was shocked at the spectrum of humanity in the attendees—given that they were all the same age. They ranged from the extremely physically fit to those ready to check into the nursing home. One guy, who owned a gym, looked like he could have been on the cover of a romance novel with the flowing hair and bulging biceps. Right then and there, I decided I wanted to be with that group rather than the nursing homers.

Since the home addition was done, I needed to find a different method of exercise. I joined a circuit training type gym where you do a series of stations made up of weight training machines for a few minutes followed by cardio for a few minutes. I made an appointment with myself each evening on the way home. I was one of the more serious attendees; doing multiple circuits and sweating like a pig. The gym dutifully took measurements each month. I made steady progress. I followed my doctor's advice to expend more calories than I consumed. So I tracked both the calories expended and the calories consumed. I never followed any specific diet, I just ensured I expended at least 500 calories per day more than I consumed.

After a year I had reached my goal weight of 133 pounds. At that point, I let my circuit gym membership expire and I just used the gym and fitness facilities that I had access to through my employer. Rather than just losing weight, I wanted to become more physically fit. Besides having cardio machines and weight training equipment, the gym offered various classes such as spinning, yoga, body conditioning, water aerobics. As a person who worked full time and spent an hour and a half commuting each day, exercise time was limited. I wondered what the best mix of types of exercise would be for me. There were no shortage of advice—many often contradicting others.

To simplify the process for myself, I identified five facets of physical fitness: 1) cardio, 2) resistance training, 3) range of motion, 4) core, and 5) balance. I try to include each of these into my exercise program each week—though not in equal proportions.

Cardiovascular exercise takes up the most time. Since I have become a triathlete, I spend significant amounts of time running, cycling and swimming. The amounts of time and the intensity of the workouts vary depending upon my race schedule.

The next most time consuming is resistance training, also known as weight training. The method I like best for me is to do weight training four times a week—each day concentrating on a different area of the body. Then I don't do that part of the body for a full week to let those muscles recover.

What I refer to a "Range of Motion" others call flexibility. I am not naturally a very flexible person. Once a Pilates instructor said to me "you have the tightest hamstrings I've ever seen." I've heard that it is common for runners to develop tight hamstrings. So for me, it is important to keep everything moving. I like the term "Range of Motion" because it focuses on what I can influence rather than innate levels of flexibility.

I identify core training as its own facet because in every sport training article or book I've read, they emphasize the importance of core training and the fact that it is not emphasized by some athletes. By core, I don't mean only the abdominal muscles but all the muscles that surround the base of the spinal column in the hip area to hold us up.

The last facet I identify is balance. I don't spend much time on balance; a few minutes on a tree pose in a yoga class can fulfill my quota for the week. But as I age, I feel it is important to acknowledge the need to challenge my balance occasionally in order to keep it.

Identifying these five facets of physical fitness was a mnemonic device that I use to help remind myself of the variety of physical activities that I need to maintain my personal fitness. Especially since it will soon be time for my 40<sup>th</sup> class reunion; you know which group of attendees I want to be in!