OUT OF SIGHT

Despite losing his vision, it's business as usual for trainer Randy Roach.

BY RACHEL CROCKER

Randy Roach knew he wanted to be a bodybuilder when he was eight years old. Over the following decades, Roach did everything to make his dream come true – he began training friends as a hobby, earned two personal trainer certifications, worked at a local club, built his own in-home gym and became heavily involved in bodybuilding.

Then, in 2005 the successful trainer and budding bodybuilding author completely lost his eyesight.

While many people would consider blindness an insurmountable hurdle for a fitness professional, Roach simply adjusted his teaching methods and adopted a highly hands-on approach.

Worried at first that his female clients would shirk at being touched throughout their workouts, he was pleasantly surprised to find that they appreciated his subtle yet effective training style. A light hand placed on the wrist holding a free weight and a touch to the lower back is all Roach needs to "see" if his client is performing an exercise correctly.

"I used to be able to train my own body with my eyes closed, so losing my eyesight wasn't detrimental to my own training," he begins. "But with my clients, I find being hands-on effective because I can feel whether they have good form and when they are getting tired."

No place like home

Roach trains clients in his Waterloo, Ont., home gym scheduling a maximum of five clients a day. "It takes a lot of concentration," he explains. "When you can't see something, a lot more energy has to be expended to focus on what is happening." Thankfully, over the past year Roach has regained some of his eyesight, and he hopes that more will gradually return.

At 1,200 square feet and over 11 years in the making, his gym holds over $100,000 of top-of-the-line equipment as well as many pieces that he has personally designed. While he admits that he misses the atmosphere of commercial gyms, he finds it much easier to maneuver around his home base.

Media exposure

Intensely passionate about bodybuilding's place in the history of fitness, Roach can speak at length about the tumultuous timeline of the sport and its impact on the fitness and nutrition industry over the years. Today, he is working hard to balance his time between personal training and finishing a self-published three-volume history of bodybuilding called *Muscle, Smoke and Mirrors.*

Roach's in-depth knowledge has attracted media attention around the world. He has been interviewed by many of the major bodybuilding websites and is a regular guest on "Super Human Radio" with Carl Lanore where he speaks on a plethora of topics from health care to training techniques to, of course, bodybuilding.

The foundations for good health

Roach believes that a clear mental state is as important to fitness as nutritional wellness. He stresses this to clients who arrive emotionally unprepared for the task at hand. According to Roach, the three key elements of health are, in order of importance, nutrition, frame of mind and exercise. If the first two are out of whack, he says, damage can be done on the gym floor.

"I think a lot of people obsessively exercise, and that can be degenerative to one's health," he notes. "On certain occasions, I have ordered people out of my gym because their state of mind was destructive to their physical health." A destructive state of mind includes being tired or angry, he says.

Roach laughs when asked if, because of his keen interest in the history of the sport, he takes on only bodybuilders as clients. "Bodybuilders can't afford to hire personal trainers because they're working out all the time," Roach states.

Instead, he has a wide variety of clients from many walks of life including a blind girl he met through a mutual acquaintance. At the mention of his young protégé, he laughs and finally pulls out the cliché that he has likely heard more than once: "The blind training the blind."

One could argue that the fourth pillar of good health is a robust sense of humour. Roach has that, and more, in spades. FBC

Randy ROACH

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Years in the industry: 30

Qualifications: YMCA personal training certification

Top Tips:

1) Don't fall into the trap of acting like a bartender. Save socializing for off the gym floor.

2) Nutrition is extremely important. Encourage clients to eat whole, natural foods with as much raw food as possible.

3) "Free weights versus machines" is the industry's most tired argument. Look at your client and the tools available. Switching it up between the two keeps people engaged and stimulates their muscles in different ways.

4) Subscribe to Iron Game History: The Journal of Physical Culture, a non-profit, peer-reviewed publication from the University of Texas about the history of physical culture.