

Do You Even Struggle Bro?

We have all heard it said, “The struggle is real!” Well, how real is it? I am going to share my thoughts on struggle. What is struggle? Why constant struggle isn’t good. Do you over struggle? Hopefully this will give you an opportunity to reflect on how you struggle and how it is important in your life.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORD STRUGGLE

As with most words in the English language, struggle has multiple meanings. It is also a noun and a verb. These are pulled from dictionary.com and thesaurus.com.

Defined as a noun, a struggle is an energetic attempt to achieve or overcome something over a long period of time. Some synonyms are combat, conflict, effort, and work. Some antonyms calm, entertainment, idleness, laziness, retreat, success, surrender, and truce.

Defined as a verb, a struggle is to make a strenuous or labored effort. Some synonyms are cope, go all out, hustle, seek, strive, and try. Some antonyms are forget, neglect, procrastinate, and surrender.

The definition between the noun and the verb are quite similar; however, there are differences. One difference is ‘try’ versus ‘do’. Both definitions describe difficulty but the noun completes the definition with “achieve or overcome something”.

Another big difference to me is the verb uses ‘strenuous or labored effort’ while the noun uses ‘energetic attempt’. In my experience, this is where most people incorrectly struggle. People understand that there is a level of struggle required to reach a goal. Too many times people ‘verb struggle’ for the sake, or appearance, or a struggle and likely not making any progress to achieve or overcome something.

Here is a quick example of the verb struggle. Up to this point, I have typed the word ‘struggle’ 14 times. After a while of thinking about and typing the same word, I am struggling to type the word struggle. Even though I know how to spell it, I have misspelled it the last 2 times I typed the word. Right now I am ‘verb struggling’ and not getting any better.

Here is a quick example of the noun struggle. One thing I feel like I struggle with is clearly and effectively communicating my thought and feelings. This is the reason I decided to write and post for anyone to read. I am giving an energetic effort to overcome something; a self-perceived communication issue.

WHY DO PEOPLE ‘VERB STRUGGLE’?

Most of the time it is a perception versus reality issue.

Revisit the antonyms and synonyms for both of the definitions. Words like combat, conflict, hustle, and work are common synonyms. These are what most people want to be associated with. Words like idleness, laziness, neglect, and surrender are common antonyms. These are what most people do not want to be associated with. How does one become associated with the antonyms and distance themselves from the synonyms? It is easy. People work harder. Working harder generally has the appearance of a struggle. The more you appear to struggle you also appear to combat, conflict, hustle, and work while less likely appear to be idle, lazy, or neglectful.

How many times have you witnessed this type of behavior? The person at your office that is the first one there and the last one to leave, never take vacation days. They never have time to do anything because they are always busy. They always seem to be busy until you find out that they are so inefficient at what they do that they have to work much harder just to keep up. Same thing in the gym, the ones that proclaim they spent 3 hours at the gym doing something that can be done in half the time. There are many more examples of ‘verb struggle’ or over struggling. These are just some examples of individuals that want to give the perception of a struggle.

DO YOU ‘VERB STRUGGLE’?

At the beginning of this discussion I defined the word struggle as a noun (an energetic attempt to achieve or overcome something) and a verb (make a strenuous or labored effort). I would be willing to bet that most people, if asked for the definition, would give the verb definition. Which is ok, and they wouldn’t be wrong. However, without much thought, you may easily ‘verb struggle’ and not even realize it.

Give it a shot, think about something in your life right now that is a struggle and try to fit it to the noun definition. Most of you are probably able to put it to the noun definition as there is something to achieve or overcome. Whether it is job, training, or life, or social related most things have some type of deadline or objective. If you can’t place your struggle to the noun definition, I would suggest that you rethink this struggle.

DO YOU OVER STRUGGLE?

Revisiting the antonyms and synonyms for the verb and noun definitions, it is interesting that both the antonyms and synonyms are very similar except for one word: success. Success is an antonym for noun definition. Basically, success is the opposite of struggle. At first glance, that doesn’t make sense. If you take a moment to really think about success and struggle, it becomes very apparent that they are indeed antonyms. Struggle and success are mutually exclusive. You can’t struggle AND be successful at the same time.

Given that you can't struggle and be successful at the same time, think back to the previous exercise and consider whether or not you feel successful with your struggle. If you feel successful, how much utility or satisfaction is returned from the completion of the struggle? High struggle should yield high utility. However, there are cases where an objective is achieved with high struggle and low utility. If this is happening on a consistent basis, some much needed evaluation is needed. Many times just going through the motions just to get something done is what causes this to happen. Remember, the noun definition of struggle is an energetic attempt to achieve or overcome something over a long period of time. Without the energetic approach, you are just trying to do something. Many people have heard me say "we don't try, we do". So if your utility is low, add some energy and enthusiasm back into your struggle and see how that works.

HOW TO USE STRUGGLE TO OBTAIN OPTIMUM UTILITY?

Requirement: Knowing what makes your happy. Without this, you will never truly feel optimum utility. Do you do things you like to do or do you do things you feel like you have to do?

There is a feeling that overcomes individuals when a major goal is accomplished. A lot of people feel it; however, no one can explain it. Watch a post-game interview of any major sporting championship event. The default question "Can you put this into words?" is asked in just about every interview. No one can answer. Most look like deer in head lights. The best visual example of this feeling is when the clock strikes 0 in the NHL Stanley Cup clinching game. Gloves, sticks, helmets, towels, anything within reach is flung into the air and you see one team immediately turn into a group of kids. Why is that? These are grown adults paid to play a game. Most teams will say that there is an expectation to win the Stanley Cup. However, by that logic, all they did was meet expectations. (Topic for another day, realistic expectations)

The reason is the struggle. In fact, an extremely difficult struggle. Obviously, there is a certain amount of skill, talent, and luck just to make it to the NHL, let alone win a Stanley Cup. But not everyone is fortunate to have the skill, talent, and luck, be a professional athlete. However, you do have your own skill talent, and luck. I believe that there are four important intangible items needed to achieve your goals; time, effort, sacrifice, and pride. If you are not maximizing those 4 key factors, then you are not going to obtain maximum utility. Think about each of those factors individually.

Time

Are you putting in the proper time? I'm not talking about the actual hours, minutes, and seconds spent 'doing' something. Are you using that time properly and effectively? Are you spending 2 hours doing something that should take 1 hour? You must efficiently put in the proper time. Work hard to get your tasks completed in a timely manner. Don't be the person that achieves their goal only to reflect back on what if you spent your time wisely. Could you have exceeded your goal by more?

Time is your most valuable asset. How can you overcome the limited number of hours in your day to get all of your tasks completed; including tasks not directly related to your goal?

Effort

Have you ever heard “You get out what you put in”? This is a direct correlation between the effort your put in to the results you get out. Are results coming easy without too much effort? Are you putting in just enough effort to complete the work? Are you trying to put in too much effort? Every task should require enough effort to overcome a challenge without putting other things at risk. In weightlifting training, there is a delicate balance between correct weight and proper form. The focus should always be on form in training. Finding the right amount of resistance for any given exercise to maximize effort is important.

I'd like to touch on too much effort. In theory, it doesn't seem like that is possible. In training, how many times have you failed to complete an exercise and/or the technique wasn't that great? Lots of times I'm sure. In most cases, the resistance is too high. Ego aside, the greater the resistance the greater the perceived effort. But more effort doesn't always lead to the results you want. Do you put too much weight on the bar and now you require your coach to spot you for each rep. Or you perform an exercise and do it with improper form, you showed effort, but you didn't do it correctly. This is still fresh in a lot of Cowboys fans eyes, but Dez may have shown too much effort on 4th and 1 when he reached for the goal line and couldn't complete the catch. A baseball player can hit a ball 500 feet down the left field line, but it goes just inches to the left and it is a foul ball. It took tremendous amount of effort, but there isn't anything to show for it.

This same concept works in the business world. Asking for too many responsibilities is a perfect example of too much effort. Having too many things to complete rarely works out. Most of the time a deadline isn't reached or the work itself just isn't that great. Or what about the hospital profession? What if a doctor or nurse took on too many responsibilities to show more effort? In this case, too much effort can lead to some very serious consequences.

Finding the right balance in effort is key. Not enough, and even if you achieve you goal, it will not mean much. Too much and you risk mistakes that lead you to not achieve your goal.

Sacrifice

There is no such thing as a free lunch. You must sacrifice something to get something. Essentially, you must neglect something so that something else can prosper. This requires risk so you must expect some type of return. The return on sacrifice is your utility. Risk is always involved to achieve any return. What are you willing to give up and for how long to achieve your goal?

Sacrifice is much like effort; it takes the right amount. Your resources are limited. The most common sacrifice people make is their time. In my opinion, time is extremely risky and most people do not understand this risk. Spending too much time on a goal takes away time from your friends and family and can be a huge burden. If you alienate your friends and family to reach a goal, and you achieve the goal, you risk not having anyone to share your success. Sure, you might have achieved something great, but without people to share your success with, your utility is greatly reduced.

Pride

Pride is something often overlooked. If you aren't proud of something you aren't going to be too happy with the results no matter how big the accomplishment. Generally, not having pride in something will allow for corners to be cut and short cuts to be found. Not having enough pride can result in not putting in enough time, effort, or sacrifice. This will reduce your utility as you don't care as much.

When you put together the proper amount of time, effort, sacrifice, and pride you are setting yourself up to maximize your utility.

Not too long ago (January 2018), my fiancé (Melissa Knourek) and I both hit some PRs at a weightlifting meet, coincidentally at the same time. The actual weight lifted are not relevant, we both hit a PR of the same amount and over the same amount of time. However, our reactions were 100% different. I was happy that I was able to do something I had never done before. I had some friends with me encouraging me to make the lift. And when I did, I simply walked off the platform, smiled, and shared some high fives. Mel completes her lift and then becomes completely emotional and starts to cry on the platform.

For her, she set out on this goal for a long time. She properly put for the proper time, effort, sacrifice, and pride in order to achieve that goal. Her struggle turned into success in an instant. And the reward from all of the struggles was very apparent to everyone in attendance.

For me, I hadn't been able to consistently train since the middle of 2016. I travelled a lot to help run or coach people at different events. I sacrificed my training for the majority of 2017 so that I could be available for those events and my athletes. Witnessing the success of those athletes far exceeded any utility from my own lifting. So when I finally found time at the end of 2017 to get some consistent training, there were only a few weeks before the event. I put forth the effort, sacrifice and I have pride in what I do. I put in some time, but not the extent that Mel had invested. So that 1 piece of the equation was enough to give me a 3 out of 10 on a theoretical utility scale while Mel hit a 13 out of 10.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Having a struggle in your life is a good thing. It can lead to some great things.

“The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress and grow.”

– Thomas Paine; Founding Father

But don't forget that struggle can only end in one of two ways; surrender or success. So the next time you hear someone proclaim that the struggle is real, can ask them if it really is.