

Zen and the Art of Lifting

– by Karen McCoy



When it comes to exercise, nothing rings supreme like **lifting weights**. And the reasons (and the scientific facts) are numerous.

- Shapely, tight, toned muscles
- Leveling of blood sugars; reduced cravings; reduced hunger
- Decreased insulin levels
- Increased bone mass and reduced osteoporosis
- Reduced muscle-wasting with all related diseases
- Stronger hearts, lungs, capillaries, ligaments, tendons and bones
- Leveling of hormones
- Increased metabolism for 24 hours day every day (unlike cardio which gives an after-burn of only 6-8 hours on the day you do it)shall I go on?

For many people (yours truly included), lifting heavy weights is the highlight of their day. They attack every rep with fervor. But for some people, they just can't get into it. Or worse, they're bored by it. They lament, **"I'm bored. Weights are boring."**

Really?

Here's what I say: if you're bored you're either: 1) not working hard enough, 2) not focusing well enough, or 3) not changing it up enough. More than likely, it's all 3 combined.

- 1) **First of all**, the real trick to lifting weights is to **get into the groove**. Strong stance, knees slightly bent, tummy sucked in, head and shoulders out and proud. Now close your eyes, focus on your breath and lift slowly, with purpose and vision. I call it the Zen of lifting weights. Get into the meditative mood...see the inner flesh and bones of your muscles moving with every pump. Envision what you want your body to look like. Get excited at the fact that you're reshaping your body with every lift!
- 2) **Shake it up:** use drop sets, vary your exercises, intervals, super sets...whatever it takes. With time, you'll learn these valuable tactics. Have your trainer teach you how.
- 3) **Work with intensity!** This is the main reason people don't get results. Even when they think they're lifting well, when I get a few minutes with them, they truly learn the art of intensity!

We truly are a culture suffering **from short attention span and lack of focus**. We want quick results with little effort, and that's displayed in our approach to fitness. I see this every day in the gym when, rather than staying with one thing and working it well and hard, clients jump around from station to station, from bands to balls to boards to Bosu's, in an attempt to 'shake it up' and keep interested. Sadly, what this only leads to poor results and no real noticeable changes to one's body shape or tone.

Think of it another way: it takes 8,000 nails pounded into the foundation and bare walls of the average 3 bedroom house to create a strong, working foundation on which to build the rest of the house. Do you think those labourers like pounding in nail after nail? No, but they have to do it in order to create the

strong frame, and bring structure to the house. Weight training is like that – keep carving, building, and sculpting with every bicep curl. Every time you lift heavy, with basic movements, you’re carving deeper and deeper into the muscles, creating shape, form and tone.

Let’s look at Michelangelo’s statue of David. Truly a work of art. Do you think he ever could have created such a masterpiece if he suffered from lack of attention and focus? If he jumped around from head to toe, to shoulder, and just did a little bit here, a little bit there? No, his instrument stayed in one place for weeks, carving, focusing, and shaping that stone into the perfection that we enjoy today as David. Was he bored? Maybe, at times. But he knew what he had to do – stay focused, keep at it, and carve that stone over and over and over again.

Did you know that martial arts consist of the same 14 moves done over and over again, to gain mastery over the moves? Did you know that Olympic Gold-Medal swimmer Michael Phelps trains 365 days a year (yep, no days off ever!) doing the same 3 strokes over and over again. Do you think he fights boredom? Yes, and very successfully, obviously. He knows he has to put in the work to be a Champion.

If you’re bored with lifting weights, you really have to ask yourself if you’re willing to do the hard work necessary to change your body and your life. As a society, we’re less patient, and we jump around from one thing to another because we don’t really want to do the grunt work. It’s a form of procrastination.

I believe that’s why boot camps have become so popular – you get to change it up all the time, and get a good sweat on, but this does not create great shape and tone. **I love boot camps and boot camp-style training**, but I keep it to a minimum, because I did it for years (along with lots of cardio) and while my heart and breath improved immensely and I gained some body strength, my shape didn’t change a whole lot.



I’ve always loved the look of strong, shapely muscle, so my choice of exercise reflects that – consistent, basic weight training exercises. I throw functional boot camp-style and bodyweight exercises into my weight workouts to add in some variety, but it’s minimal. My mainstay is the weights.

Weight training can be monotonous, relentless, tough, and without flare. But that’s what separates the women from the girls! And believe me, those hard, shapely fitness competitors you see in magazines didn’t get that way by doing step ups or side lunges! No way, hard, deep squats and plenty of them created those amazing glutes and quads!

If you want to shape, tone, shift and carve your body into a work of art, with strong shoulders, tight biceps and triceps, lean, hard butt and legs, then **weight training** is king! Continuous lifting, carving and shaping with heavy weights, week after week, will create a shapely, sexy body for life!



Stay with your weight training program for 6 weeks, then change the exercises. Add in some boot camp-style functional exercises for variety and freshness, but return to the basics and keep it solid, progressive, simple and true. And watch your body *transform*!