COACHING YOURSELF: BEING PHYSICALLY FIT

What would you think if while your doctor was lecturing you to stop smoking, he had a cigarette in his mouth? How much confidence would you have in an obese dietician counseling you on losing weight? At minimum, you’d see the irony in the contradiction of “do as I say, not as I do,” and more likely you’d completely disregard the advice because of a lack of credibility. You can probably see where I’m going here. How credible would you seem to your athletes if you promoted physical conditioning and advocated it for a lifetime for your athletes, but were physically inactive and perhaps substantially overweight partly because of the inactivity?

Coaches tell me they are not physically active for the following reasons:

- I’m too busy coaching and working.
- I don’t like training after all those years of training as an athlete.
- I’ve had the mind-set that you only exercise to be in shape to play sports and haven’t thought about exercising for my health and to be a good role model.
- I want to be in better shape, but I just can’t get myself started with an exercise program.
Many coaches are excellent physical role models, exercising regularly and keeping themselves in good physical condition. They are models of an active lifestyle not only to their athletes but also to the community. You are to be applauded if you are among these coaches. If you are not, I encourage you to become physically fit—foremost for your own health but also to serve as a positive role model for your athletes and all those who observe you. As you get into better shape, you’ll find that you have more energy for coaching and the other things you like to do. You’ll also see in subtle ways that your athletes and others will have more respect for you.

Physical training doesn’t guarantee success, but the lack of training almost certainly promises failure. Remind yourself of the many benefits of physical training listed here:

- Improved use of oxygen in muscle, increasing energy for muscular contraction
- Improved ability of the muscles to use fat as a source of energy
- Increased size of muscle fibers (unclear if it increases number of fibers), which helps muscle exert more force
- Increased number of capillaries serving muscle fiber, which improves blood flow
- More efficient respiration, more fully using the lungs’ capacity, and greater endurance of the respiratory muscles
- Improved blood volume throughout the body and better distribution of blood to the needed body parts
- Improved ability of the heart to pump blood with each beat (increased stroke volume) and decreased resting and exercise heart rates
- Increased efficiency of the nervous system in controlling movement enabling the body to use less energy to do the same amount of activity
- Improved function of the endocrine system by decreasing the amount of insulin needed to metabolize sugar
- Improved ability to burn unneeded fat improving body composition so you’re not carrying unneeded weight
- Stronger bones, ligaments, and tendons, reducing the chance of injury
You have a significant advantage over many other people in getting off the couch and starting a daily exercise program. You know about fitness, you likely have ready access to fitness equipment, and you’re in an environment in which fitness is part of the daily culture. Here are some steps to help you get moving:

1. Decide that you want to become fit. Just as you direct your athletes to achieve goals, decide that you want to achieve a fitness goal and set out the steps to get started. Your goal should be at minimum to maintain good health. The U.S. government recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or longer. Moderate exercise includes activities like taking a brisk walk, biking at 10 mph or faster, or playing a moderately vigorous game of tennis. Another guideline is to accumulate at least ten thousand steps a day, which you can check by wearing a pedometer.

2. Set aside a time to exercise regularly so that it becomes a habit. Try not to let other activities interfere with your exercise, but if they do, be flexible and find an alternative time.

3. Determine whether you prefer to exercise with others or alone. If you like to exercise with others, they can be great social support to keep you going on the days you would rather not exercise.

4. If you’re finding changing your sedentary behavior difficult, I recommend that you read Steven Blair and colleagues’ book *Active Living Every Day* (2002). The book takes you through 20 steps to help you change your behavior from inactivity to healthy and enjoyable activity.

*Decide that you want to achieve a fitness goal and set out the steps to get started.*
Rainer Martens

Sport has always been a vital part of Rainer Martens’ life. He has coached at the youth, high school, and collegiate levels and has studied sport as a research scientist. The founder and president of Human Kinetics, he also started the American Sport Education Program, the largest coaching education program in the United States. An internationally recognized sport psychologist, Martens is the author of more than 80 scholarly articles and 15 books, including Successful Coaching, the best-selling coaching book ever published, and Directing Youth Sport Programs. He has also been a featured speaker at more than 100 conferences around the world and has conducted more than 150 workshops and clinics for coaches and athletes at all levels.

To order a copy of the book Successful Coaching, click here or call toll-free at 800-747-5698.