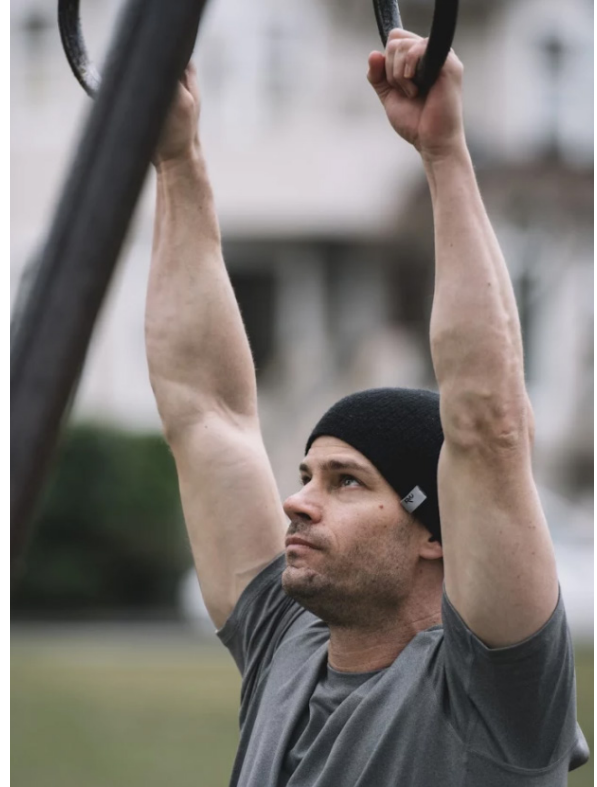


# INTERVIEW:

## Mike Howard



With over 20 years of practical experience as a personal trainer, youth fitness specialist and mindset performance coach, Mike has continuously sought out the best ways to help people achieve sustainable success. Along the way, he has orchestrated meaningful, individualized solutions to thousands of clients both in Vancouver and around the world.

***You've been involved in the fitness industry for 20+ years now. What are the things that first drew you to this field and what has motivated you to remain in it?***

I've always had a fascination with the human body, sports, and exercise. This was bolstered by my desire to help people - to change lives. While my direction, roles in the industry, and passions have changed, the burning desire to help as many people as possible has remained steadfast. Over the span of the past 20 years, I've been a personal trainer, club manager, teacher, writer, and online coach. I love learning and finding new ways to help people. I maintain a student first, teacher second, and servant always kind of mentality.

***A couple years back you wrote the book *Talking Back to Diet Gurus: An Un-Revolutionary and Un-Sexy Guide to Fat Loss*, where you try to educate readers on how to critically assess the crushing amount of information out there in the health industry. What are the top things evidence-based practitioners should convey when trying to give their clients tools to evaluate what they read about diet, exercise, or fitness?***

I think the most important thing to convey to clients is to assume that all claims are exaggerated — whether it's a fad diet, supplement, or exercise system. The underlying message is that their hard work, consistency, and patience for the process will get them results. Always re-direct them to the most-agreed-upon-basics: adequate veggies, optimal protein, lots of intentional movement and lifting. More importantly, help them develop the habits that will allow for the aforementioned.

Globally I recommend coaches instruct clients to develop a skeptical eye. Open-mindedly skeptical. The next general truth to convey is that most diet book claims rely on unverified testimonials and observational studies.

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*When it comes to fad diets, you recently called out the Whole30 in a YouTube video; advising on “[why almost everyone should avoid it](#)”. But you followed this up with another video on [what to do instead of a Whole30](#) along with a [blog post giving more alternatives](#). Why did you feel it was important to provide such a comprehensive alternative after you had gone through and critiqued this diet?*

I feel as though the Whole30 phenomenon simply feeds into our society’s desire for the quick fix. In the long run, this doesn’t teach people to develop a healthy relationship with food — nor does it promote autonomy — a very important component when it comes to intrinsic motivation and, more broadly, long-term changes.

I provided alternatives to Whole30 because I felt as though there were much less restrictive ways to accomplish the same outcome — strategies that are more sustainable and didn’t rely on the unfounded demonization of certain foods. I feel as though an important component of what I do is to help alleviate the fear of foods and to provide more flexible and sustainable alternatives to the fads. I also feel that some people feel they “need” something that is more clear-cut. In this way, I want to help my audience satisfy their desires for clarity and yet allow for the kind of flexibility that they can maintain over the long haul.

*With exercise and nutrition, one of the biggest factors that determines success is the ability to remain consistent. But this tends to be the area where many people struggle. Over your career, what have you found to be the best strategies to help people with consistency.*

I find that setting up small habit goals, perhaps 2-3 of them, will help create consistency. “Goldilocks” type tasks where they are challenging enough to elicit change and yet not too challenging that they will become frustrated. Some examples include: waking up 15-30 min earlier (and hence going to bed earlier), bringing 3 healthy items to work every day, 3 gym visits. I then strategize on how to help clients follow through. Eventually, these habits stick and then we can get more specific. A relapse plan is very important too. The hallmark of long-term success is being able to navigate the dips — life’s curveballs that will inevitably hit everyone at some point. I instruct clients to set up their environments for success at home, work, on the road, and in social situations. Really my job is more choice architect than it is trainer — meaning I guide and empower people make the best decisions possible when it comes to their health.

*Another problem people encounter is how to set up a goal and then implement a plan to achieve said goal. Can you speak a bit on your methodology of helping new clients set up health-related goals?*

I feel as though many coaches fall into a trap of being too cursory with goal-setting. I essentially have 3 pillars when it comes to goal-setting.

1. Find your “why”: Think about your most profound desires. Why is your health important to you – think deeply, think long-term and think from the heart and be able to clearly articulate and repeat this. Your “why” should go way beyond the “I want to look better” or even “I want to feel better”. Perhaps it’s being able to play sports with your children into their adult years... and with your grandchildren. I recommend creating a health mission statement that will reinforce why healthy living is part of their values system.
2. Process goals over outcome goals: It’s absolutely critical to look past the outcome goals (i.e., lose 20 lbs., three dress sizes, etc...) and have clients

instead focus on habit goals – the goals behind the goals are the building blocks that form the foundation of your actions that will beget your fat loss goals (see examples above for habit-based goals).

3. What pain are you willing to go through? Author Mark Manson proposes that instead of asking “what are my goals”? ask instead “what pain am I willing to go through?”. Goals represent warm and fuzzy feelings but offer little in the way of the arduous process. It’s far more effective to ask yourself what you are willing to sacrifice to reach your goal. What compromises and discomforts are you going to endure over the long haul?

Looking at your goals through the lens of sacrifice can help paint a realistic perspective on what it will take to achieve them. ♦

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Mike has gained national and international attention for his philosophies on body composition, youth fitness, and matters relating to fitness and nutrition education. He has appeared on TV (CBC and Shaw TV), in print (Vancouver Sun, IMPACT Magazine), and has over 400 online articles. He has also been the guest on a handful of podcasts. Mike is the author of the well-received e-book “*Talking Back to Diet Gurus: An Un-revolutionary and Un-Sexy Guide to Fat Loss*”.

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