



Hi!

Thanks for downloading this. I wrote this for our Community Trainers off the back of our recent Level 1 course where we spend a lot of time understanding what individuals' movement limitations are.

I hope it's helpful. I've left my email at the end, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Enjoy,
Andrew



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Developing Your Coach's Toolbox: Teachable Chunks

If you're someone who is into *exercise or movement or fitness* (or whatever word you apply to consciously challenging your body in a progressive way) then it's easy to forget that most adults don't move.

Even adults who are into fitness, are probably mostly running, cycling, or doing prescribed movements in a gym setting.

When you leave your fitness bubble and start working with busy parents or grandparents who don't think about moving, it can be shocking how challenging seemingly healthy people find it interacting with the physical world when they step off the rails of the same 4-5 movements they do every day. (Walking, sitting, carrying household items and maybe running or cycling.) In fact tidying up or doing basic chores is probably the only time when most people end up in novel positions. Picking toys up from the ground, sitting down on the floor to fold laundry or loading dishes into cupboards or dishwashers is probably the extent of most peoples' movement.

At WildStrong, we ask people to move on the ground, crawl, pick up heavy objects, and get past obstacles. This can be demoralising for people who suddenly realise that they're much more limited than they thought.

Because people live in environments where they're not challenged, they forget what they used to be capable of and don't even realise what they've lost.

It's easy for people to become frustrated with themselves or the new movement.

As coaches we need to develop tools to help people overcome their frustration and begin to move more.

Teachable Chunks:

When you start coaching you'll begin to realise that certain issues tend to cluster together. For example, a person who has issues marching or skipping may have trouble with other contralateral movements like crawling.

People who are tight might avoid all sorts of positions and create a feedback loop where they avoid movement and then lose the capabilities they have.

Certain people might be afraid of heavy objects, some people might be afraid of moving explosively or of heights. Obviously someone who is afraid of heights is more likely to be afraid of jumping, landing, or controlled falling.

Sometimes you don't know what the missing piece of the puzzle is. People could be avoiding movement due to fear of pain, fear of failing, fear of being embarrassed, fear of appearing un-feminine or un-masculine.

A large part of anticipating problems comes from understanding potential limitations.

Identify Potential Limitations:

Generally we organise limitations as including:

Strength/stability. Lacking the ability to produce force or resist external forces.

Being unable to strict press a 16 kg kb from front rack position to a stacked overhead.

Mobility: Lacking the ability to comfortably maintain a position.

Being unable to maintain a stacked overhead position with locked elbows flexed shoulders due to tightness or discomfort.

Could be due to muscular tightness, joint structure, past injuries or neural limitations.

Complexity: Lacking the motor learning or coordination to reproduce a movement or series of movements.

Getting confused by contralateral crawling patterns or being unable to time acceleration of the hand in the snatch.

Confidence: Being unable to attempt or succeed in a movement due to fear.

Not allowing oneself to jump over a tyre due to fear of falling.

Interference: Performing a movement incorrectly, or inefficiently due to past teaching that doesn't conform with our goals.

Having experience with American-style kettlebell swings and defaulting into lumbar hypertension instead of maintaining a neutral spine.

As we say in the [Level 1 course](#), before a coach can effectively address a movement limitation, it's good to identify the source of a limitation. i.e. More strength training probably won't help with coordination limitations in complex movements.

Keep in mind as well that limitations can be multifactorial with one limitation feeding into another. For example, lack of strength might feed into

lack of confidence for a given movement. So sometimes a general program of mobility, strength, balance, complex full body movements will start filling in gaps and members may overcome limitations without any specific work. We're building reinforcing capabilities which will act as a scaffold for more skills and abilities.

This brings us to the idea of teachable chunks and your coaching tool box.

Example: Crawling

A good example is in early classes where we first start introducing crawling to a new community. Crawling can be incredibly challenging both physically and mentally for new members. By applying PACTS and thinking about potential limitations we can create a teaching flow that will mitigate some of these challenges.

Question: Why is crawling so challenging?

Many people don't spend time on the ground.

Can feel awkward or embarrassing.

May lack core strength or stability, this could also lead to balance issues.

Wrists may not be used to bearing load.

May not be comfortable with contralateral movements, could find them too confusing or complex.

Could be confusing leopard crawls with other movements like spidermans or lizard crawls.

Maybe generally just not used to doing challenging things or feeling like a beginner.

There could be more reasons, if you think of any, try and apply them to the plan below. Now that we've thought of potential barriers, let's quickly state what we want our class to consider when introducing crawls:

We need to find a way of introducing crawls that:

Isn't embarrassing and doesn't single out individuals who might feel awkward.

Considers limitations in core strength and include scaling and substitutions that allows everyone to participate.

Include a wrist warm up and begins to introduce weight bearing movements on wrists.

Slowly introduces contralateral movements of gradually increasing complexity.

Avoid introducing interfering movements that might confuse members. (No spidermans if introducing leopard crawls to a new group.)

Creates an environment where people learn to have fun and laugh at themselves as they're challenged. Try to instil a playful, growth mindset.

We go into more detail about this in some of our crawling videos but a sample plan might look like this:

Warm Up:

Consider ways of sneaking in simple contralateral movements before introducing the crawling. Start off with marching, then add speed or complexity, then introduce the quadruped position and think about wrist preparation. Leave out spidermans or other quadruped movements that

might interfere. Give people opportunities to have fun, but avoid too much competition when practising crawls.

Sample movements might include:

Marching, cross walks, skips, quadruped wrist warm ups, bird dogs, baby crawls, leopard crawl touches, slow leopard crawls (to avoid a sense of competition/anxiety amongst slower clients).

When introducing crawls, ensure members realise that it's not a race. Explain that even coaches get confused sometimes. Ensure they see that you might find it difficult as well.

Enter Teachable Chunks:

Once you've taught a movement via a series of warm ups, stories, examples, cuing and practice, take that series and make it your own. Think about what worked, what didn't work, what cues solved what problems, what regressions helped with which problems. This combination of teaching techniques should be stored in your coaching tool box for future use. Even if the daily programming doesn't explicitly refer to that exact series, try to remember how you've taught the movement before. Next time a member is having problems with crawling, try to think about how you introduced and coached crawling last time, could you recreate that progression on the fly?

So if I see a client is having trouble with crawling, I try to think back to what has worked for me in the past and I'll try to tap into a similar series of movements. You don't always need to start at the beginning of the progression, but I might try something like: bird dogs > baby crawls > leopard crawl touches > forward leopard crawls.

Use your early classes as an opportunity to build your portfolio of teachable chunks. Other examples might include:

Body weight hinges > dowel hinges > goat hinges > swings.

Thoracic twists, body weight hinges > empty windmills > weighted windmills

T-rex swings, upper cut swings > kettlebell snatches.

There are hundreds of combinations of progressions and regressions you might develop as a coach. The key is to understand the **why** of each progression set and know when to apply what series of movements to someone struggling with a movement. These teachable chunks don't always have to be movements or warm ups, they could be a series of more specific cues or examples or maybe a specific drill like landing after stepping off a box or asking a series of questions to clarify a context. Find chunks that work for you, some progressions might not be effective for all coaches.

Steps for Developing Teaching Chunks:

Understand common limitations of any given movement. Think physical and mental.

Identify what specific limitation is probably preventing successful movement.

Regress the movement and re-teach it in a logical, progressive series of movements or coaching techniques.

If you are happy with the results. Write down the progression in your coaching notes, refine it, and use it for future situations.

Whenever you're running a class, consider your anticipated problems and refresh relevant teachable chunks so your toolbox is ready for the challenges of the class.

Conclusion:

As mentioned above, once you have a specific or series for introducing and troubleshooting a movement, think of it as a teachable chunk. It's crucial that you think about the 'why' behind movement limitations. If you can establish why people are struggling, then it becomes possible to help refine the movement. Once you've internalised a series of fixes that seem to work in most instances, file the teachable chunk away and refer back to it in the future.

Remember that teachable chunks are specific solutions for different problems and that new problems might require the development of new coaching sequences. Also be sure to observe whether or not members need to see the entire sequence or if you can just pick and choose smaller chunks that are relevant to your specific problem.

Video Explainer

I've put together a video [teachable chunks](#) where I go into more details and examples.

Thank you!

I hope you enjoyed this article. The skill to start weaving in teachable chunks is a big focus of our Level 1 Certification. We want to equip you with all the skills to know when to step in and when to stand back as a coach.

You can find out more about our [Level 1 Certification Course](#) here.

If you have any questions about anything you've read here, please just drop me an email and I'll get back to you.

All the best,

Andrew

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Andrew holds a Master in Public Health and has over 15 year's experience of coaching, personal training and course development. Andrew holds a lot of sports science certificates, here are some of his favourites: NSCA Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist; Crossfit Level 2; ACE Certified Personal Training qualifications; USAW Olympic Weightlifting; Columbus Weightlifting.