

Strength Training, Training

Attentional Focus for Resistance Training

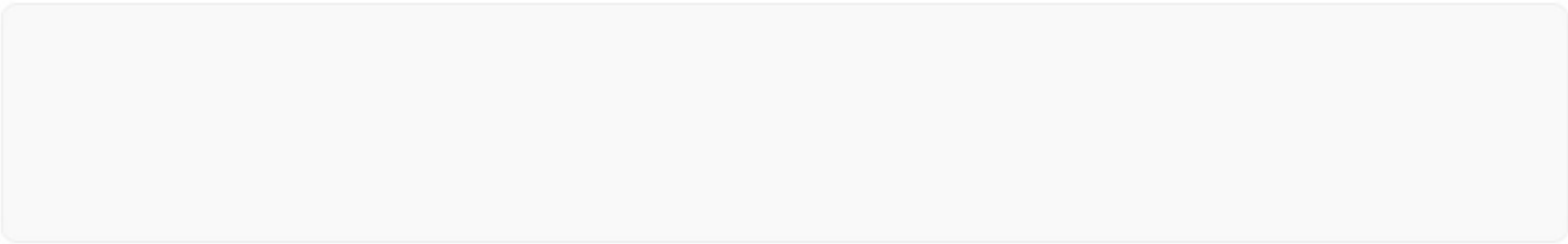
By Jimmy Pritchard Published On: 2022-07-18



Attentional focus and resistance training go hand in hand, particularly with heavily resisted compound movements. The mind-muscle connection was popularized during the 1970s and 1980s by professional bodybuilders such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Frank Zane. In their attempt to increase focus while training, they would literally visualize the contractile elements of their muscle fibers cross bridging as they performed a movement.

Obviously, this is only part of the process, as the entire process sees muscle fiber recruitment beginning with the release of acetylcholine into the neuromuscular junction, crossing over into the synapses, and binding to receptors on the surface of muscle fibers. Nonetheless, these bodybuilders were ultimately shifting their focus within and providing themselves with what is most commonly known today as internal cueing. It allowed them to drive more energy into what they were doing while eliminating distractions, achieving a flow state. While internal cueing is commonly employed within the coaching world, it's becoming equally as popular, and for a good reason.

Internal vs. External Cueing



Eliminating distractions and focusing on the task at hand is of utmost importance while resistance training. This is true, not only for safety but also to express the highest level of performance. The manner in which one provides or receives a point of emphasis can be broken into two categories: internal or external. Internal thought processes are those that involve the human body and its movement. An example would be "extend your hips while jumping" or "keep your shoulders back while bench pressing." In contrast, external cues focus on the environment or objects around us. An example of this thought process would be "push the ground away while sprinting" or "try to snap the bar in half while deadlifting."

Both coaching cues can work with athletes and trainees alike; however, Nick Winkelman, PhD (Head of Athletic Performance, Irish Rugby Football Union) offers an interesting perspective in his research paper titled *Attentional Focus and Cueing for Speed Development in the Strength and Conditioning Journal*. He noted that sprint performance increases when athletes receive external cues versus internal cues, likely due to the fact that internal cues can, at times, direct the athlete's attention towards components that do not contribute to the desired task to be completed. For an effective external cue to be formulated, it needs to have either a distance, direction or description. This will supply all of the needed information necessary for an athlete to execute their movement more effectively.

Practical Application

In practice, focusing your attention on something external while resistance training can be highly beneficial as well. If you are performing a lateral lunge and know that you should keep your posture upright, imagine balancing a glass of water on your head without letting it spill rather than focusing on what each and every joint angle should be. This is an absolute game-changer for some athletes and clients I work with; however, every person learns differently. I believe a healthy mixture of both internal and external cues should be employed.

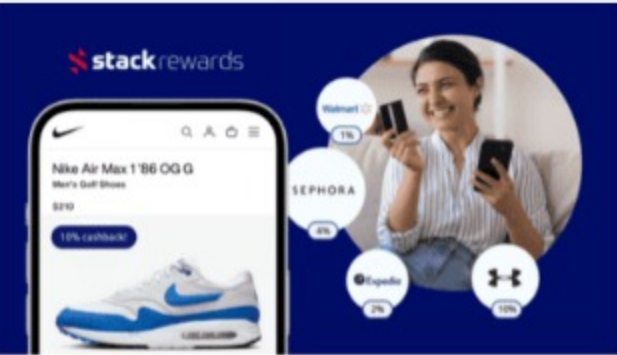
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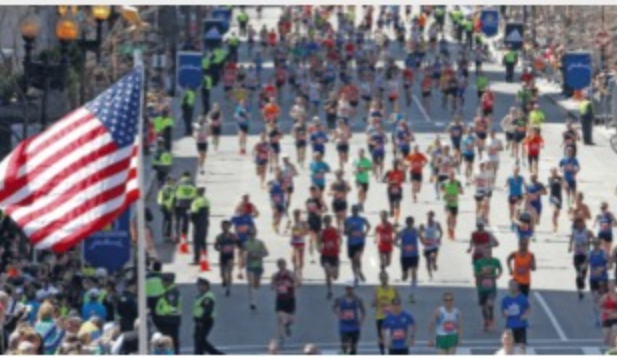


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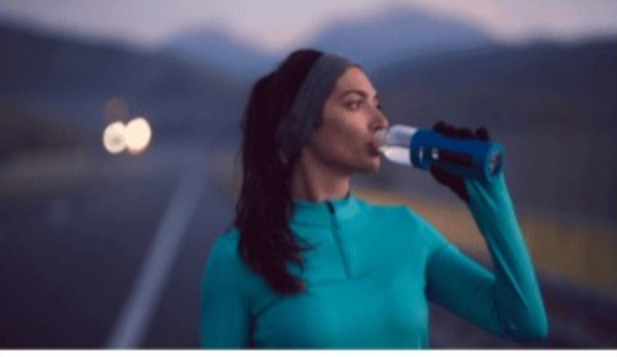
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