



UP
front

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The gym was jam-packed last night. It's January. The crowd will thin in a few weeks if this year's rhythm follows norms. But I'll still be there, in late February and throughout 2026, almost every day.

There are other things on my daily to-do lists that I fail to tackle, but exercise is not negotiable. It's mandatory. It's a good habit that has imprinted itself indelibly on my description of who I am.

When I was a boy – maybe 9 or 10 – my dad gave me a weightlifting (now called “training”) book, written by Bob Hoffman, a muscleman of the era with niche fame. Hoffman, a Tifton, Georgia native, incidentally, was dubbed the “Father of World Weightlifting” by the International Weightlifting Federation, which remains the sport's governing authority today. Hoffman, a bodybuilding champ, owned York Barbell, a manufacturer of fitness equipment that he bought in 1932, the company's 30th year. York (Pennsylvania) was close-ish to my childhood hometown, and my mother's twin lived there, so the whole thing felt like a brush with something exotic and important and worldly, and I was somehow inside an exclusive domain that made me cool.

The Simplified System of Barbell Training was a thin paperback, bound like a stapled magazine (this one) rather than a square-spine tome. It provided its reader with two 10-part routines, each starting with three exercises, followed by four with more weight than the first three, and finishing with three that incorporate another bump up in weight. Routine (“Course” in Hoffman-speak) number one was presented as foundational, while number two was considered advanced. For example, the foundational series featured regular bicep curls during the mid-weight, four-exercise segment, while the advanced series required followers to reverse the grip. Each exercise was explained using extended, detailed narrative prose, accompanied by an elaborate hand-drawn illustration of an idealized man doing the thing as described. Absent animation or video, Hoffman's pencil man simultaneously existed in dashed-outlined positions numbered one through as many necessary to convey the range-of-motion the exercise required.

Hoffman was ahead of his time. As he wrote in his intro in a linguistic style consistent with his era, “You obtain from exercise what you put into it.” An early iteration of “no pain – no gain.” Even if he didn't realize it, he had a whole-person perspective on wellness that extended beyond the building-big-muscles goal:

“If your wish is only to keep superlatively fit, strong both inside and out, following this course will bring you the results you desire.”

Humans have been physically exerting themselves since the beginning of time. First, driven by necessity, later by the realization that activity improves quality-of-life. From Hoffman's 1930s he-man point-of-view, we have continued to evolve. As the sock-hop '50s morphed into the flower-power '60s, Dr. Halbert L. Dunn coined “high-level wellness,” shifting focus from preventing disease to active, holistic health. In the go-go '80s, Fitness was commercialized, integrating lifestyle, diet, and mental health. Celebrity aerobics instructors were the first global multimedia fitness stars.

Today, The Global Wellness Institute defines its namesake term – wellness – thusly: The active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health. The GWE (Global Wellness Economy) was estimated at \$6.8 trillion in 2025. My own daughter founded an online exercise and wellness brand centered around a subscription-based app, GGStudio. She has tapped into something in the zeitgeist with her viral “Bridal Arms” series and personal brand.

For my family, wellness has always been a thing, even if we didn't have a name for it. In our practice, it revolves around eating right (and loving to cook) and exercise. I've been into it since my mom took me to the farmers' market every Friday when I was a little boy and my dad bought me a barbell and my Bob Hoffman book. Life-changing gifts that keep giving that I can't imagine what my life would be without.

Scott A. Lauretti



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