



Episode 46 Transcript

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Full-Body Training Done Right with Charles Staley

Nick Collias: Welcome, everyone. This is *The Bodybuilding.com Podcast*. We're here buried deep in a snow bunker in Boise, Idaho. I'm Nick Collias, an editor for Bodybuilding.com. My fellow editor, Heather Eastman, is here with me.

Heather Eastman: Hello, everyone.

Nick: And our guest is down in a warmer climate. He's [Charles Staley](#). He's a great strength coach, Bodybuilding.com contributor, and the author of our monthly column, "Ask The Ageless Lifter." On his own site, he also calls himself the "oldest, skinniest guy you'll ever see deadlifting 500 pounds." But more recently, Charles is also the creator of a program on Bodybuilding.com All Access, called [Total-Body Strong](#), which is an 8-week fully body training program, three days a week. So, you squat three days a week, pull, push, hip hinge three days a week. But that doesn't quite capture the extent of what's going on here. It's a really interesting and surprisingly complex program.

So, to talk out the details, we've asked Charles to come in and talk with us. So, great to have you [again](#) on the podcast, Charles.

Charles Staley: Cool. Great to be here. And by the way, it's not really that warm here. It was like 37 [degrees Fahrenheit/2.8 degrees Celsius] this morning.

Nick: 37? Now you're in Scottsdale [Arizona, USA], aren't you?

Charles Staley: Yeah. Yeah. So that's okay, though...

Heather: It's like high desert.

Charles Staley: ...we'll suffer through it.

Nick: Did you see some people out there in parkas? I remember I was in Tucson last fall and it was 65 [degrees Fahrenheit/18.3 degrees Celsius]. There was people in gloves and hats and parkas.

Charles Staley: No, when you live in Phoenix, you suspend your ideas about reality. You'll see people in ... I saw people this morning in tank tops and flip flops. Conversely, in August when it's 120 degrees [Fahrenheit/48.9 degrees Celsius], you'll see people out there running and riding their bike at noon time. So it just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Nick: So everybody's crazy down there is what you're saying. Okay.

Charles Staley: Pretty much, is how I would chalk that up.

Nick: So now, let's talk about this full-body training program a little bit. It's one of the most unique programs we currently have on our [Bodybuilding.com All Access](#) platform, not only because it's totally not a bro split at all but it's also really adaptable movements, exercise order, everything is really flexible and pattern-based. I wanted you to tell me about how you came to the idea of pattern-based and adaptable programming, what your history with that is like.

Charles Staley: Yeah. It surprises me. I never know when I kind of put material out into the world what's going to catch people's attention and what will not. I sometimes will do articles on topics that I find just completely fascinating and they just fall flat. Then other times I do things and I'm just basically explaining what I've always done and people find it interesting. So nonetheless, it's kind of interesting. But in the Total-Body Strong [article](#), that's based on my kind of take on programming, which I call primary pattern programming, and what I want to do, Nick, if I could, is just before I go into the details of that, I just wanted to kind of share with you the central premise that dictates a lot of my decision making as a coach.

Nick: Sure.

Charles Staley: So that's obviously also the premise behind the Total-Body Strong idea. Also, it's a concept that a lot of lifters fail to appreciate. So if you're listening, stay with me here because this opening concept, if you understand and apply it, from my experience has the potential to totally transform your training. I mean, I've got a number of women in their mid-50s who can do pull-ups and who can do 300-foot farmer walks with 100 pounds. So this really changes the whole game.

So, the premise is this, if you are serious about fitness and more specific to this conversation, serious about lifting weights, you have a problem in my estimation. That problem is you want to have a lot of muscle but you also want to have minimal body fat. A lot of us want to be strong as well, which is kind of a given. I know women ... there are limits to maybe how much muscle women want to carry. But I think we want to be conspicuously muscular and in order to do that, you have to be fairly lean as well. So, most of us simply want to look like we lift and I include myself in that category. I think that's a valid goal when you lift.

Yes, of course, some people have different primary goals. Maybe they're rehabbing injuries or they

want to develop athletic power or they're a bodybuilder and they want to have perfect symmetry, but most of us just want to look like we lift. So, the reason that's a problem is because your body kind of operates from homeostatic software, for lack of a better term, that's among other things designed to protect you from famine. I mean, that's why we're here to even ... That's why we have the luxury of even worrying about these things in the first place because we've survived all these eons. So, all that muscle you want is metabolically expensive. So the more muscle you have, the more calories you need to consume, which makes you less likely to survive a famine. Along with that, when you have low body fat, that makes you even more unlikely to survive a famine.

So, one way to look at this whole thing is that Mother Nature's goals are kind of in complete opposition to yours.

Nick: Right.

Charles Staley: You can see that in the real world because you don't often see people have a lot of muscle and very low body fat, and when you do see those people, it's pretty likely they're taking drugs. So this is just a very difficult thing to achieve. So, then obviously, we're not likely to face a famine. In fact, we have exactly the opposite problem. But your internal software is way behind. It'll take another couple hundred thousand years for it to catch up. So in the meantime, from my point of view, you need to train in a way that's perceived as a threat to the body. This is the central premise. In other words, your training has to be so hard that the body has to get stronger and more muscular in order to survive those workouts in the future.

So, that means two things: one, obviously you have to just train hard. That's a very important subject. It's not the subject of this conversation, but you have to train hard. If you're not sure if you're on a good program or not, just stop worrying about it and just train hard and that will fix most of your problems most of the time. However, some exercises simply are not very hard no matter how hard you work them. So in other words, the exercises you use have to be threatening. They have to provoke your body into changing itself in some very significant ways.

So, here's a few examples of things that just are not very hard no matter how hard you work them, and that would include things like calf raises and planks and triceps pushdowns and wrist curls and bent lateral raises and reverse curls and leg extensions. Also, like exercises where the limiting factor is balance are not particularly threatening because you can't load them. I mean, here's three examples, here's three versions of a common exercise. You can do split squats, which are a good exercise. Meaning like a lunge in place or you could do a Bulgarian split squat, which is still fine but it's a little less stable. Right? Because you have now more of a balance component. Then you see people doing split squats with the rear foot in a stirrup, which is even less stable. So the less stable an exercise is, the less you can load it and then the less threatening it becomes.

So, you look at the opposite of that and so, you think of what exercises are threatening and that would include things like squats and military presses and deadlifts and bench presses and pull-ups and dips and all those exercises have a couple of things in common. They involve several muscles all at the same time rather than just working one muscle at a time. They allow for the use of fairly heavy weights. They are typically a bit scary to do, at least if you're using challenging weights. Because of all those points I just mentioned, they're also relatively dangerous.

Nick: Relatively.

Charles Staley: Yeah. Relatively. It doesn't mean they're dangerous. But the safer an exercise is, the less effective it will be. That's just an unfortunate reality that you have to navigate.

Nick: Hmm. Now I've heard some of this offered up as a reason to embrace something like a bro split before because you can't possibly inflict enough damage to make it worth it in full-body training is what I hear in the comments on pieces about full-body training. But you're talking more about like as a threat to the entire organism, not a threat to a specific muscle group.

Charles Staley: Correct. Correct. And so that's kind of the whole point. So then, all those threatening exercises I just mentioned can conveniently be fit into four what I would call primary patterns. There are other coaches like [Dr. John Rusin](#), who uses, I think he uses six patterns, and that's cool. For the purposes of this program, I just use four. They are squat, push, hinge and pull.

So, now some people use like a lunge pattern. I just incorporate that into squats. Some people use a carry pattern. So, I think if you look at how many exercises you can reasonably do in a workout, I include four what I call primary movements and then two secondary movements. So, in my system, each workout consists of one squat movement and one push movement and one hinge movement and one push movement. Then two, up to two, you don't have to do two. The secondary movements in my kind of way of viewing things are optional as well as secondary. So that's where, I mean, if there's something you just love or need to do such as you want bigger arms or bigger calves or whatever it might be. You want to do direct ab work, you can totally do that but only after you've done the main course, just to use an analogy.

Nick: Okay.

Charles Staley: So, this makes your training kind of maximally effective, and it makes sure that your workouts aren't too fluffy, if you understand what I mean.

Nick: Or too redundant, definitely.

Charles Staley: Or redundant, as well, is another great way to put it.

Nick: This is looking at the first couple of days at Total-Body Strong, there's definitely a lot of volume in there. Like, when you're doing a squat variation, which you leave open the possibility of swapping out squat variations for things that you have, equipment you have. You're doing four sets of 15. I don't care who you are. Sets of 10, 12, 15. If you do four or five of them, that's a lot of work. I mean, it's pretty serious.

Charles Staley: They're very difficult workouts and that's why the secondary movements are optional.

Heather: I like that.

Charles Staley: It's a way to reduce stress. I always, with my clients, especially my online clients, I will typically have what I call compulsory and optional exercises so that it's just a way to minimize stress. If you have a workout and you go to your program and it's like, "Crap. I've got like eight things I have to do today," it just makes it kind of foreboding in a sense. But if you know you have four compulsories, then it kind of reducing the stress and you just think, "All right. Well, I'll just knock out the four and we'll see what happens." Typically, after you've done that you're warmed up, things are

going. You're quite likely to do the optionals, as well. But the point is I just want to have the focus on things that have the most bang for the buck. A little phrase that I used to kind of describe this kind of methodology is that you want to train the most amount of muscles with the fewest number of exercises with the least amount of redundancy.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather: Right.

Charles Staley: So that's why you're not doing barbell bench press and dumbbell incline press in the same session. They're both good exercises, but you have some redundancy going on.

Heather: Right. Charles, I was telling Nick kind of before we started this podcast that one of the things that I really appreciate about this new program that you've designed is for once it's actually designed by someone who you can tell trains other people. A lot of times we get these programs from athletes where their program is what they like to do. It's like, "This is my split. This is my superset. This is how I load. This is ..."

Charles Staley: Yeah. Yeah.

Heather: You're actually ... Myself, having been a trainer for over a decade and having seen other trainers and the way they work, you're actually creating a program that is designed the way that other trainers would create programs for their clients. So this is in my mind, one of the unique programs that we have on the site where-

Charles Staley: Oh, thank you.

Heather: It really, it really can be, oh you're welcome. It's a great program.

Charles Staley: I'm glad that's apparent and not to cut you off but like a lot of people design like training concepts and programs just because it looks cool on paper.

Heather: Oh, totally.

Charles Staley: Or has like a unique kind of feel to it. And then they're like, "Oh this is so cool here's the program," but no one's ever done it. And the difference, as you've pointed out is this is the way I've been training myself and clients for years and it never really occurred to me that there was anything all that unique about it. Uh, but maybe there is.

Heather: And kind of to build on that, you said something interesting with the training that it has to be a threat to the body and I'm not sure if this program includes a nutrition component, but it got me thinking that we do these kind of extreme diets and do you feel that that, to be able to maintain that kind of leanness and that muscle mass that you also need to eat in a way that's a threat to your body, if that makes sense.

Charles Staley: Well, so it's kind of the opposite. Like for fat loss in particular, which kind of is what most people are looking at. You have to be, your diet has to be nonthreatening so it's exactly the opposite. So, you want a slow loss of body fat. And most nutrition authors that I respect the most, will say between 0.5% and 1% of total body weight per week. Now, if you are significantly fat, I

guess that's politically incorrect, but at least you know what I'm talking about, I think the percentages could be a little bit higher. Because if you're carrying around 100 extra pounds of fat, it's not that threatening for your homeostatic mechanisms if you lose five pounds in a week. It doesn't really add up to that much. So you have to sort of sneak in the backdoor, so to speak. You have to try to, you have to try to do the diet in a sneaky way so your body doesn't think that you're starving because if it does, then you have a loss of metabolism and your body's trying to counter you every step of the way. So, it's almost the opposite approach for fat loss, at least.

Nick: And, yeah, to be clear to the listener, this does actually have a nutrition component, this program, but it has a, has one of the simpler ones that we've had and is one of my favorite ones in our recent programs because it can really be summarized in about 30 words, which is eat a gram of protein per pound a day in about four to five meals. Eat most of your carbs around workouts, take five grams of creatine and eat enough calories. That's it, pretty much.

Charles Staley: Yeah. Well, I think there's other things that you could add in, but I think if you want to be a clear thinker about anything in life, but especially in training, which is a confusing topic, even for me, I've been doing this since like the 80s and I still have more questions today than I've ever had in the past. So this is a difficult, confusing, complex topic. It's important to be able to contextualize information. So, when you talk about something like a fat-loss diet, there are many, many, many factors that play or contribute to your potential success. So it's important to realize that not all of those many factors have equal contribution. So for example, when fat loss is the goal, your calories per day by far is the most important factor. And things like meal timing and food quality and meal frequency, yeah, they play a role, but it's much smaller. So, I think it's important to zero in on the factors that really matter the most.

Heather: That's interesting.

Nick: Yeah, and one other thing, when you're talking about training people versus just training yourself as an athlete, trainers and coaches can still be very attached to the program as written like this is scripture, you change it and you're being insolent in some way or you're being blasphemous. But this program kind of goes in the absolute opposite direction. Like you want to do circuits, do circuits. You want to do straight sets, do straight sets. You want to swap out movements, do movements. So how, what's your history with that level of flexibility in programming as well?

Charles Staley: I think flexibility is crucial. And one thing that I personally love about this, you're calling it Total-Body Strong for the article, but what I love about this is that you can have a gym full of people who are all using this program verbatim and it would not be apparent from a casual glance that they're all doing the same program. Because your squat variation could be anything from a leg press to a goblet squat, to pistols, to Bulgarian split squats, to hip belt squats. So there's so much variation involved in this that you could literally do, you could do all of your favorite exercises, given the equipment you have in your history and so forth. So it's very easy to adopt the principles of this program and still have a ton of flexibility. Now the only the main difference is, you can't be on this program and do a workout that consists of like reverse curls and lateral raises and leg extensions and planks. Like that's not ... that's when you know somebody is not doing an effective session.

Nick: But what if I do my triceps pressdowns while I'm basically in a hip hinge position that counts as a hip hinge, is my understanding doesn't it?

Heather: I knew you were going to say something like that.

Charles Staley: That's the whole "Instagram workout." There is, I don't want to get off on a tangent, but I just love to talk about this Instagram fueled kind of female workout thing where you're doing like nine different exercises at once with your back foot in the stirrup and the front foot like on a Bosu Ball, and you're doing a combination like twisting, jumping, lunge, overhead press curl, like all at the same time, and synchronize with your workout partner. It's very important that you and everyone else are synchronized perfectly. So multitasking in the exercise world doesn't really work all that well.

Heather: It rarely works in my experience, But, yeah, again, the program you're talking about where everyone can kind of do their own thing with the equipment that they have. Again, that's exactly how one would train a client in a gym. It's 5:00 PM and everyone's using the equipment. You've got to think on your feet.

Charles Staley: Yesterday, here's what I love about this and sorry to cut you off-

Heather: No, you're fine.

Charles Staley: This is a central feature of my personality, I apologize. But yesterday I did a workout where I did a flat dumbbell bench presses with 85 pounds dumbbells and I was doing barbell deadlifts and weighted pull-ups, and what was the other thing? Oh, and I was doing split squats. Then a couple of hours later, I had an 82-year-old client and she was doing box squats, seated rows, an overhead press with very light dumbbells and I forgot the other thing. But basically, her and I are doing exactly the same program.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Sure, love it.

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And you kind of touched on this earlier, that there is a certain amount of stress when you see an exercise list that's 8-12 exercises long. I mean that's a lot to get through. They talk about that, that kind of psychological fear of tackling that much. And in my experience, when you start to simplify and do only a handful of exercises, you really get to do a correct and effective movement because you're not worrying about setting up or going to the next exercise. You're, really kind of focusing on that. Have you even tried with even shorter workouts where it's maybe even just two or three exercises? And what's your experience with that?

Charles Staley: Well, I think ... I haven't, now needless to say, I have had times where time is just tight however I would still do the four exercises. But let's say my time is really tight, my energy is sparse. Maybe I'm scheduled to do four sets of pull ups but maybe I just do one hard set of pull ups because you know the 80/20 principle applies to lifting and if you do one hard set of an exercise, you're probably getting 75 percent of the benefit of doing three or four hard sets. So I would rather just do one set and then at least keep that particular muscle, those muscle groups kind of at least on a holding pattern rather than regressing, if that makes sense.

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Charles Staley: And then another thing that I do that is ... kind of related to your question is that a lot of times I will have one of those exercises where you don't go quite as close to failure. Because let's face it, for example, I mean potentially you could cook up a Total-Body Strong workout where you're doing like barbell back squats, deficit barbell deadlifts, weighted pull-ups and military presses.

I mean that's very daunting. So, like I think it's permissible sometimes that maybe on workout one you go a little light on the hinge pattern. Then on workout two you go a little light on the squat pattern. And then on workout three you go a little bit light on the press pattern, and so forth.

Nick: Right. I think that's important to emphasize as well. Somebody listening to this might think that this is purely a pattern-based workout, but there is a workout as written on the page as well, which has a lot of that variety in there. Not only within the workout, but day to day, you use three different variations of squats each week, three different variations of pull-ups each week.

Charles Staley: Yeah. So I think I made that clear in the article. But yeah, like if body composition and muscle mass is the primary goal, you do want to have a lot of variation. So if you're training three days a week, I would use three entirely different squat patterns, three entirely different push patterns and so forth. However, you could even use this program as a competitive powerlifter. And if you were to do that then probably you're going to have much more specificity. I mean maybe you're going to squat two or even three days a week and so forth. Or all of your push exercises would be related to the bench press more so than if you're just training for body composition. So yeah, it's kind of ... I kind of really liked the wide applicability of this kind of format.

Nick: And four weeks through it though, I also noticed that most of them, the exercises, not all of them, change and that's something I've seen you advocate elsewhere as well. It's like, yeah, every four weeks maybe swap most stuff out for a different variation of something of the same thing. As opposed to say, alright, we're just going to squat every day for 12 weeks. We're going to do the same deadlift variation five days a week for 12 weeks. If my form is okay, what goes wrong with just doing the same thing forever?

Charles Staley: Well, you probably know. It's like if you ... Let's say you discover some new exercise, like you never did hip belt squats before. So you do them on Monday and it's like, holy crap, like I am so sore, like it's insane. I've never felt anything like this, awesome. So then the next Monday you do the same thing and you can add some weight and so you're able to progress and you get sore but not as sore. Then the following Monday you do it again and you get a little less sore and somewhere down the road, and it might be four weeks, five weeks, six weeks. Now you're not getting sore at all and you can't add any more weight. So that's called adaptive resistance. You just, your body has ... on workout one, it was a huge threat to your system, but over the course of four or five or six workouts, your body has solved the problem. It has figured out how to cope with that stress and it's not responding anymore. So now your risk of overuse injury is very high and for very low pay off. So that's when you change an exercise.

Heather: Okay.

Nick: Now, one other thing, you wrote a great article for us in the Ask The Ageless Lifter column recently it was about cardio, which, the question always comes up, well what do I do for cardio on this? And all over our site, many other sites that you've written for intensity is still sort of *the thing*. Like it's not cardio if you're not bleeding out of your eyes, basically.

Heather: It's not cardio if it's not threatening. That's the one takeaway point, is my workouts have to be threatening.

Nick: Exactly. Right. Threatening. But threatening like there's a tiger in the room with you.

Heather: But only for 30 seconds at a time.

Nick: But people talk about that, like it's basically free. Like, "Oh yeah, high intensity cardio, not only is it the best for fat loss, it'll make your legs bigger, too." It doesn't count as strength training or something you recover from. How do you modulate your intensity in that regard?

Charles Staley: Yeah. So I think it depends on the objective for the cardio. I think people tend to do things just because "you should". Like stretching comes under that category for a lot of people. Like, "Well, you're just supposed to stretch." Like, "Well, I don't know. I just want to always have a reason for doing what I'm doing."

So, I think the high intensity cardio stuff is more applicable if your goals revolve around athletic performance. If you're a CrossFit athlete, or you're a competitive distance athlete or something like that, or you just particularly find it fun to try to set 500-meter records on the Concept2 Rower, that's all legit. Having fun is the most underrated, underappreciated aspect of training. You should find things that you find fun, even if they're not rational. It's important to have fun.

I think for fat loss, you want to choose modes of cardio that they don't compete for the same resources that lifting needs. I really like things like walking, believe it or not. Twenty years ago, I never thought I would say this, but I just think it's the most efficient and least catabolic form of cardio. You can multitask doing that, so I always take a walk every morning and I'll listen to a podcast on my phone, and walk to Starbucks or something. I just think that you don't want to be in flight or fight mode all the time. My people mostly lift and/or walk.

Nick: I like that, that idea of competing for the same resources. You have a finite amount of recovery, finite amount of resources. That makes sense to me. Go ahead.

Heather: One thing I've noticed Charles in a lot of your articles is, it's very much about the injury prevention. When we've talked about that adaptive resistance, you say all of a sudden once your body adapts, you now open yourself up to that risk of overuse. I think when we look at some of these more popular programs that you see out there, like the CrossFit and like the competitive bodybuilding, because they are so repetitive and because you are competing for the same resources, that's when you start to see a higher instance of injury.

It sounds like that risk of injury is very much in the forefront of planning all of these different factors, your cardio, your nutrition, your resistance training, and that using the cues from your body is ... Correct me if I'm wrong, but if that's what I'm hearing you say, is that it's very intuitive program where, as soon as you feel you've adapted, then it's time to move on to something new.

Charles Staley: Yeah. I guess when you get old, you start thinking about injuries a lot more. I would love to say that I'm so devoid of injuries because I'm just a smart guy and I have great habits, but I'm sure luck plays some role in that, for sure.

I always say, "If you show up healthy, anything is possible. But if you show up hurt, nothing is possible." I just think that's got to be the first mode of thinking. If you are doing an exercise for too long a period of time, and especially if it's one of these high threat exercises, you start getting frustrated that you can't add weight to the bar, and you're stressing your joints, and muscles, and connective tissues on the same lines of force, week after week, after week, after week. A lot of connective tissue and bone does not really have much in the way of nerve supply, so you can be

doing damage to yourself without really knowing it. You see people all the time who tear a pec right off the bone, just out of nowhere. Those injuries are not out of nowhere. There is accumulative damage going on, and you just don't really have a symptom until it's too late.

I think variation ... I was listening to my friend Bret Contreras on a podcast the other day. He goes, "The more you do this stuff, the more I'm a fan of variation." I'm kind of that way, too. I just think that it keeps your body ... This is like muscle confusion. Although, not in a P90X way of talking about it. You've got to keep threatening your body with new stimuli. Once you've done a certain movement for so long, your body gets it figured out.

Nick: Even though you have a background in powerlifting and strength training, and a strength coach, what I hear from there is the same thing I've heard from some of the elite bodybuilders that we've talked to, as well. Sometimes those guys are totally right in some things. They vary their training, and they walk. They get it. Maybe because many of them are 260 pounds and they don't want to do a fucking Wingate test, three times a week.

Charles Staley: I was just gonna say.

Heather: It's not fun.

Charles Staley: I was just gonna say ... By the way, just as a little bit of an aside, from a pure muscle ... On an acute basis, if you're looking at just one workout, maximum variety would be preferable. The problem with too much variation is that it's difficult to instill progressive overload.

For example, if every single workout you do different exercises, you're still getting great stimulus. But the problem is, there are two necessary preconditions to success in lifting. One is you have to work hard, and two is ... This is the one that most people neglect, you have to continuously work harder. The problem is if you are always doing different exercises, you don't get the chance to make an apples to apples comparison, and so you don't know if you are truly progressively overloading or not.

Nick: Yeah. No and ... Go ahead.

Charles Staley: No, no. I was gonna say, you could just go by feel like, "Okay, well today feels like harder workout than last time." But that's not too reliable.

Nick: Yeah. This program does have periodization built into it. I think we should be clear. There is basically two distinct phases. One that's more hypertrophy and volume, the second half is more strength-focused, or at least down to more traditional strength rep ranges. But each week, the rep ranges change for each movement, and there's definitely a periodized component in there. It's not just a free fall.

Charles Staley: Yeah. By the way, primary pattern programming, or Total-Body Strong, for the purposes of this article, this is not a periodization strategy. This is a tactic or a philosophy of how to populate workouts with exercises. It's an exercise selection strategy, primarily.

What that means is, if you happen to like, for example, daily undulating periodization or DUP, you can totally integrate that with this style of training with no problems at all.

Heather: Perfect. Yeah, I know, it feels like we're kind of doing this thing where we're expanding and contracting where it seems very simple on the surface, and then you realize that there's so many variations. But you also realize that it is quite simple once you just understand the basic overarching concepts. To your point that you just made, you can fit different exercises in different modalities in that you prefer, as long as you understand the basics of what this program is about.

Charles Staley: I'm glad to hear people that appreciate this. But it is, it's so simple. When you go the gym, what am I gonna do? I'm gonna do a squat, a push, and hinge, and a pull. Could not be simpler. Then if time and energy allow, maybe I'll do some curls, or some ab work, or some cap work, or maybe I'll do a farmer's carry, or push the sled, or get on the assault bike, or whatever you want to do, that's cool. But, it's that simple.

Heather: Yeah. Charles, I am fast becoming your biggest fan right now. I love it.

Charles Staley: Awesome. Check's in the mail.

Nick: Now, if somebody follows the program as written, there's a size phase, then a strength phase basically. What do you recommend after that. Can somebody just alternate phases like that over and over again, endlessly?

Charles Staley: Yeah. You sure can. Those phases don't need to be at a 1:1 ratio. For example, people remark how strong I am, but really what they mean is, "Wow, you don't look like you could lift weights like that." In other words, I'm really skinny. Okay, I'm skinny.

For me, I do more hypertrophy work because that's where I'm weak. I'm already pretty strong, so I work more on muscle mass. I'm 58 years old, so probably that work is not gaining me any muscle, but probably what it's doing is it's probably preventing the loss of muscle, so I'll take it.

But if you are pretty conspicuously muscular, but you're not as strong as your physique would make it look, then I'd probably spend relatively more time in strength phases.

Heather Eastman: I was just saying it's better to be smarter than you look, than to look smarter than you are.

Charles Staley: That's what I'm gonna go with.

Nick: But I'll just add that you also have a really great recollection article on our site that's called, "[How I Got In My Best Shape Ever At Age 55](#)," I believe is what it's called, where you talk about falling in love with hard sets of 10, and hypertrophy-style training relatively late in your training career.

Charles Staley: Truly, truly. Yeah. That's my biggest ... If I have a regret ... I mean, I'm totally happy. I'm 6'1", about 195 pounds. I'm fine, I look fit. But would I like to be 242 at 10% body fat? I freaking would love that. But it's not in the cards right now because through most of my training history, I did low volume, high intensity training, and maybe I did a set of 10 here or there, but I never did a set of 10, and then another set of 10, and then another set of 10. I just never did that kind of work. That's what's necessary to add muscle, along with the diet that supports it.

If you're out there listening to this and you're young, and you want to gain muscle, or even if you're

not sure, you got to do that stuff while you're young. Volume is the key.

Nick: Right. But at the same time, you mentioned that you have this style of programming working for women in their 50s who want to do pull-ups as well, so it's not just that person.

Charles Staley: Yeah. Yeah. For sure. For sure.

Nick Collias: Well, the program is [Total-Body Strong](#). It's an 8-week full body training program on Bodybuilding.com All Access. Charles Staley, thanks for coming on and talking with us. It's a really cool project.

Charles Staley: Guys, thanks so much. Always fun to talk shop.



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