

Can motivational speeches pump up your gym performance?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Match these weightlifting activities with the pictures.

barbell

bench press

dumbbell

kettlebell

medicine ball



2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

backstory

counterintuitive

cursory

disquiet

knackered

mull over

overindulge

premise

proliferate

rousing

snippet

wannabe

1. If things _____, they quickly increase in number.
2. If you are _____, you are very tired.
3. A _____ is a small piece of something, especially information or news.
4. People who _____ allow themselves to have too much of something they enjoy, especially food or drink.
5. A _____ speech or song makes you feel emotional, excited, or enthusiastic.
6. A _____ is someone who wants and pretends to be famous or successful.

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7. If you _____ something, you think carefully about it over some time.
8. A _____ is a principle that you consider to be true, that you base other ideas and actions on.
9. _____ is a feeling of being very worried or nervous.
10. If something is _____, it is opposite to what seems obvious or natural.
11. Something _____ is brief and not thorough.
12. A person's _____ is their personal history.

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Once confined to weightlifting, workout hype tracks have become a hugely popular (and profitable) genre online. Jenny Valentish goes in search of the daddy of them all

Jenny Valentish

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- Motivational speeches were first adopted by weightlifters who wanted some screaming encouragement as they bench-pressed, but they've since infiltrated the fitness mainstream. These speeches live in playlists proliferating online so you can listen at the gym or, if you're feeling knackered, watch stock-footage montages of people screaming in the rain on your laptop. Tracks can feature solo speakers or snippets from several sources. Their voices are often uncredited, though ministers, athletes and business leaders feature heavily. Usually, the voices are underscored with dramatic music.
- When it comes to motivation, I'm more carrot than stick – a "great job" makes me bloom – but, after a few months of overindulging, I need a hard taskmaster. I do usually take my workouts seriously – fighting in Muay Thai and competing in amateur bodybuilding – but, if anything, my real dad was a bit bemused when I started going full beast mode.
- So I've been listening to Don't You Dare Give Up On Yourself from Gold Coast company Fearless Motivation, whose tracks feature Turia Pitt alongside US motivational speakers, editing the wisdom to rousing rhythms and galloping strings.
- Fearless Motivation was founded in 2015, when such tracks started to move beyond bodybuilding circles. Back then, Arnold Schwarzenegger was a popular choice. Now, big players have millions of subscribers, while Fearless Motivation claims its tracks have been streamed 500m times on Spotify. In addition to soundtracking endless reels from gymfluencers, motivational speech creators now aim their sights at students and wannabe entrepreneurs. A secondary industry, of YouTube tutorials on how to make these videos for fast monetisation, has also flourished.
- Over the next hour, as I swing kettlebells, I hear speakers mulling over famous quotes such as Oscar Wilde's "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." I'm also given lots of contradictory advice:
Give up!
Don't give up!
The more valuable you are, the more a team will pay for you. Same with YouTube. The more value you give, the more people watch.
Stop with the YouTube binge sessions!
- Boiled down to its essence, the premise is always: you're the underdog. Nobody knows how much you've suffered. Nobody cares either. So now you need to dominate.
- My friend Eilish Kidd, a kettlebell sport athlete who co-owns Art Gym in Hobart, was intoxicated by this genre a few years ago. In particular, she found solace in the work of Niyi Sobó, a former NFL athlete turned mindset coach who hosts the podcast I'm Not You. Kidd put aside her disquiet at all the references to "kings" to listen. "I was using these soundtracks to retreat," she says. She stopped listening after deciding these speeches were making her antisocial. "It created an even stronger sense of isolation. Now I had something going through my head that other people couldn't hear: 'You're not the average person. You are stronger and more powerful.'
- "I think why it appealed to me initially is because it's that lone wolf kind of thing. It gives you the licence to be by yourself and different from everybody else."
- I skip a Jordan Peterson track and land on Tom Bilyeu. He's the mega-rich founder of Impact Theory, a motivational media company, but he doesn't hold a commanding presence in my earbuds – the better tracks build in intensity in the manner of Eminem's classic hype song Lose Yourself. In any case, being told by Bilyeu that I can't be in a successful relationship if I haven't read books on the differences between men and women seems counterintuitive to moving up to a heavier kettlebell weight.

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- 10 There's a selfishness that's celebrated in this genre. We're living in an era that celebrates negative personality traits, and that's crossed over into self-improvement. Ten years on from the original swell of interest, figures like Andrew Tate and Russell 11 Brand have infiltrated the pack, with their interviews and podcasts becoming source material. (I give Tate, who's puffing on a cigar in the cover art, a cursory play. He tells me to stop wasting my potential or I'll disappoint my father.)
- 11 While these speeches offer tough love, following their advice to the letter would likely lead to burnout or injury. But I find my groove with the ultra-alpha The Wolf King Speech. It's a 20-minute male/female double-header that spends less time trying to guess my backstory and more on convincing me I'm one of a kind.
- 12 Just like these speeches, kettlebell workouts are all about momentum, so I decide to execute as many violent, hip-thrusting swings as possible as a finisher. I just hope nobody expects to get past me to the dumbbell rack any time soon.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. According to the author, which sportspeople were the first to use motivational speeches?
2. What often accompanies the voices on motivational tracks?
3. What two words make the author feel good?
4. Apart from sportspeople, who do motivational speech creators now target?
5. What is the author's first example of contradictory advice?
6. Why did Eilish Kidd stop listening to motivational speeches?
7. What could listening to influencers like Andrew Tate lead to?
8. Which speech does the author particularly like?

4 Key language

a. Match the phrases on the left to the definitions on the right. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. find your groove | a. to respond better to encouragement than to threats |
| 2. find solace | b. someone who makes people work very hard |
| 3. hard taskmaster | c. in a very bad situation |
| 4. in the gutter | d. to find something that comforts you and makes you feel better |
| 5. lone wolf | e. someone who likes to be or work alone |
| 6. be more carrot than stick | f. to discover something that makes you feel happy and confident |

b. Choose three of the expressions in task A and write personalised sentences.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Exercise is easier if you listen to music."
- "Listening to motivational speeches is a waste of time."
- "Weightlifting is bad for you."

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6 In your own words

a. Use a search engine to find more information about some popular exercises that are beneficial to people's health. Find information about one of these common forms of exercise or any other that you want to add to the list. Report your findings to the class.

- running
- weightlifting
- yoga
- gymnastics
- swimming
- rock climbing