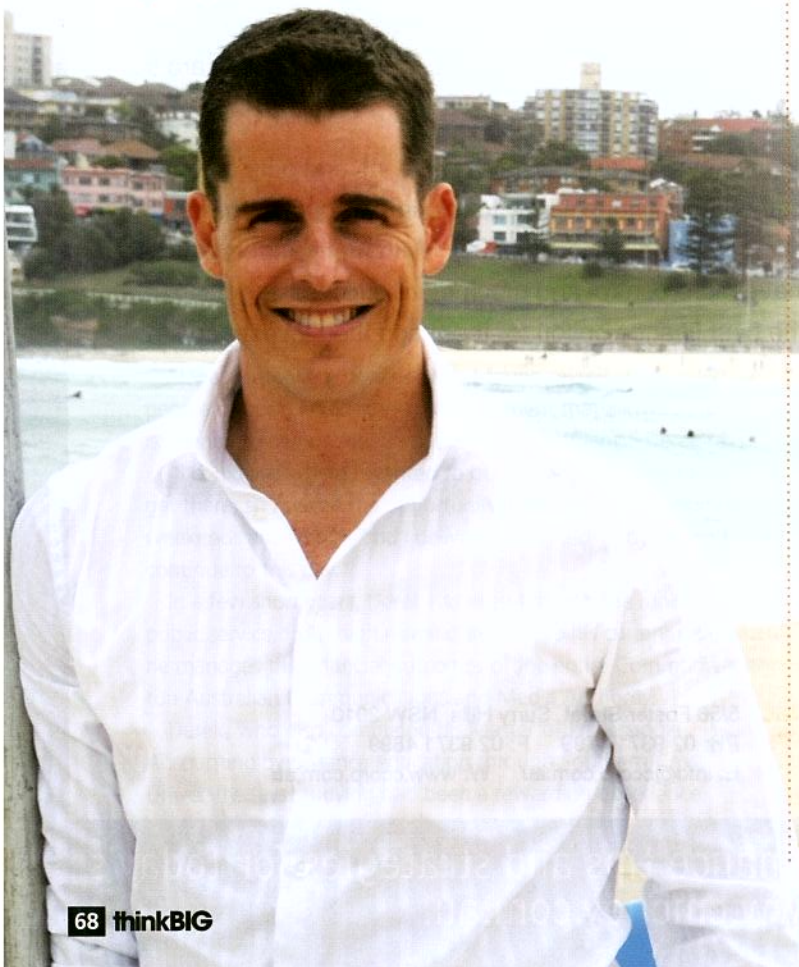


SHARING THE VISION

By Jonathan Jackson

Health is an emotional pursuit as much as a physical one requiring dedication, willpower and a few life changing insights. Jonathan Jackson speaks with Andrew Simmons about fulfilling our physical goals.



Responsibility is a trait that many of us lose sight of over the course of our lifetimes. Whether the concern is health, wellbeing or employment, the responsibility we have to ourselves to ensure our happiness is sometimes lost in a mire of disconnected emotion and wayward causes. It is therefore refreshing to find someone whose life goal it is to help others find the cause of their disconnection and get them back to a healthy and happy state of being.

Andrew Simmons is the founder of Vision Personal Training Studios. He is a dedicated father of three children under five years of age, a best-selling author, university lecturer and fitness lover. He is a journeyman in the fitness industry, who has learnt much about life since he began his career as a personal trainer in 1995.

A great deal of that education has come from Andrew's growing ability to act as a 'part-time psychologist' to his clients. It is something he takes on board as being a necessary element of his profession and something that sets Vision apart from other personal training studios and gyms.

"I love being able to take someone younger who is lost in life and help them grow and become better people, better leaders of people, boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives," Andrew says.

The knack behind being able to do this is to ensure that all trainers under the Vision banner understand client needs.

"Trainers must understand what the clients really want. Once you discover someone's 'why', you help them personally and this goes for trainers as well. A lost trainer who doesn't understand what he does may not be a very good personal trainer."

The trainers at Vision undertake a comprehensive education program to ensure they are empathetic to clients' needs.

"We spend so much time sitting down with our clients and not training them. Andrew says.

"Until I understand what you do, what you are going to do when you leave and what you will eat for the next 42 meals for the week, I'm kidding myself if I think I'm going to help you."

In the early days Andrew struggled to get his head around the psychological nature of his work.

"I struggled with that for years trying to cope with everyone else's problems, but you have to see yourself as a professional and as part of being a professional who can help people you have to disassociate yourself from their problems."

Taking on everyone's problems was an emotional drain and formed part of the reason behind Andrew's business and team building exercise.

This former failed accountant, who spent two years of his life



'clockwatching', saw the value of sharing the load when it came to dealing with clients. It didn't happen at once, however, and Andrew like many other successful businesspeople went through his own rites of passage.

After leaving the Chartered Accounting firm that he found so boring, Andrew went back to school to follow his passion and

complete an Exercise Science degree. While

studying he found a job at a gym working the reception desk and taught aerobics classes on the side. Aerobics instructing led him to personal training.

"I fell into being a personal trainer because I was writing programs for people, but then I wouldn't see them until three months later. I thought no wonder they couldn't get a result if they had to go and do it by themselves. I figured that if I saw them on a more regular basis they would get better results."

While still naïve in a business sense, Andrew was learning rapidly about what made strong businesses work. He had already fell upon the idea of complete client service and while teaching Body Pump and Body Attack for Les Mills he began to learn about systems and the systemised approach to growing a franchise.

Andrew spent many of his weekends going around the country teaching instructors how to use Les Mills systems and thinking if this type of systemised approach could work for group training, it could work for personal training.

The other lesson learnt was the value of teamwork.

"I would travel around the country on weekends feeling I had a common goal with the people I was travelling with. At the gym I felt like a sole trader who was pretty isolated. I didn't share my goals and experiences to become a better trainer."

So Vision started because Andrew saw the value of teamwork and shared goals, he saw the need for systemised training and he felt that he could achieve his goal and passion of helping people if he had more trainers on his side than not.

Initially he brought in a business partner who was working at the same gym who shared similar goals. As the EAS Body for Life Challenge gained ground, Andrew and business partner Jess decided to leverage off the idea.

"We decided to run our own little challenge. At that stage I was known as Andrew Simmons Personal Training and his was Jess's Unique Physiques. It was his clients versus my clients and on that night we unveiled a new name called Vision and kept running the challenge 12 weeks on, 12 weeks off for two challenges a year.

"Everything was going well and we had to take on more trainers because more clients wanted to do the challenges. So I started writing my own systems and it was going very well until the club was bought out by Fitness First and they changed the rules until we had no option but to leave."

The buy out by Fitness First was a blessing in disguise as it forced Andrew to take stock of what he was doing and where he wanted to go.

"It was the catalyst for doing what we do today. At the time it was a

nightmare, but it was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. It forced me to grow."

Growth has been organic and has been based upon training those trainers who really want to help clients achieve their goals. Trainers are taught four factors as part of Vision's unique selling point:

Emotion, Education, Exercise and Eating.

"The most important thing is to work on someone's emotions, understand what drives them. It's not that someone decides to get fat, there is an emotion attached to their weight gain to start with. It then becomes a vicious circle because people become unhappy with themselves. You have to guess the root causes of their problems.

"I trained AJ Rochester the host of *The Biggest Loser* and until she could deal with the demons of being raped as a young girl, there was no way she was ever going to get back to her goal weight. That's an extreme case. I tried to have this conversation with a little girl a while ago and found out her communication wasn't good and she wanted to learn how to better communicate. It all came down to not having the opportunity to express herself as a young child because her father was of the opinion that children should be seen and not heard."

Training is an emotional pursuit, not only for the client but for the trainer as well. Andrew relates it to the give/gain theory.

"If you expect to gain without giving something in return, you're dead in the water. The biggest thing I've learnt is to help people grow and invest in them."

Andrew invests in his trainers; he has to if he wants to reach his goal of having 225 studios in four countries by the year 2012. He invests in his clients by having his trainers take the time to find out why they have come to the studio and he invests in himself. His two biggest goals now are to set the standard for the fitness industry and become the world's most reliable brand delivering outstanding results.

"That's our five year plan. I want to give those passionate people the tools to have a great career."

In the meantime he will also work to help fix the diabetes pandemic.

"That's where my drive comes from. It's out of control and I want to make a massive dent in that industry. Unfortunately the medical fraternity doesn't see us as being a viable option, but I think we're the best option. The pharmaceutical companies give sufferers a pill to lose weight, but they are not helping them take control of the situation. We teach someone how to take control of their lives through their eating and exercise habits. When they feel good about themselves they become better people."

Control, responsibility, call it what you will, but Andrew is right when he says that too many people are hindered by negative emotions. The only way to truly rediscover your happiness is tackle the negativity head on and come out fighting. **TB**

