



## The Business of (Relieving) Pain

Correcting dysfunction, one client at a time.

**Subject:** Anthony Carey, MA

**Company:** Function First

**The Fix-It Man.** Anthony Carey is somewhat of a mastermind when it comes to the human body. Not satisfied with simply helping people get into shape, he decided long ago that he wanted to take his skill set to the next level and help others eliminate pain associated with musculoskeletal disorders. “To me, corrective exercise programming has always presented a much greater intellectual challenge,” says Carey. “Every client is a unique puzzle, and solving that puzzle requires thinking outside the proverbial box.” Once you piece that puzzle together, maintains Carey, the results can be dramatic and almost immediate. “A client who walks through the door bent over and crooked with a back spasm may walk out upright and pain-free,” he says.

Carey also believes that it is this specialization that has led to the tremendous success of his San Diego-based facility. “We do corrective exercise with functional progressions, and that’s it. We don’t do nutrition, weight loss or cardiovascular conditioning. I am a firm believer that we should run our path deep and not wide. Casting a wide net and trying to catch any possible client will never allow you to generate a successful business over time.”

### Calling All Trainers

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**Paradigm Shift.** The majority of the Function First clientele arrives there as a last resort because they have had minimal success with traditional methods of pain relief. “Most of these people have exhausted other avenues in their search for help, but they are still willing to do what it takes when given the right tools,” says Carey. They have typically already undergone numerous surgeries and physical therapy sessions and have been put on a multitude of medications, all to no avail. Somehow, they find their way to Carey for a last chance at hope.

“The majority of our clients come from throughout San Diego County, but we also regularly have clients fly in from different parts of the U.S., Canada and South America,” says Carey. “This week I have a client from New Hampshire and another one from Arizona.”

What attracts clients to Function First from all over the world? Carey believes it is education and very hands-on customer service. He says his main goal is not to “treat” problems, but to dig in and uncover the root of dysfunction based on scientific principles of biomechanics, physics and human physiology. “Our clients love the insight they gain into their bodies, as we educate them through the process,” he states. “They love that we offer them a different perspective on their physical challenges, as well as a solution that makes sense to them.”

New clients can find this approach difficult to wrap their brains around—at first. “We often see two scenarios: in one scenario, new clients think they are

getting physical therapy with us and they expect a similar experience; in the other scenario, they bring the ‘more is better’ mentality and don’t expect to get results without the ‘burn.’” In order to derail these presumptions at the get-go, Carey and his staff require that each client participate in an orientation to get acquainted with the methods offered at Function First. “These paradigms become accepted quite quickly once clients experience their first session with us,” he says.

**Regaining Hope.** Carey has worked with a wide range of clients, from a 6-year-old to 94-year-old twins. They each receive a comprehensive orientation package as well as digital photos and written explanations of all exercise programs. Carey sees every client once a week to ensure that he or she understands the given program and can successfully complete it at home between visits. “Our clients work with us for several months and then move to their own fitness regime or we refer them to another trainer.” If necessary, Carey will continue to meet with clients once per quarter to ensure that progress is continuing. “I am inspired by their determination and drive to find that solution,” he says with a smile. “And when I get to be a part of that solution, I am inspired to help as many more people as I can.” ■

*Ryan Halvorson is the associate editor for IDEA and a certified personal trainer at Excel Sport and Therapy in La Jolla, California.*

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