

CHAPTER 6

SPEED, BALANCE AND AGING GRACEFULLY

BY LOUIS J. STACK

What is success to you?

To me it was skiing at 127.33 miles per hour. That was the speed I achieved in Les Arcs, France while on the Canadian National Speed Skiing Team training for the upcoming Olympic-qualifying World Cup Race. It was 1991, and I had just achieved my personal best time of 127.33mph, or 205.57kph. My overwhelming feeling of success quickly vanished a few days later when FIS race officials threw out the results, due to slight irregularities with the timing system.

This event evolved into a set of circumstances that prevented me from racing for Canada in the 1992 Winter Olympic games in France. As an athlete, I set a personal best yet the outcome created a very unsuccessful feeling for me. An interesting dilemma - both a personal high and a personal low in the same event.

I feel fortunate that I skied for Canada until 1995. I was again very successful finishing 18th place in the first World Championships of Speed Skiing held in Yllas, Finland. Success is a personal experience. While many see skiing at 127mph as completely crazy, it was a character-building experience for me, one that shaped my future.

Stepping back to 1985, I felt a huge sensation of success when I, along with my brother, built our first working prototype of the Pro Fitter 3D

Cross Trainer. I was 25 years old, just off crutches and dreaming of getting back into my size 13 ski boots and on the slopes again. I borrowed \$3,000 from my single-parent mother which my brother and I used to build our version of a ski training device. The goal was to help me regain my balance after knee and double foot surgeries. We successfully designed and built our first two units and I used them intensely to regain my former health.

In the process, I learned that other Canadian ski racers were interested in recovering from their injuries with our Pro Fitter 3D Cross Trainer - ski racing can be a pretty dangerous sport. As history would have it, the Pro Fitter was the first functional, closed-chain training device that integrated total body movement into a single training tool. Our product was often referred to in leading medical journals - the functional fitness revolution had begun! Everywhere I went, physical therapists loved the Pro Fitter and the results it gave their patients. Was I successful? I sure thought so. We had created a product that helped an industry see a new way to achieve successful outcomes for their patients.

In 1988, the Winter Olympics came to my home town of Calgary, and I placed Pro Fitters in all the training rooms - the world was watching. Media was everywhere, looking for great stories to fill the air time between events. To a cameraman, nothing in the gym was as eye catching as an Olympic athlete preparing for their gold medal performance zipping back and forth on this cutting edge balance-training device. We were very fortunate to get the amount of worldwide TV exposure we did - I made my luck and I ran with it!

More success followed with calls and letters from Olympic teams, suppliers and athletes who wanted to use and sell our 3D Cross Trainer. Team Denmark was first on board. It was the beginning of a very successful period for my new company, Fitter International Inc. (www.fitter1.com)

All this excitement and regaining my health lead me from the luge track, where I had been training (good feet were not required for luge racing), to Canada Olympic Park's ski jump in 1989. I was not jumping but instead doing speed runs on skis down the 90-meter jump outrun. I had swapped a Pro Fitter for racing skis with Canadian ski great Todd Brooker - those skis combined with my rubber luge suit had me ready to race. Speed

skiing came to me very naturally as I loved speed, had the right body build and the nerve to point my skis straight down the hill. I was invited to join the National Speed Skiing Team the following year.

This began an amazing adventure of traveling around the world to race, representing Canada. I travelled with three pair of skis, two pairs of boots and all my racing gear, as well as a Pro Fitter, a pop-up display stand and brochures. I hauled over 200 pounds of gear with me to tradeshow on weekdays and competed in World Cup races on weekends. I remember the looks I got in Holland dragging my 8' long ski tubes, oversized boot bags and a Pro Fitter perched on top. I had wheels on one end of the ski tubes and shoulder straps on the other. I could pull or push the rig wherever I needed to. I would wear my backpack on whatever side of my body that the ski cart was not attached too. I really did not need to train as the load I was carrying was enough to get anybody into great shape. At tradeshow I would demonstrate the Pro Fitter for hours every day. When travelling, people asked me what was that thing I was carrying. I would pop the Pro Fitter off the top of the rig and demonstrate it right there. Crowds usually formed to see what all the action was. I made my own luck and success by presenting my product every time I could. Success followed me as I drove, trained, bused and flew around the World Cup circuit from 1991 to 1995.

My lovely wife, and now business partner Margaret, was 7 months pregnant when I arrived home from Europe after my last ski race. She was thrilled I was home safe. Together Margaret, myself and my new son Marquess (10 yrs. old) would soon welcome a new addition to our family. Tynan was born that June, and 21 months later his sister Teaghan was born. My goal was to be a great husband, dad and builder of my business.

Our slogan at Fitter is "leading the world to better balance!" This was very fitting as I am a Libra (balance is my sign) and my success in ski racing required immense focus and balance. I settled into my office working role and quickly realized how desperately I missed my prior work environment of mountains, travel and shows. The first ten years of business life was very active and now I positioned myself to be in an office ten hours a day. What had I done?

Fitter was expanded to offering a wide range of functional products including Exercise Ball Chairs, Bongo Boards and tubing products.

Margaret had been ball sitting in our prenatal classes so I began to use one in my office. “Active Sitting” was the term we coined to describe the concept of movement in the trunk and pelvic girdle when sitting at a desk. The idea was simple. If you could shift your hips easily in 360 degrees when sitting, then it was natural to keep great posture with your head squarely on your shoulders working in harmony with gravity. The alternative was to sit in a fixed chair until you were so uncomfortable you would start to lean your head, slouch or stand up to give your body a break from the unnatural sitting position. I became a very active ball sitter, kneeling, straddling it like a horse and even rolling down on my back to stretch out my tight muscles. When I traveled I carried a sitting disc that physical therapists used to treat folks with injured backs from sitting all day.

Luckily I was still healthy and traveling extensively to tradeshow around the world, serving multiple different industries. I became a product expert who would find a unique new idea at an athletic trainers show and then cross pollinate it to physical therapists, fitness leaders, sports med doctors as well as the public. At an ergonomics show in the late 1990s, I purchased the power legs to build my own sit-stand desk. I remembered seeing these in Denmark years earlier, and the experience of being able to stand at my desk was game changing. I have ADHD and love to go, go, go until I crash and burn from exhaustion. As soon as I had the option to stand, I tried standing on a balance board. I loved it! I then kicked it up a notch with a Bongo Board - this was so dynamic that it was hard to focus on my work. The key point was that movement while standing at my desk was even better than the movement when sitting on the exercise ball. It became clear to me the goal was not just to sit or stand but in fact to move. The Active Office was born! The goal of the Active Office is to encourage subtle movement around good posture sitting, standing and on the journey in-between!

The time we spend hunched in front of a screen is a real health liability. The paradigm shift we face is how to turn that time into a healthy asset. We get 24 hours a day in life - it is best to use them all wisely. Incorporating functional movement into the work environment is so easy and the health gains are massive. Better core stability, balance, confidence and up to 46% increase in work place productivity. (Texas A&M). When you leave an Active Office your energy is higher, you feel more confident, rejuvenated and ready to take on the world.

As my friend Joan Vernikos, PhD and author of *Sitting Kills – Moving Heals* says, “Just be aware you are moving less than you used to. The best kind of movement to correct this condition is to stimulate your balance organs in your inner ear by changing your posture often. The key is to just keep moving.”

My life journey lead to the four pillars that Fitterfirst is built upon. Each of these pillars were developed to help me succeed through the various chapters of my life:

I. Injury & Prevention – In my 20s I was injured. My goal was to regain my health.

II. Athletics & Training – In my 30s I pursued ski racing. The goal was to do my personal best as a national team athlete.

III. Family Fitness – In my 40s I wanted to help my kids to grow up healthy, active and make the most of their own skill sets.

IV. Active Office – In my 50s, I applied all I had learned to my work place that helps me stay active and enjoying a great quality of life.

Each of us have different wants, desires and goals in our lives. One thing we take for granted is the need to maintain balance in our daily lives. Not just between work and home life, or kids and personal time, but the innate balance that allows our body to function successfully within the gravity-based environment we live in. I encourage folks to “master the art of aging, gracefully!” - the alternative is to age ungracefully or to be dead; neither are very attractive options.

There are many important things we will learn in the future about the process of aging. I feel the simplest lesson we can all learn is to watch the movement of a mother with a baby. Hips shift from side to side and the head remains upright square on her shoulders. I call it the human way - maintaining a good relationship with gravity is like a golden rule of life. Stand up straight, move often - if you use it you will not lose it!

In closing, I will introduce my best friend, S.A.M.

Practice **Stability** in daily living
to improve **Agility** at play and
to enhance **Mobility** for life.

The fact is that time and gravity will have its way with us. To maximize your success, create a daily blueprint that incorporates as much movement as possible into your routine. With the benefits of a stronger core, better balance and more confidence, you will be better equipped to take on and enjoy more of life's wonderful opportunities now and in the future!



About Louis


Louis J. Stack, Founder and President of Fitter International Inc. has been “Leading the World to Better Balance” since 1985. His brand Fitterfirst is recognized worldwide for supplying premium professional and personal products that help people recover from and prevent injury, maintain balance and fitness, and keep moving

at work. Throughout his 30-plus years’ experience as a business owner, national athlete and father, he has built a foundation of integrity and quality in everything he does. Along his journey, Stack has been an advocate and industry expert, often leading the way in the physical rehabilitation world and setting precedents in the way we approach our office environment.

Stack’s company stemmed from personal injuries, seeking a fix to his own discomfort. From there it has flourished into a worldwide, multimillion-dollar company that caters to families both young and old, high-performance athletes, injury and rehabilitation patients, and now includes the everyday office worker.

As with most aspects of Fitterfirst, the “Active Office” concept was born from Louis’ own experience – after transitioning from being primarily an athlete to a full-time business owner, his body suffered the consequences of sitting, hunched over a computer day in and day out – he craved movement in his 9 to 5 routine. So rather than conform to the limitations of a sedentary office, he sought a solution to his problem, bringing in a ball chair and getting himself a sit-stand desk. Aided with his new productivity tools, Louis immediately felt an improvement in his quality of life and he knew it was the next track he would pursue with Fitterfirst. Fast forward to present day and the “Active Office” continues to be the fastest-growing component of the Fitterfirst lineup.

Grounded in his roots, Louis is very involved in Fitterfirst, helping out in almost every aspect of the company. On any given day, he may be assisting the production team build the next round of Pro Fitters, or chatting with the marketing group about new promotional ideas he has. Travelling near and far, he can often be found at tradeshow doing what he does best: showing off Fitterfirst and demonstrating the large collection of wellness products his company offers. Nothing makes him happier than improving someone’s life with one of his products – a “win-win-win” as he likes to call it. Aided by his wife Margaret, who runs the day-to-day aspects of the company, Louis continues to be the visionary for Fitterfirst, developing new products, promoting his business, and continuing to learn everyday how to make his company the best it can be.

- Canadian National Speed Skiing Team, *1990 – 1995*
- Calgary's Small Business of the Year Award, *2002*
- Featured in INC. Magazine's "Business Case Study", *2003*
- Finalist of the Canadian EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award, *2015*
-  **Nominee** of the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award *2016*
- Volunteer, Alberta Alpine, City of Calgary - Rinks and Parks
- Husband and father of 3 happy kids