

Under the Bar: An interview with Dave Tate

**By Phil Caravaggio
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Anyone with even a passing familiarity with the sport of powerlifting knows the name Dave Tate.

But for those remaining few who have been camped out in a bomb shelter for the last decade, Dave Tate is the CEO of [Elite Fitness Systems](#), the top strength training store on the web and *the* destination for nearly everything available to make athletes and powerlifters stronger. His [free Q&A](#) has long been one of the top resources for people looking to improve their lifting, and his hundreds of articles for publications like Powerlifting USA and [T-Nation](#) are often printed and bound by trainees as a sort of powerlifting bible.



Dave Tate

He's an accomplished powerlifter in his own right, having totalled Elite in three different weight classes, with best lifts of a 935 squat, 610 bench press, 740 deadlift, and 2205 total.

Dave's own history with Precision Nutrition started earlier this year when, after a serious shoulder injury and worries about his cardiovascular health prompted him to change courses, he called JB and asked for help transforming his body and regaining his health.

That transformation has been nothing short of amazing. By seeking out help, both from John and other top-notch doctors and coaches, he's been able to lose well over 50 pounds of fat and improve every health marker he

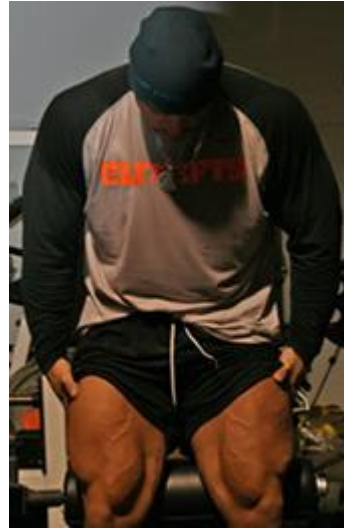
tracked, from blood lipids to liver enzymes. The process has been documented by John on T-Nation (see the [Dave Tate Project Part I](#) and the [Dave Tate Project Part II](#)) and by Dave on his own site (see [Dave's Q&A on elitefts.com](#)).

Dave is a big supporter of Precision Nutrition, and so we crossed our fingers and hoped for the best when we asked him a few months ago if he would design a powerlifting program for PN members.

And did he ever.

In the program, Dave goes way beyond sets and reps. He goes down to the most minute details, offering running commentary on every part of every day in the sidebar. It's part program, part full-fledged powerlifting curriculum.

Precision Nutrition members, you can download Dave's Developing Maximal Strength program here:



[Developing Maximal Strength, by Dave Tate](#)
[Membership Required]

Not yet a Precision Nutrition member? [Here's how to join.](#)

Last week, I had a chance to chat with Dave about his career in powerlifting, his famous "four levels," his experience with Precision Nutrition and his own body transformation project.

Q&A with Dave Tate

Precision Nutrition: You've spent a career in powerlifting. You've been an elite-level competitor, you've coach hundreds if not thousands, you've written books and hundreds of articles, you're an entrepreneur – all around if not directly in the world of powerlifting. What drew you to the sport?

Dave Tate: Chaos, I guess. When I was eleven or twelve years old, I got a weight set for Christmas. It was one of those plastic sets. I think it was an uncle that got it for me. And I loved that shit. That was all I did, I trained for like 8 hours a day, did every exercise I could possibly think of. My dad noticed that I really enjoyed doing the stuff, and he happened to be the friend of the chief of narcotics in our town. And this chief was part of this club, called Findlay Barbell Club, which was maybe 800 square feet, a hardcore powerlifting club kinda like a Westside Barbell Club. They set it up so that I could go in and train with these guys. I think I was 13 years old at the time. And when I went in they kinda took me under their wing, and within six months or so I lifted in my first meet. I never really trained with anyone my own age. Everyone was always much older than me. So really from the get go, aside from that time training in my bedroom with the plastic weights, I never really had a time when I would just go into the gym and fuck around. I would go into the gym, and that was it, that was what we were doing: we were training for powerlifting.

For me, I used it to train for wrestling, or to train for football, but then I fell more in love with powerlifting. It got to where I couldn't wait for the other sports to be over so that I could get back to the gym. So I guess I was just thrown right into the sport at a young age. I loved it.

PN: You started as such a young guy, do remember feeling intimidated walking in to the gym with a bunch of big guys lifting huge weights?

DT: No.

PN: Not at all?

DT: None. I mean, it was a small club, there were only five or six guys. They were strong, but the thing I remember when I walked in there, seeing these guys lift these weights, they *seemed* like big weights, you know 600 pound squats or whatever it was. But I just wanted to do it. I wanted to be able to be better than they were, stronger than they were. In my twisted 13 year old mind, I figured, "I'm younger than they are, they're just a bunch of old guys," you know? I figured that I should easily be able to beat them, and I strove to do that. So they really didn't intimidate me, but at the same time, they also embraced me. From the minute I walked in there, they were like, "You're Dave, right?" "Yeah." "Skip's son, right?" "Yeah." "Play football, right?" "Yeah." "Do you have any idea what you should be doing in here?" "No fucking idea whatsoever." [Laughs.] Or they'd say, "Do you read the muscle and fitness magazines?" "Sometimes." "Well don't read them anymore." And I'd be like, "Okay, well what are we doing then?" "We're squatting." And they just took me in and showed me how to squat, how to bench, how to deadlift. I'm not going to say I picked up on it quickly, it took a while to really get the form locked in, at least to where we thought it was good at the time. I learned 12 years later with Louie Simmons that it wasn't *that* good. But it got me going. I just felt like I belonged.

PN: Do you remember your worst day in the gym?

DT: Nah [laughs.] Everyday is a good day in the gym. I mean, I remember injuries, bad workouts, you know, stuff like that. But I can't remember any specific event that strikes me as bad. And I've kinda got this philosophy anyhow that it's the bad days that make the good days what they are. If they were all good days, then what would a good day really be worth? I remember tons of funny stuff, though. And I guess funny can be bad. I remember doing some chins a long time ago, this was way back in high school, and I threw a bar over the top of the power rack for my chin-up bar. I did the set, no problem. So then after the set I'm standing there talking to one of the guys, and the bar rolls off the rack, hits me square on the head and knocks me out. [Laughs.] That was kinda bad.

PN: How about your best day?

DT: It's tough to say, there are always days where everything seems to click, everything feels right. But the more experience I got in the sport, the more I realized that when those days come around, those are the days to stop and pull back the reins a little. On those days when everything was going, when you're on fire, when you're on top of the world, a lot of times I just closed it down. Because that's a really strong indicator that everything's going in the direction you want, and there's nothing you can do to make it better. All you can do is ruin it, you know, by overtraining or overreaching. Or just by taking advantage of it. A lot of people will have a day where, say their best bench is 405 and they've got a meet coming up in six weeks, and they just *mash* 385. I mean, kill it. The natural tendency is to go 415, 425. But the meet isn't *today*. So sometimes it's better to just pull back on the reins and put it in the meet, which is where it's supposed to be. There were a lot of days like that.

PN: You've had to overcome a ton of obstacles. Even your injuries alone, I can safely say that almost anyone else would have just given up. What keeps you going when things aren't going your way – when it looks like the deck is totally stacked against you?

DT: That's interesting, you know. Let me step back a second and say

that the injury thing has kinda been taken out of context. People need to remember that I started competing in 1984. I totaled my Elite sometime around '87. I didn't have an injury, outside of one pec tear which was actually a result of taking an air conditioning unit down from the ceiling in a bar, I didn't really have an injury until 1999 or 2000. So you're looking at 15 to 16 years, totaling elite, with no injuries. So the injuries are more a function of time, in terms of years under the bar, than it is a lack of mobility or warm-up or whatever. And I will challenge anyone who thinks any differently to compete at the top of their game for 16 years injury-free. But the injury thing, it's just part of the game. It's a shitty part of the game. Pulling muscles and little mild things like that, it's more a matter of managing them, because you know they're going to come. It's just the severity and the timing that changes. There's nothing worse than straining a pec four weeks out from a meet. I'd rather strain it two weeks after. But to answer the question, I think it's just part of the game. If you're involved in any sport that involves extreme overreaching, and powerlifting is one of those, you have to be able to walk to the edge and see what lies beyond. Too many people don't get close enough to the edge, and so they never excel. The difference between first place and third place is a really, really fine line, especially in extreme sports. I would say that extends to things like skateboarding, BMX, motocross, anything like that. That edge is there. Now obviously a football player doesn't want to go to that edge in the *weightroom*, he wants to be on the edge when he's on the field. But it's there, it's part of it. That's just how I operate, I guess.

PN: Well even outside the injuries, you talk in your book having a learning disability, but then you've gone on to accomplish so much, not only in powerlifting but also as an author, in business, and so on. Do you think that ability to walk to the edge in powerlifting translates to the world outside the gym?

DT: Yeah, I think it does. But it goes beyond that, too. A couple of weeks ago, I was asked what the secret to success is. And the first thing that crossed my mind was, "What the fuck is success to you?" If you think I'm successful, man . . . I *don't*. So that may be the first secret, if there is one, that you're never satisfied. But there are a couple of other things that have helped me over the years. The first is that, well, I know I don't know anything. While I may think I do from time to time, I *don't*. The only thing I really, truly know, is how to test what I'm doing. I know how to quantify it. So be it training, nutrition, business, whatever. I go into everything thinking that I don't know a fucking thing. Then I start talking to people who claim to know, and I'll implement what they say. And then I'll test it. I'll have indicators I measure to tell me if it's going in the direction I want, so I can tell if it's working. And because I don't know anything, because I don't allow myself to make intellectual decisions, if those indicators don't go the way I want them to, I change things! I try to remind myself that I don't know anything, I try to stay detached enough to view things objectively. If you don't do that, you'll never change things, even when they're not working. You just get stuck in, "It's gonna work, it's gonna work, it's gonna work." And it's not.

And in business, everything I've ever done, I started by getting in way over my head. I just figured I'd find the people to help me if and when I needed it. And I did. I found advisors, I found mentors, I found consultants. I paid who I had to. I built relationships with who I needed to. And this is key: I *don't* take their advice with a "grain of salt." I don't pick and choose what to use and what not to, or modify it or whatever. I just listen to them and put it all into play, then I test the outcome. If the outcome is going in the direction I want it to go, we're good. If not, well, how can I say this politely? "Fuck you. See you later, I'm finding something else to do." Life's too short to be banging your head against wall.

A lot of this I've learned through the weightroom, most definitely. That's what strength training is. It doesn't matter how you lift the weight when the meet comes around, or how you trained to do it, all that matters is whether or not you did it.

PN: I remember back at SWIS last year, you had this great way of categorizing people into four categories, four levels of excellence -- or lack thereof, in some cases...

DT: Shit, suck, good, great.

PN: Yeah, that was it. [Laughs.] Can you tell us about those four levels, the difference between them, and how you get from one to the next?

DT: I think that no matter what you're doing, you fall into one of those levels. Now, I mean, within the realm that we're discussing, that is. This isn't a blanket judgment of the person as a whole, like the person is totally shit or whatever. I mean within a specific area, or skill set, or endeavor. Their training may be totally shit, but their diet may be great. Or vice versa. So we need to establish that we're talking about specific skills here.

But yeah, shit, suck, good, great. I'll use the example of general fitness. Most people in the United States are *shit*. I mean, diabetes is on the rise, and . . . well, never mind, everything that could possibly go wrong *is* going wrong. Diet is definitely a huge problem. And it's not the only problem. These people aren't doing anything! They stay indoors, they're not active, they watch TV, they don't even walk to their neighbor's house to talk or maintain any sort of relationship with those around them. If you ask most people who their neighbors are, they don't even know their names. Everyone is becoming a house rat. Which, by the way, if you're in the e-commerce industry is not a bad thing. [Laughs.] But that's kind of what we've become. So their fitness is complete shit.

Now if they take the first step, join a gym and so on, well yeah, then they go to suck, because the first step is a big thing. But personally I don't give a shit about the person who took the first step, I really don't. [Laughs.] I don't praise them, and I don't want to praise them. I know that 99% of people that take that first step are never going to go any further. In fact, they're probably going to regress. I'm sure you've seen this, every trainer or weightlifter in the world has seen it: you're sitting around the table with some friends and they start asking you about training or nutrition or whatever. First thing that goes through your mind is, "Is this guy really serious, or is he just wasting my time?" because you know it's going to take more than two minutes to answer the question. So right off the bat you're trying to gauge if he's even willing to do what it takes to move past the first step. 99% of the time you're going to give him the short answer, because you already know it will never go past that. You've already spent thousands of conversations laying shit out for people, family members, friends, whoever it is, to have your time just essentially fucking wasted. [Laughs.] Which is what it is! And to make matters worse, they don't understand that your time is of value, and that it's what you do for a living. So that's why I don't care about those people. You say you're going to start working out? Great. Your New Year's resolution is to start working out? Great. I don't give a shit. In fact, in my business I don't even target those people. That's where the biggest market is, by the way, but I don't want to deal with them.

Now "good." These people have stuck for a while. They're actually going to the gym, three or four days a week, for a couple of *years*. And they're *good*. You go in the gym, you'll find 'em. Just sit there at five o'clock, during the busy time of any commercial gym. You're going to see "shit" out the ass. You're going to see "suck" out the ass. But you'll

also find about five or six "good." And by "good" in the weight room, what I mean is you'll see movements that are fluid, that look like they have purpose, they'll have muscles that are actually contracting, they have control of their body. You could go over and ask them, "Hey, flex your triceps for me," and they can do it without moving their shoulder or biceps. These people have been doing it for a while, and they've got a bit of a passion for it. Those are the people I like. Because those are the people that will take the advice that you give and actually try to use it. Those are the people that you can take from good to great – if they're willing to put the effort in. But here too, most of these people will just stay at "good," they won't be willing to go the distance.

Shit to suck is say 50 or 60 stairs, *big* stairs. And suck to good, that's another 50, 60 stairs. I mean, there's a big difference between the guy who just walked in the gym and says, "I'm gonna do this," and the guy who actually does it for a few years, and has fluid movements and knows how to control his body. That's going from a beginner to an intermediate in weight training, and that can be three to five years for some people. More, for others. And a lot of people are content to stay there, and I'm happy with that. I'm cool with that, because for most people, it's not their life, it's not their driving passion. It's just something they really, really love to do. And so that's where they stay.

Now to go from good to great? That's only three or four steps. But they're three or four steps that people aren't willing to take. Getting down to 10% body fat is no big deal. Going to 3%? That's a big fucking deal. But the process isn't any different. The *suffering* is. You just have to suffer more, suffer longer. You think 30 grams of carbs is bad? Wait until you drop down to *none*. You're suffering. Those three steps are when you're sitting there at night, with cravings out the ass, and the best you can do is cheat and have a sugar-free popsicle, and you have to be content with that. Those three steps are the difference. And those three steps are what make the competitive athlete.

Now there is another step: the extraordinary. And that's a whole other world. That's only about half a step. Those are the great athletes that step up and those who go out and change the landscape. And obviously, they're rare. Real rare. It's not even another step, it's just a different intellectual level that most people will never, ever get to in anything they ever do in their lives. But we can see it, we can admire it. That's when you get the goosebumps, the feeling like you're watching something truly special. That's the epitome of sport, the epitome of fitness. And it really has nothing to do with fitness, it's just heart. You can have a Michael Jordan, who makes everybody want to stand up and say, "wow," and you can have a Special Olympian do the same thing. It's just heart. It's a level you can't teach, you can just observe.

PN: If you had a dream client or athlete walk into your place, what kind of attitude would you want them to have?

DT: Well, I don't train anyone any more, I'm done with clients, so there is no dream client for me, mostly because there's no such thing. [Laughs.] I've done that, I've worked 40 odd hours a week for seven years doing that, and that's why I don't like people in the "shit" category. I love 'em to death, they're great people, but... I'm going to change your question and ask, "What would I look for in someone I'd actually train *with*?" That's what I've always cared about more. Louie told me one time that he'd never train with someone who didn't scare him a little bit, and I agree with that. In other words, if I'm training with you, and at some point during the workout I think you might snap and hit me over the head with a five pound plate, that's a good training partner. [Laughs.]

PN: Your book, *Under the Bar*, was as much about your life as about powerlifting or sport – it was almost a compilation of

lessons learned. What compelled you to share those lessons, and your story, with others?

DT: My kids. At the time that it was written, my health variables weren't really that good. But my injuries were okay. So I didn't see "not competing" any time soon. And I've been in the sport long enough to know that I'm not that strong, and that the weights that I lifted had a lot to do with mental fortitude and leverage. So I wasn't going to be competitive if I went down in body weight. And if I'm not competitive, after 20 years, I don't want to be a part of it. It's time to step away. So I basically wrote that thinking, my blood pressure's through the roof, my cholesterol's through the roof, my enzymes are through the roof - I may not be around that long. And the sick part is that I just accepted that. And I figured, if my kids could just see me compete, then it would be okay, because the greatest lesson I could teach them would be just letting them see me compete. And it took me a long time to realize that this isn't about me. And when that finally started to come into focus, that's when I wrote that book. Because who knows what could happen, or when it could happen. Hell, I'm healthy right now, but I could walk out right now and get hit by one of our forklifts. So I wanted to be able to pass on the things that I've learned, because nothing for me has been easy. Nothing. And to be honest I don't think it is for anybody. Some people act like things are easy, and maybe there are a small few who really do have it easy, but for the vast majority, it's not that way at all. You're going to struggle for everything you get. You're going to have to work for everything you get. So I thought I would write down some of the things I've learned, so they'd be able to read it and say, "Here are the values I should build my life around." They're the same values I talk about on my website, the same values I built my company around, the same values my employees live by. So that's how it came about, it wasn't written to be sold, or even given away, it was written for them. But then a few people read it, and they said, "You have to publish this." And that's kind of how it came about.

PN: Not too long ago, you contacted JB and started basically a complete body transformation: from elite powerlifter to a leaner physique built primarily around aesthetics, rehab and getting healthier. What prompted that change?

DT: Actually, I wasn't an elite lifter when I started, I had already stopped competing. I wasn't going into it as awful as I might have, but I wasn't going into it in great shape either. My metabolism wasn't as high as it once was, but I was consuming the same amount of calories. I feel great now, it's just different. It was a huge challenge, and I like that, that's what drives me. For me, I have to test myself, or I won't stay focused. Even after dieting for 14 weeks doing the Precision Nutrition stuff, I still had to try John's [Get Shredded Plan](#). I *had* to. And I've learned more from that phase than anything I've done diet-wise in my entire life. Because I learned how to get flat. [Laughs.] And how to reload. And if somebody is dieting and worried about how they look, and I know you guys are big on individualization and it's one of the hardest things to teach, but if you can learn how to push to getting flat, and then stop right at the point right where you don't get flat, but you're *about* to, and then add the carbs to reload, you'll maintain the same energy but you keep burning fat. I also learned that when it comes to reloading, my body does way better on simple sugars. When I tried reloading on Fruit Loops, my god, it was insane how I looked the next day. But when I tried to reload on rice and pastas, it hardly did anything.

And when that phase was over, I was so depleted in calories that I freaked. My body went from 257 to 285 in three weeks. Which is actually kinda fun. [Laughs.] I remember an email from John saying something like, "Holy shit, you would have had to have eaten in excess of 5500 calories per day, *above* your actual daily requirements." And I

just thought, "Yeah, that sounds about right." [Laughs.] But that was also a lesson learned though, because when I started getting ready for this phase, I thought it wouldn't be hard to get back to where I was. Boy, *that's* a crock of shit. [Laughs.] You can put on 30 pounds of pure fat in three weeks. But it's not coming back off in three weeks. [Laughs.] It took like 12 weeks! Of serious shit! [Laughs.] So I also learned this time through to not get so extreme in the final few weeks so I don't freak like that. And I *had* the [Get Unshredded Plan](#), you know. [Editor's note: *The Get Unshredded Plan helps you come out of an extreme, temporary diet without rapidly putting weight back on.*] You think I'm going to fucking follow that? [Laughs.] When there's an end date, and I know there's caramel apples around the corner? [Laughs.]

But I learned a lot, I do feel good. And the one thing that I really noticed is that before I used to basically fall asleep throughout the day, just have crashes all the time, eating like shit. I just didn't have the energy. But now I have *tons* of energy. And even though I do take in carbs, it's still not more than 150 or 200 grams per day, on a high day. It's funny because people are saying I'm now on a high carb diet, and I'm thinking, what the fuck do you consider high carb? [Laughs.] Because if you think 150 grams is high carb, you're out of your mind! I'll show you high carbs! [Laughs.] So yeah, I do feel better, a lot better.

Strength-wise, I don't have comparisons, because I don't do anything that even resembles what I used to do. I don't squat, I don't bench, I don't deadlift. And a lot of times people are shocked to hear that. I explain it this way. I heard Jack Nicklaus say in an interview the other day, someone asked if he was playing a lot of golf now that he's retired. And he just rolled his eyes. He said, "No, I spend time with my kids." He said, "I might go out on the golf course a couple times a year, that's it. I spent my *whole life* golfing." Well I spent my whole life squatting, benching and deadlifting. So aside from the fact that my shoulder can't handle them, I really don't even have a desire to do them. Plus I know now that if I tried to, my strength would be way off what it was before, because now the focus of my training is completely different.

PN: Looking at your journals, looking at your progress reports during that transformation, it's a pretty amazing change – cholesterol and triglycerides, body fat, all way down. What role did nutrition play in that transformation? How important is nutrition when you're trying to get healthy and basically transform your entire body?

DT: From a body transformation perspective, it's fucking huge. It's *huge*. People need to have guidelines to help them get going, like the Precision Nutrition kit. They *have* to have something to get them going. And they also need to pay attention to how they feel, to watch their body fat levels, to watch their skinfold measurements, to watch their circumferences, watch their strength measurements. And to watch the circumference of your leanest body part. Say your skinfold measurements show that your arm is the leanest site on your body. You want to watch the circumference of your arm, because that's going to give you a great indication of how your muscle mass is changing. There's not a lot of fat there, so if it gets smaller, you're fucked. [Laughs.] So you gotta pay attention.

PN: And what if you were still competing in powerlifting, how important would nutrition be there?

DT: I would tend to say that, at least for the super heavyweights, it's not important at all. I just know what all the guys at the top of the game do. You tell some super heavyweight to eat vegetables, well that's fine, but they eat the vegetables, which have a low caloric density, and they end up replacing high calorie foods with low calorie foods. And what works *for* you in things like bodybuilding, body

transformation, fat loss, or whatever, that works *against* you in super heavyweight powerlifting. Plus, the big guys, they're taking in 10,000 calories. So if they're not getting the nutrients they need in 10,000 calories, something's wrong. I mean even a Ho-Ho has to have vitamins in it somewhere. [Laughs.] The one thing I do tell them is, "Look, I've been there. I know you're not going to eat vegetables unless they're on your hamburger. But let's at least put some Greens+ and some fiber caps in there. Let's do *something*." I think that's the first step with these guys, to supplement what they're not getting. And it's a band-aid solution, but I think it's about as much as you're going to get out of those guys. Now the *lighter* guys, *they* need fucking education. Because these are the guys that will wake up, have a hamburger patty for breakfast, a hamburger patty for lunch, and a hamburger patty for dinner. And not eat anything else all day. Because they're so afraid that they're going to gain weight and grow out of their weight class. So they need some serious help to get that metabolism back up. So it's much more important for the lighter guys.

PN: When you got Precision Nutrition, what were your first thoughts about it?

DT: [Laughing.] My first thought? "Fucking John. Why didn't he just give me the diet? I don't want to read this shit, just tell me what to do." [Laughs.] That was my first thought. But then I started looking through it, and reading it, and I really liked it. What I liked is that it gave me choices. Which is kind of a fun thing, because you have all these meals to choose from, all these different ways to get the food you need. I'm a creature of habit, so no matter what choices you give me, I'm still eating a fucking apple every day. [Laughs.] But I know, and it's refreshing to know, that when I want the choices, I have them. I'm not stuck eating a certain thing, or eating a certain way. And I like how it's presented in short chunks, because it's easier for me to digest the information. That's where Precision Nutrition stands out. The other cool thing about it is the backup services, the forum, the add-on items that you guys keep posting, I mean it's much more than even the manuals and the cookbook you get in the mail. I'm a raving fan, I'm all about Precision Nutrition. I recommend it to everybody. It's not about gaining muscle or losing fat, it's about all of it. It's about building the baseline for all of those things, and once you've got the baseline, the rest is straightforward. People say, "Dave, you're not on it right now though." The hell I'm not! It's the baseline, and I just make adjustments to the baseline to achieve my goals. That's it.

PN: Last couple of questions. Tell me a bit about the history of your website, www.elitefts.com. By now it's far and away the best site for strength training equipment, books and products, and you guys supply some of the top training centers in world. How did it come about, and why did you start it?

DT: Years ago, I'd have to say '98 or '99, I didn't even own a computer. I didn't even really know what a computer was. But my brother worked in the networking department of a major company, and he built a computer for me from spare parts. I think it had like a 486 processor or something. [Laughs.] So I got used to the computer, figured out how to get online, and I start searching for strength training information like any meathead would do. And I find stuff on Westside Barbell and Louie Simmons. And the best site for that at the time was called deepsquatter.com. So I start reading this, and a lot of the information was kind of fucked up. It wasn't what we were doing. And I knew it wasn't what we were doing, because I was doing it. [Laughs.] So I sent Jason Burnell an email and said, "Let me send you a template on what we're doing." And then that turned into a little Q&A thing where he would send me questions and I would email him the reply. From that Q&A, I was contacted to do a seminar in South Carolina, and at the seminar a bunch of us went out to dinner and a guy asked me if I

had ever thought of doing a website. And I said, "Yeah, I've thought about it, but I don't even have a computer that's worth a shit." But he told me he had a buddy who had just left a major web development firm to start his own, and he was looking for a project, a beta site or something to use as a portfolio piece to build his business. So he told me he could work something out that would be extremely affordable. So we set up this website, and it was basically Q&A, a lot like the format we still have now, except it was just me answering questions. And after a while, people started asking about products that we used. And I thought, well, why don't I just get the products? So we put together an online store, and I borrowed some money to buy my first inventory. I think it was something like \$500 from my mother-in-law. And so we got started. And then from there, over the next three years, I didn't make any money, I didn't lose any money, I didn't borrow any money. I just did it all myself. I reinvested everything I made in the company. Every dollar that came in just went into new inventory. And new inventory. And new inventory. Then I sought out some good consultants. And we just kept building on the idea that the business we're in is not the fitness industry, it's not the equipment industry, it's not even training. We're in the *PR* business: we help people set personal records. That's what we do. We do that with our equipment, we do that with our articles, we do that with our Q&A. That's the essence of it, and we've stuck to that framework. There are other companies selling equipment. We're selling a lifestyle. We're helping people achieve what they set out to achieve, and we help them every way we can.

PN: Well it looks like it's working, because it's grown tremendously.

DT: Man, I'm totally amazed at what I've been able to accomplish. I believe the more you give out, the more you get in return. I really, truly believe that. And my life is an example. So I'm huge on contribution, and giving back what I've been given. Most of things I've learned in my life, whether in training, or business or life in general, were gifts given to me by other people. It was the guys taking the 13 year old and not making him feel intimidated in the gym. It was all these people in my life, stepping up at the right time, and saying, "You know what? You're not stupid. You're fucking lazy." And being there for me, helping to guide me along the right path. So I owe them so much. And every time I walk in to work, or I go home, or I get in my car, or I look at my kids and my wife, it acts as a reminder. It's like a knife twisting in my back, constantly reminding me: "Pay those guys back. Pay them back, pay them back." Because without that help, I wouldn't have *anything* right now. That's why the Q&A on the site is for free, that's why I try to help as many people as I can. I try to express that gratitude every day.

PN: Well you've definitely shown that again with this program for our members. Dave, thanks again, and thanks so much for taking the time out of your day to talk, I know you're a busy guy and this is the busiest time of year for you. This has been a real pleasure for me.

DT: Hey, no problem at all. My pleasure.

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Our thanks to Dave for putting together this fantastic program. To find out more about Dave, to read his free articles and Q&A's, and to browse the most comprehensive catalog of strength training equipment and products on the web, visit his site at www.elitefts.com.

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