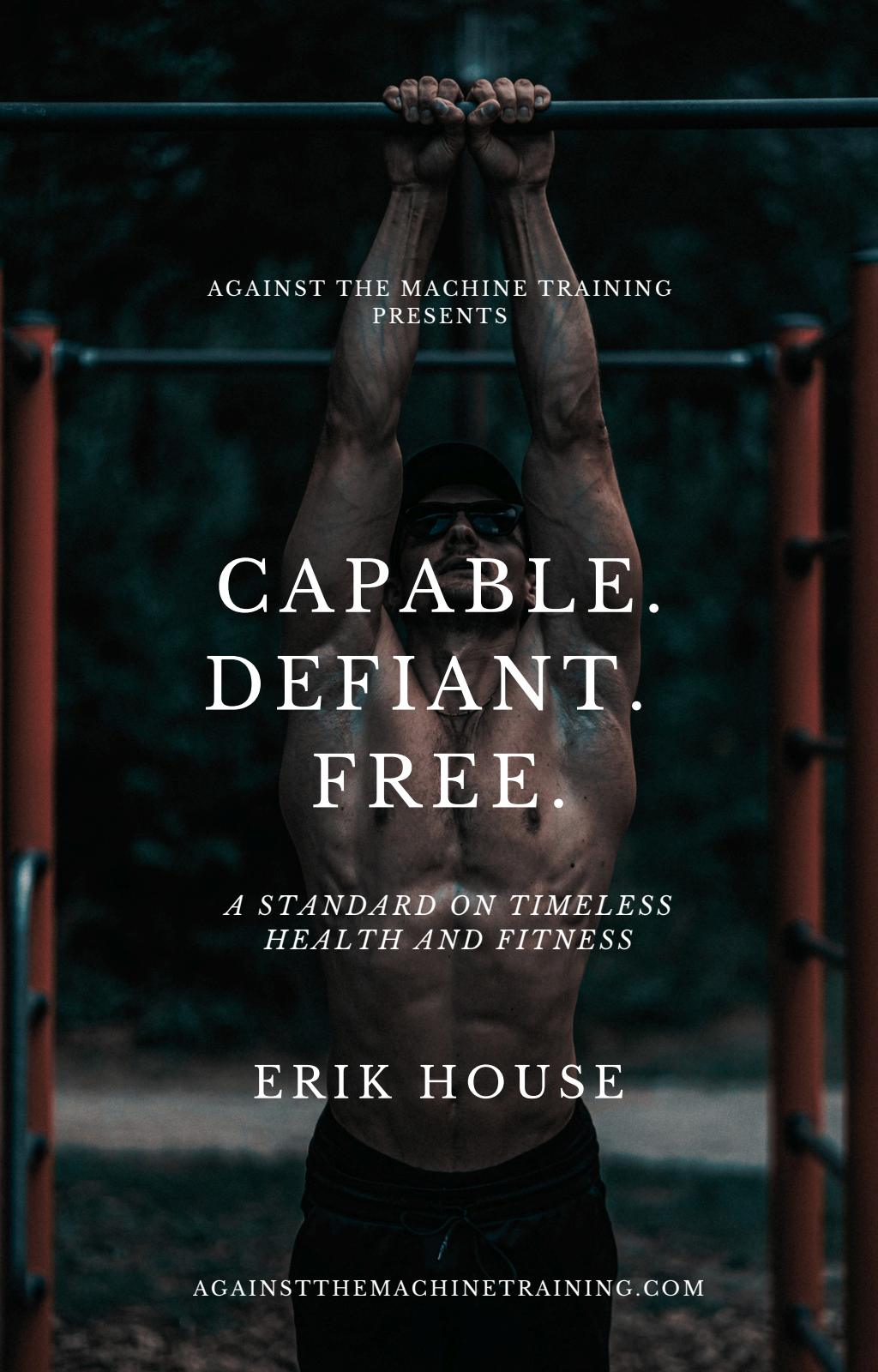


A full-page photograph of a muscular man hanging from a pull-up bar. He is shirtless, wearing a black cap and sunglasses, with his arms fully extended upwards. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a path. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man's physique.

AGAINST THE MACHINE TRAINING
PRESENTS

CAPABLE.
DEFIANT.
FREE.

*A STANDARD ON TIMELESS
HEALTH AND FITNESS*

ERIK HOUSE

AGAINSTTHEMACHINETRAINING.COM

INTRODUCTION

CAPABLE. DEFIANT. FREE.: A Standard on
Timeless Health and Fitness

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First edition.

Against the Machine Training
againstthemachinetraining.com

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INTRODUCTION

AGAINST THE MACHINE TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

There's a man you've probably seen and never really paid much attention to. He's sixty-something, maybe older. He doesn't carry much weight, but his arms are vascular, and even through his shirt you can see his back and chest are dense. He's lean and built, not bulky. He always wears running shoes no matter what clothes he has on. You probably won't ask him his secret, but I would. And I have, more times than I can count. By now it's become something like a working case study. Ask a man who spends his life in a gym what he does, and he'll talk for twenty minutes, or maybe even scoff at your inferiority. But the ones who actually look like something real, upright and dense, moving with a cadence younger men have lost, almost always give the same short answer: pushups, pull-ups, some stretching and running, and a basic whole food diet. Nothing more. And more often than not, somewhere in their past, a stint in the military.

What separates him from most men isn't genetics, and it isn't luck. It's that he was never handed the thing most of us were handed: a "special" program or diet. You've probably been handed one. Maybe more than once. It promises if you actually start and complete it, the weight will come off and the muscle will grow, and for a while it works exactly as it promises.

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Then, at some point, which never announces itself in advance, it stops. It stops not because you failed. It stops because nothing about it was built to continue.

And that's the part worth examining. We call the thing behind all of it *the machine*, the fitness industry's real engine, running on trend-chasing, endless optimization, and status dressed up as health. It doesn't want you well. It wants you dependent. Almost nothing sold to you as fitness was designed for your flourishing. The twelve-week program, the shredded-by-summer countdown, the challenge with a start date and a finish line stitched into the marketing aren't broken products. They're *the machine* working exactly as designed. A finish line is what makes something easy to sell. Nobody buys a subscription to the rest of their life, so nobody's selling that. *The machine* sells the sprint, or fad, over and over again, rephrased and repackaged, to the same people, because that's what it's designed to do.

Maybe you get good at starting like I have. Starting was never the hard part for many people. What nobody trains you for is the unglamorous middle — day eight, month seven, month thirteen, year two, four, or six. It's the version of this with no finish line, or photo worth posting. Almost nobody exists in this space, the space of life long consistency.

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It isn't a personal failure. It's the predictable result of buying into something with an expiration date.

Here's what's strange, though, outside all of it, there are men and women who never had this problem. It's not because they found a better program, but because nobody ever sold them the idea of a program in the first place. No gym membership purchased, no machines to operate, no transformation to post. Just a body that kept working consistently straight through the unglamorous middle, because it was never allowed to stop.

That's not a coincidence. That's the actual method, the one that stands against *the machine*. It predates the industry that replaced it, and it outlasts everything *the machine* has sold since.

This guide is built on that method and walks you through five parts — why you need this, how you move, how you eat, how you carry your body through the hours nobody's counting, and the mind that holds the rest together. None of this is new, and that's exactly why it works.

INTRODUCTION

This guide is the floor, not the ceiling. Everything here works, but most people stop after day one.

If you want to go further, and ready to dig deep to change your life, there's a way to work with me directly. Information about that is on the last page of this guide.

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CHAPTER ONE

ATMT PHILOSOPHY

AGAINST THE MACHINE TRAINING

This may be redundant, but Against the Machine Training isn't a “special” program or diet. It's a philosophy. And this philosophy is built on the same one that men and women have used for over a hundred years, long before the fitness industry figured out how to scam the average person. It's the same discipline that ran through military PT and old-school calisthenics, that lived in a prison yard with nothing but concrete and time, and even filled a 1960s PE class in California before anyone thought to make it complicated. None of it required a gym membership. All of it built men and women who stayed strong for life. That's the lineage this philosophy belongs to.

I spent over a decade inside the fitness industry that replaced it — first as a failed gym bro purchasing endless supplements, then a pretend powerlifter using insane workout splits (and getting injured frequently), then a personal trainer chasing certification after certification, each one promising more honest answers than the last. What I found instead was the same pattern wearing a different label. Every company sold the same promise wrapped in new packaging — buy this, follow this, and the body you were always meant to have will finally arrive. The label changed often, but the transaction stayed the same: fad diets, supplements, designer steroids, and overly-complex programs laid the foundation.

Now they've been joined by TikTok celebrity trainers, peptide protocols, hormone replacement, luxury equipment, and boutique gyms — each offering the same promise: a faster, easier path without the hard work, or to put it more bluntly: pay for the cheat code, and escape the process. And I clearly got suckered into some of it for many years (and narrowly escaped jumping on the steroid/peptide/TRT bandwagon).

But, my real education came later, and from two different directions at once. One was academic: a degree in health and behavior psychology, and with it, a robust education in behavior change, identity architecture, and what actually predicts whether a person sticks with anything. The other was observational. As I mentioned already, I paid attention to older men and women, those in their fifties, sixties, seventies, some even past that, who'd never set foot in a gym and never needed to. No gym membership, no machines, no steroids, no peptides, no fancy gadgets, no fad diets. Just decades of a standard they never stopped keeping. What I landed on wasn't a new method. It was their method.

Now I know I've said this before, but let me be forever clear: You do NOT need a boutique gym membership (or a gym at all). You do NOT need a designer diet protocol. You do NOT need peptides, gadgets, or machines.

You need your bodyweight, a pull-up bar if you can find one, eight feet of open ground, a clean and simple diet, a steady mind, and a real reason to do it. Our mission is to train men and women to flourish, and to stay true to a standard the fitness industry buried for profit to keep you and everyone else dependent.

What sets this apart isn't the movements. It's the psychology and philosophy underneath them. Behavior psychology explains why willpower alone was never going to carry you through past a few days and into year ten. Positive psychology explains why a life built only around avoiding decline eventually collapses under its own weight. Health psychology explains why the body and the mind were never actually two separate projects. Chapter five goes a little deeper on this, but for now, the short version: most people don't fail because they lack self-awareness (even if they do). They fail because some part of them already knows the truth, and finds it easier to look away from it than to face it. You already know when you're lying to yourself. This whole guide is built to make that harder to do.

The standard itself rests on four things. **Capable:** a body that can do what you ask of it, rather than a hormone-dependent physique built at the expense of your organs' systems and wallet.

Resilient: built to hold up over decades, not weeks. **Simple:** stripped of everything that isn't essential — no optimizing, no stacking, no injections or pills, no chasing a fancier input when the only thing missing is repetition. **Enjoyable:** because a standard you resent is a standard you'll eventually abandon, and enjoyment is what tips the scale toward the next rep, the next day, the next decade. You don't have to keep at it alone, either. There's a community of people already living by this free standard, already doing the work, and they're waiting for you to join them.

At the end of the day, this isn't a detox. It isn't a fix. On one level, it has to be relentless. On another, it has to become ordinary enough that you forget you're doing it at all. Done consistently, it quickly stops feeling like it takes life from you and starts giving it back, even on the hard days. It takes time to become second nature. What made it reasonable for me was this: I think about it constantly with interest instead of dread. I don't think about getting in shape for an event on the calendar. I think about who I'm becoming, and the one small step in front of me that gets me there.

This is my rebellion against the industry that found me insecure at fifteen and never let go, against every program, every certification, every promise that the

next purchase would finally be the one that worked. I bought in for over a decade before I understood what I was actually buying: not results, but a subscription to never arriving. *The machine* doesn't want you fit. It wants you hooked. It wants you buying, and buying, and buying, forever circling a finish line that was never meant to exist. It has never been a war fought over your body. It's a war over your mind, and the industry knows it, proven with every ad, every diet protocol, every enhancement, and every influencer selling a stack. This little ebook is the opposite bet.

This is about living as fit and free as long as you can, and to hand that same freedom to anyone willing to take it. This is about a standard.

A woman with curly hair and a tattoo on her right arm is performing a pull-up on a horizontal bar. She is wearing a grey sports bra and leggings. The background is a wall with peeling green and white paint. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE OLD MODEL

AGAINST THE MACHINE TRAINING

I won't pretend what follows is revolutionary, because it isn't, and it was never meant to be. Every industry built on selling transformation needs a new invention every few months to seem revolutionary. Inventions such as a new split, a new acronym, a new formula, or a new reason the last thing you tried wasn't the real answer. That's a business model. What follows isn't an update to anything, or a new invention. It's a revival. A revival of standards that were never broken, but have been buried under better marketing for too long.

Most people can get into remarkable shape using a small number of full-body movements, applied with real intent, in a fraction of the time *the machine* insists is necessary. We've sourced two methods (among many) that simply work. One builds strength and muscle. The other builds conditioning and work capacity. Both use nothing but your own bodyweight and, if pull-ups are part of your training, and they should be, a bar to hang from. Both methods are also built to take someone with no training background from zero to one, without overwhelming them from the start.

How often.

Twenty minutes, four days a week. Eighty minutes, total, per week. That's the entire time commitment asked of you. Ideally, two of the days are built around hypertrophy and two around conditioning, alternating days, so you're not stacking the same demand back to back. If you'd rather run it differently, run it differently. It's not a set rule. It's just what we've noticed works for us, and we think it'll work for you too. Everything else bends to your life.

Each session draws from one to three exercises, depending on which method (hypertrophy or conditioning) you're running that day.

What the exercises are.

The entire menu is smaller than you'd expect, and that's deliberate. Most people never come close to mastering what's on this list before they go looking for shortcuts and equipment they don't need.

There's a proposed essential list, and a working list, but really it's all subjective:

Essential — the movements that should never be neglected:

- Pull-ups (or a ring/TRX regression)
- Push-ups
- Bodyweight squats

Recommended working list — cycled in with the essentials once you're ready. Many of these are additions for a body already conditioned to the demands of calisthenics:

- Pike push-ups
- Bulgarian split squats
- Dips
- Hanging leg raises
- Jumping jacks
- Pistol squats
- Sissy squats
- Park bench GHDs
- Tyson push-ups
- Six-count burpees
- Navy SEAL burpees
- Ab rollouts
- Handstand push-ups
- Sprints
- Broad jumps
- Horse stance (for time)

Think of this as a working menu, not a closed one. Nothing here is off-limits, and nothing outside it is banned either. This is simply more than enough to build a real practice on, long before you'd ever need to look elsewhere.

A note on how to correctly perform each of these exercises: I would double the length of this ebook teaching you how to perform something that you can learn much better from a Youtube video, so I'll recommend exactly that. If you are unsure how to perform any of the exercises, including their regressions or progressions, you can't do better than to refer to Youtube. There are plenty of real experts teaching these exact exercises. Do your homework if you are unsure, but don't let your lack of understanding prevent you from exploring them.

How to use them.

Two methods run the whole system: EMOM for conditioning and work capacity, Ladder Downs for hypertrophy.

EMOM — conditioning and work capacity.

EMOM stands for Every Minute On the Minute. Set a stopwatch to run for twenty minutes. At the top of each minute, you perform your set. Whatever time is left

in that minute is your rest. Then the next minute starts, and you go again.

That's the entire mechanism. No supersets to remember, no rest-timer math, no standing around a rack negotiating with yourself. The clock tells you when to move. You just move.

An EMOM pairing worth using: *nickels and dimes*:

Each minute, you perform two movements, a harder exercise and an easier one, back to back, with no rest between them. The harder movement is the nickel: five reps, because of the difficulty of the movement. The easier movement is the dime: ten reps, because the movement is less difficult than the nickel, so you should be able to do more reps.

A pull-up is more difficult than a bodyweight squat, so it's your nickel — five reps. A push-up is less difficult than a dip, so relative to its partner, it becomes the dime — ten reps. Pick one nickel-and-dime pair for the session and run it every single minute: nickel, then dime, back to back, no rest between them. Then whatever time remains in that minute is yours to recover, then you do both again at the top of the next minute, and so forth.

An example twenty minutes: minute one, five pull-

ups immediately followed by ten push-ups, then rest until the clock hits sixty seconds. Minute two, the same pair, the same order, again. Repeat that combination for twenty minutes.

Ladder Downs — hypertrophy.

The goal of a hypertrophy day is to build muscle. That's what hypertrophy means, and the gold standard for building it has always been lifting weights under bodybuilding principles.

I'm not interested in accomplishing that goal that way. I do, however, recognize that relative muscle mass matters for long-term health, not just aesthetics. Building meaningful muscle without a barbell comes down to one thing: getting enough volume, close to failure, using nothing but bodyweight.

The general fitness population assumes you can't build significant muscle without gym equipment. They're wrong. I'm not going to build an argument to prove it here — trust me, or don't. Either way, keep reading, because the method is what matters.

The most reliable way I've found to accumulate that

kind of volume with bodyweight alone is a rep scheme called Ladder Downs.

A ladder down starts with a moderately difficult number of reps for a single movement, rests thirty to sixty seconds, then drops one rep the next round. Rest again, drop another rep, and repeat until you reach one.

Example: twenty push-ups, rest thirty seconds, nineteen push-ups, rest thirty seconds, eighteen, and so on, all the way down.

If you can't start with ten or more reps on your first set of a given exercise, start with a regression instead — more on that below — so you're getting adequate volume for growth rather than grinding out three or four reps and calling it a day.

Keep your rest under sixty seconds. Thirty is better. The point is to keep the stimulus, the pump, and the fatigue high, because the entire session is built around a twenty-minute ceiling.

Once you can consistently start a ladder at twenty reps, it's time for a small progression, laid out below. Past that point, adding more reps will typically push you over twenty minutes — which is completely fine, if you have the time to spend.

Regressions.

If a movement isn't available to you yet, that's not a reason to skip it. It's a reason to meet it where you are.

Pull-ups — band-assisted or negative-only pull-ups if a full rep isn't there yet. If that's still too much: rows, TRX strap rows, dead hangs, flex holds, or band pulldowns.

Push-ups — incline or knee push-ups, using the same principle. Planks held for time work as a further step back.

Squats — partial-range squats, deepened gradually over weeks rather than days, box squats, chair squats, or assisted squats.

Split squats — the same approach: partial range, deepened over weeks, assisted as needed.

Dips — bench dips in place of parallel bar dips.

I'm not going to walk through every regression for every movement on this list. Again, that's what YouTube is for. Search the exercise name alongside the word "regression," and do the homework.

Either way, the standard movement never changes. Only your entry point does. Almost anyone can start here and go from zero to one within a few months. Many are capable of going from one to ten within a couple of years of consistency — not intensity, consistency.

Progressions.

Eventually, you'll outgrow the base version of most of these movements. When that happens, there are three ways to make a movement harder, in order of how much they actually matter.

Range of motion, first. A pull-up that travels from a dead hang to chin-over-bar is harder than one that doesn't, before anything else changes. The same is true of a full-depth squat compared to a partial one. There's a real case for training partial ranges deliberately, but for most people, full range of motion is the first thing worth chasing.

Tempo, second. Slow the eccentric — the lengthening phase — down to three or four seconds instead of one. The exact same movement becomes a harder one, with nothing added but time.

Added weight, last. A weighted vest, ankle weights, a weight belt, a loaded pack. Load is the final lever,

not the first one, and it only belongs in the conversation once your range of motion and tempo are honest.

Programming it yourself.

Everything so far has told you what the exercises are and how the two methods work. What it hasn't told you yet is how to actually build a session out of them, which movements to pair, and how to make sure nothing on your body gets neglected while everything else gets plenty of attention. That's worth learning properly, because a lifestyle implies you'll eventually be doing this on your own, long after any guide stops telling you what to do next.

The oldest, simplest lens for this is push, pull, legs. Nearly every meaningful movement your body makes falls into one of those three categories: pushing something away from you, pulling something toward you, or moving your own bodyweight through your legs and hips. A push-up or a dip is a push. A pull-up or row is a pull. A squat or a split squat is legs. Program with that lens running in the background, and you'll rarely find yourself neglecting a whole category by accident — no quiet month where your pulling strength falls behind because every session that month happened to lean push.

Apply it to the four-day week from earlier in this chapter. Across your two EMOM days and two Ladder Down days, make sure push, pull, and legs each show up at least twice.

A pull-up-and-push-up pairing on a Monday EMOM covers pull and push in the same twenty minutes; pairing bodyweight squats with dips on Thursday covers legs and push again, this time leaning the emphasis toward the lower body. Your two Ladder Down days can each anchor a single movement — a pull day, a push day — as long as the week, taken as a whole, has touched all three categories at least twice by the time it's over.

The essential list is built to make this almost foolproof on its own: one pull movement, one push movement, and one leg movements, covering all three categories without you needing to think hard about any of it. Once you start pulling from the recommended working list, keep applying the same lens. Hanging leg raises and ab rollouts are still pulls, loading the same muscles from a different angle. Pistol squats, Bulgarian split squats, and sissy squats are still legs, however different they feel under you. When you're deciding what to add next, ask which category needs it most — not which exercise looks the most interesting that week.

One more piece worth knowing: inside a single EMOM pairing, your nickel and your dime don't need to come from the same category. Some of the best pairings deliberately cross categories, such as a pull nickel with a push dime, or a leg nickel with a push dime, so that a single twenty-minute session ends up covering two categories at once instead of one. That's not a rule to memorize. It's just what starts happening naturally once you actually understand what you're balancing.

That's the entire skill. Not a spreadsheet, not a periodization chart. Just enough working knowledge of push, pull, and legs that you could build a sound week of training from a blank sheet of paper, with nothing but a bar and the floor, for the rest of your life.

An example week.

- Monday — EMOM: 5 pull-ups, 10 bodyweight squats, 20 minutes
- Tuesday — Ladder Downs: pike pushups, starting at 12 reps, 30 seconds rest between rounds
- Thursday — EMOM: 5 Navy SEALs burpees, 10 bodyweight squats, 20 minutes
- Friday — Ladder Downs: pull-ups, starting at 12 reps, 30 seconds rest between rounds

The point of all of it.

I didn't build this to impress you.

There's no version of this chapter where I convince you it's smarter than whatever you've tried before, because smarter was never the problem. What you tried before probably worked. It just wasn't built to last.

This is. One clock, a small handful of bodyweight movements, and one simple rule for pairing them — for as long as you're training, not just for as long as the plan lasts. Not because it's the most sophisticated system available, but because it's the one you can still be running at fifty-five, in a garage, with nothing but a bar and twenty minutes.

If you're just starting out, the goal is to make the intensity almost boringly incremental. Your mind will try to quit and burn out long before your body actually needs to. The last thing you want is to hand it a legitimate reason to quit by running your body into the ground first.

One advantage of training this way is how much room it leaves for how you actually want to feel while doing it.

Can you do more than eighty minutes a week? No — that would be breaking the rules. I'm joking, obviously. There are no rules here. Twenty minutes, four days a week, is the volume we've found sufficient to produce a real, visible shift in health and fitness, provided you're intentional and willing to increase intensity as your capacity grows.

What about the other three days? That's where your own life gets to show up. Add to your NEAT (more on that soon). Do some yoga. Roll on the mats. Take a hike. Play a set of handball. Take a pilates class. Climb something. Stretch, deliberately, for its own sake. Or add nothing at all. There are no rules here, either. This whole thing exists for you, for who you're becoming, for your capability, and what you want your life to look like when carrying that capability into it.

What if you miss a day? Who cares. Just don't quit. Pick it back up where you left off, or slide it into one of your usual off days. The only real failure here is quitting. This was never a challenge with an end date, and it was never a program with an expiration built into it. It's a lifelong standard. If it doesn't fit who you are, don't force it. And if you don't already have a lifelong approach to fitness and health, give this one six months without quitting.

Then come back and tell me if it didn't work.

How long do you run this?

Longer than feels natural at first. Be consistent for twelve weeks, minimum, on the same setup, meaning the same handful of movements, the same pairing, the same clock, before you change or cross out anything about what you're doing. Twelve weeks is not a random number. It's about how long it actually takes your body to stop treating a movement as new and start treating it as yours.

Inside those twelve weeks, progress doesn't come from swapping exercises. It comes from the levers already laid out above: more reps on the ladder, a slower tempo, a fuller range of motion, and eventually, once those are honest, some added load. You're not chasing variety. You're chasing depth on a small number of things, which is a different skill than most people in the fitness industry have ever asked of you.

Only once you've actually pushed a movement through those levers — once the reps, the range, and the tempo have nothing left to give — does it make

sense to bring in something new. That might mean pulling a movement off the recommended list to sit alongside your essentials. It might mean finally earning your way into something on the working list. Either way, the essentials never fully leave. Pull-ups, push-ups, squats, and stay in rotation in some form for as long as you're training. Everything else is seasoning, added once the foundation has actually been laid.

This is also where most people quietly sabotage themselves without realizing it. The itch to change something — a new split, a new pairing, a new exercise — almost always shows up before your twelve weeks are actually up, and almost never because the method stopped working. It shows up because staying the course is boring in a way *the machine* has trained you to be uncomfortable with. Ignore the itch. Finish the twelve weeks. Then, and only then, decide what's next.

Super secret pro tip:

If you're curious how much total volume a ladder down actually adds up to, there's a simple formula for it: $n(n+1)/2$, where n is the number you start your ladder at. Add every number from your starting rep count down to one, and that sum is your total reps for the movement that day.

CHAPTER 2

Take a ladder that starts at ten: ten reps, then nine, then eight, all the way down to one. Add them together and you get fifty-five total reps — exactly what the formula gives you, ten times eleven, divided by two. Start your ladder at twenty instead, and the same formula puts you at two hundred and ten total reps for that single movement, in a single twenty-minute session. That's the kind of volume this method is quietly built around, even on a day that looks deceptively simple on paper.

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CHAPTER THREE

EATING PRACTICE

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All of the same philosophy applies here. If none of it lines up with who you are or want to be, ignore all of it. There are no rules, not really, and I'll say that more than once before this guide is done.

I hesitate to even call this a diet, though that's exactly what it is. The word's just been bastardized. Modernity turned "diet" into something you go on; a six-week sprint, a challenge, a thing with a start date and an end date stitched into the name. That's not what this is. It's the same principle as everything else in this guide: not a program you finish, but a practice you keep for the rest of your life, not just for the next six weeks.

This isn't for everyone, and that's fine.

If you're trying to optimize every second of your day, this chapter probably isn't for you. The workouts in this guide start short on purpose — twenty minutes, as a standard, nothing more. The hard truth about the way we recommend eating is that you'll spend more time in the kitchen than you spend training. That's not a flaw in the system. That is the system. The kitchen shouldn't be an inconvenience to minimize. It's supposed to become a place you're comfortable in, like a sanctuary, if that word doesn't sound too soft for what it actually

means: somewhere you go, regularly, without dread. When I feel overwhelmed by life, screaming kids, exhaustion, and everything else, I retreat to the kitchen. Not to binge eat, but to cook something basic and delicious. At this point, it's therapy.

The method really doesn't matter. The food does.

Intermittent fasting, three meals a day, six small ones, one large one, an eating window — whatever. Pick a structure that fits your life. None of that is the point, and I'm not going to pretend one schedule is superior to another. Maybe one is, but I spent years trying to figure that out, and it made little difference in the end. The actual practice is simpler and far less negotiable than any of that:

Eat whole food. Cook your own meals. Almost never eat out.

If you genuinely can't cook, as in if you're a sixty-year-old bachelor or widower who never learned, you can still open a can of tuna, a can of lentils, a can of mixed vegetables, and use a microwave, in about five minutes. That's not a high bar. It's not hard. It's just unfamiliar to a lot of men who've outsourced every meal for decades. Get used to the kitchen again, or maybe for the first time. That discomfort goes away in a few weeks.

What that actually looks like.

As typical citizens of the Western world, we're obsessed with variety. We get bored easily, and the same is true of our diets. Everything has to taste like a gourmet meal. That's exactly why big food companies spend billions of dollars a year figuring out which chemicals hook your taste buds and your dopamine receptors. It's just another way *the machine* has gotten its hands on you. The reality is that until the last fifty or so years, food was largely unprocessed and unenhanced. I'm not going to go look up and report what the shift away from that has done for disease rates in this country. That information is public, easy to find, and you're capable of finding it yourself. I don't need it to know what it's done to me personally, let alone everyone else. I've battled plenty of addictions in my life. Food is not the exception.

To move in the other direction, and stay there long-term, you need to identify your own “why”. Mine is layered, but for context: everyone on my father's side of the family is diabetic, and several people on my mother's side experienced dramatic cognitive decline in their sixties, including dementia and bipolar disorder. I'm not telling you that eating the way I do will spare you from any disease —

I have no way of promising that, and neither does anyone else. I'm telling you why I eat this way. On top of that, I aim to eat in a way that makes me feel my best over the longest stretch of time possible, not just for the next twenty minutes. Chips, candy, pastries, donuts, and alcohol do make me feel good for the duration I'm eating them. But that feel-good feeling is short-lived, unless you keep medicating with more of it, which tends to work out badly for basically everyone involved. So how do you actually move past that kind of eating, for good?

A good “why” gets you started. What carries you the rest of the way is a real game plan, at least until this way of eating becomes second nature. To give you a starting point, here's a rough sketch of what's actually in my own eating practice. This isn't a comprehensive list, and I'm not suggesting you eat the exact same things. It's just meant to show you the category of food that will nourish you and help move you past the addictive style of eating most of us grew up on.

Plants: rice, potatoes, lentils, beans, carrots, cucumbers, avocados, melons, apples, bananas, berries.

Animals: eggs, beef, chicken, lamb, milk, yogurt, cheese, kefir, salmon, sardines, mackerel.

Yes, animal products belong here. But not the way social media sells them — not sixty-dollar ribeyes marketed as the only path to optimized health. That's social media theater. It isn't nutrition.

Oil: extra virgin olive oil, mostly as a condiment rather than a cooking medium; tallow, butter, used sparingly, for cooking.

Nuts: walnuts and pecans, used very sparingly — forty grams a day, max. They're a real source of healthy fat, not a snack food to graze on by the handful.

On protein: Probably not quite as much as you've been told.

The social media standard of one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight is, at best, unnecessary for almost everyone reading this. Somewhere between 0.6 and 0.7 grams per pound is a far more honest upper limit for building real, significant muscle. I'm not saying the higher number is dangerous. I'm saying you don't need it, and chasing it usually just crowds the plants off your plate that should be there instead.

Carbs, fats, and what they're actually for.

Carbs are fuel. Don't fear them, and don't worship them. Use them.

Healthy fats are for hormones. Olive oil, eggs, walnuts, and fatty fish are the fats that deserve the most real estate on your plate. Saturated fat isn't a villain, but it's also more overrated than the current wave of enthusiasm around it suggests. Moderation is still the correct policy, even when it isn't the trendy one.

No processed food. No seed oils. The short version of why: both drive inflammation, and inflammation is the thing standing between your body and the cellular repair it's trying to do every single day. You don't need a biochemistry lecture to act on that. You just need to leave both off your plate.

If you want to count — and you should learn how, even if you don't want to.

You don't need to count anything to see real, dramatic change from everything above. But if you want to get genuinely lean, which some people enjoy chasing, and which is entirely optional, counting will likely be necessary, considering how

poorly a modern, sedentary lifestyle is built to metabolize the calories most of us consume in a day.

Here's the extremely low-friction version I actually use:

1. Batch-cook a handful of whole, single-ingredient foods, in larger quantities, chosen so they pair well together across several meals.
2. Set one bowl on a kitchen scale and zero it out with the bowl still on the scale.
3. Add an item, weigh it, write it down on a notepad or white board, then tare the scale again with everything still sitting on it. Add the next item, weigh it, write it down, tare again, and repeat for everything in the meal.
4. Write each item's weight down as you go. I use a small whiteboard, so I'm not on my phone while I cook.
5. Once you're done weighing, plug the numbers into a basic tracking app — Journable, or anything similar — and you're finished.

That adds three to five minutes per meal. That's the entire cost. It takes very little time to become second nature, and it works.

For reference, I currently run 20% protein, 40% carbs, and 40% fat. At 2,500 calories a day, that's roughly 125 grams of protein, 250 grams of carbs, and 111 grams of fat. Your numbers will differ — everyone's do — but that's a real starting point, not a guess. Plenty of people will do better on a higher-carb, higher-protein, or higher-fat version of this, and that's fine. Almost any of those splits can work, because the outcome has less to do with the exact macros and more to do with total calories and the quality of the food supplying them.

A pro tip, bordering on a non-negotiable: no snacking between meals. This is where weighing your food does the most work, because it removes the guessing that snacking usually hides inside.

Common sense on fluids: drink water, consistently, and treat coffee and tea as the only real exceptions worth making. Drinking your calories is one of the dumbest, most avoidable habits a grown adult can still be carrying around, and almost every other bottled or canned thing on the shelf exists to keep you doing exactly that. Milk has its place for some people, in moderation.

One more pro tip, for the households running this together: batch cooking scales well for families.

When should I bulk? For most of you, you shouldn't.

Skip it. For almost everyone reading this, a dedicated bulk is a waste of the one resource you don't get back: time. Most men don't need a season of deliberate excess to build meaningful muscle. What you need is maintenance, most of the year, with occasional stretches of a modest deficit when you want to lean out, depending on where your body composition already sits. That's the entire cycle. No off-season. No dirty bulk. Just eating like an adult, consistently, with small adjustments when you actually want a different outcome.

The one exception is worth naming clearly. A bulk can make sense for someone who's genuinely skinny, meaning low body fat, low muscle, nothing to lose in the first place. That is not the same population as "skinny fat": a normal or even low bodyweight sitting on top of a higher body-fat percentage and very little muscle underneath it. If that's you, a bulk isn't your next step. Losing the fat is. Adding size on top of it first only buries the problem you're actually trying to solve.

The point.

None of this is complicated. It was never supposed to be. The complexity being sold to you — the ribeye worship, the gram-per-pound protein arms race, the supplement stack — isn't nutrition science. It's marketing wearing a lab coat. This is simpler, cheaper, and something you can actually still be doing at seventy, standing in your own kitchen, without anyone needing to sell it to you again.

It isn't nothing, either. It is discipline, and I won't pretend otherwise. But if your doctor told you that you needed to take a pill every day for the rest of your life, you'd learn to habituate that fast, and the novelty of it would wear off just as fast, until it became nothing more than a normal part of your day. That's how this should eventually feel. At no point should you feel the need to tell your coworkers about the amazing new diet you're trying. If that's your relationship to this philosophy, you've already lost the thread of it. It isn't a fad. It's just how you're supposed to eat.

Last thing I'll say: this is not a comprehensive nutrition guide, even though I happen to be a certified nutrition coach, whatever that actually means in practice. I'm sure something in here would get picked apart online by someone with a stronger opinion and more letters after their name. That's

fine. I'm not worried about you mastering the finer details of nutrition science. I'm applying the same principle here that I apply to fitness: less is more. You don't need a complex understanding. You need to eat like an adult, not like a middle schooler, unsupervised, with twenty dollars at a gas station.

Pro tip:

Develop some righteous anger at the food industry, at the franchise restaurants and the products engineered, quite deliberately, to keep people hooked and sick. That anger, aimed correctly, is fuel. Aimed at yourself, it's just more of the same weight to carry.

Dirty pro tip:

If you track your protein intake and your overall calories, you can basically get lean eating whatever you want. Though I advise against this.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PASSIVE CAPACITY BUILDING

AGAINSTTHEMACHINETRAINING.COM

What you do with the other twenty-three hours.

There's a term for this in the research: NEAT — Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. It covers every bit of movement your body does outside of a dedicated workout: walking to the mailbox, standing while you're on a call, carrying the groceries in two trips instead of asking someone to grab the door. None of it looks like training. All of it counts. For the rest of this chapter, I'll call it what it actually is: non-exercise movement.

Here's the part almost nobody tells you. Non-exercise movement matters more than your workout does, not marginally more, substantially more. A man who moves constantly through his day and never sets foot in a gym will often end up leaner, more metabolically healthy, and better in his own skin than a man who trains hard for thirty minutes and then sits still for the remaining twenty-three hours and thirty. This isn't a fringe opinion. It's the truth sitting underneath most of the noise the fitness industry generates.

It's tempting to frame that as some secret the industry doesn't want you to know. I won't, because that framing is itself part of *the machine* — the promise of a hidden lever, a trick nobody's telling

you about, dressed up to make an obvious truth feel like proprietary information worth paying for. There's no secret here. Non-exercise movement isn't a hack. It's simply what a body is supposed to do for most of its waking hours, and it only stopped feeling obvious because modern life engineered it out of us and then sold the fix back piecemeal; a standing desk here, a fitness tracker there, a walking pad under an office desk, each one marketed like a discovery. Against the Machine Training doesn't deal in discoveries. This chapter isn't unlocking anything. It's naming what your grandfather's generation did without ever thinking twice about it.

The giants of this philosophy.

Remember the man from the introduction — seventy-plus, not big, not built up in the Instagram sense, just dense? Visible veins running through his forearms and biceps. Lean in a way that reads as earned rather than manufactured. He's never set foot in a gym, remember, at least not since high school. He gardens. He carries heavy bags of whatever the day requires. He pries apart machinery that's seized up and won't move for anyone else. He's on his feet from sunup to well past dinner, most days, without ever once calling it exercise.

That man is an institution here.

He isn't the soft, flush-necked, chemically inflated, 40+ physique the modern fitness industry now holds up as the aspiration — the one that needs a boutique gym membership, a supplement stack, and increasingly, something in a vial just to maintain itself. He never needed any of it. He built and kept his body the way bodies were built and kept for most of human history: by living a life that required movement, not by scheduling a couple of hours to make up for a day that didn't.

That's the actual pinnacle, by this standard. Not the biggest man in the room. The one still fully capable of using his own body, decades after everyone else around him quietly stopped.

Active versus passive capacity building.

This is a distinction worth keeping in your head for the rest of your life. Some movement is active capacity building. It's deliberate and intentional, it's the twenty minutes, four times a week, from Chapter 2. Everything else is passive capacity building. It's movement that happens because your day, or your own enjoyment, demands it, not because you scheduled it.

Walking, gardening, commuting, yard work,

playing, hauling something heavy because it needed hauling doesn't count as training in the intentional sense, and that's exactly why it counts as passive. You weren't building capacity on purpose. You were just living in a way that happened to require it. Both matter. But passive capacity building is the one almost everyone in modern life has let disappear entirely, and it's the one with the most room left to reclaim.

A baseline, not a standard.

Nobody hands out medals for non-exercise movement, so there's no rigid number to chase here. A few honest reference points, though:

- 7,000 steps a day is a solid baseline for most people.
- 20,000 is phenomenal, and increasingly rare in modern life.
- Manual labor, gardening, and house projects that keep you moving into the evening carry as much value as anything else in this guide.
- Playing a sport for an hour counts too, not as exercise, but as play, and play moves the body just the same.

The rule for a sedentary job.

If your work keeps you sitting most of the day, here's the actual target: more hours of movement than rest, inside your working day. In an eight-hour day, aim to be moving in some form during four of those hours. That number sounds aggressive until you see how low the bar actually is for what counts. Things such as a foot bike under the desk, heel drops during a call, grip work with a stress ball or a hand gripper, standing up and moving for a minute or two every time you'd otherwise sit through another hour undisturbed, all counts.

For most people reading this, this will be the hardest single piece of the philosophy to actually adopt, not because it's physically demanding, but because we've collectively lost the ability to notice how little we move in a given day. It doesn't feel sedentary from the inside. It just feels like a normal Tuesday.

Say it as many times as it takes to stick: this is likely to matter more for your long-term health than anything else in this guide, including the twenty minutes in Chapter 2.

This is recent, and it's reversible.

As a species, we've only been this sedentary for the last fifty or sixty years — a rounding error against

the entire span of human history. Before that, capability wasn't something you trained for. It was just what living required.

That capacity didn't disappear because human bodies changed. It disappeared because modern life stopped demanding it, and *the machine* had every reason to let that happen quietly. A body that already moves enough on its own doesn't need a membership, a subscription, or a shelf of products promising to compensate for a day spent sitting. Stillness is good for that business model.

Convenience sells better once the body it's being sold to has already gone soft enough to need rescuing. None of it happened by grand design. Even if no single person planned it out, it's simply the direction any industry built on dependency will drift toward, given enough time and no resistance.

That capacity is still in you. It's just been sitting unused.

Time to take it back.

Pro tip:

Be a little weird about stretching. Not the perfunctory, thirty-second hamstring pull on your

way out the door, actual, unhurried mobility work, done often enough that it stops being a warm-up and becomes a practice of its own. Sit in a deep squat while you scroll your phone instead of taking a chair. Hang from a bar for a minute most days, just to let your shoulders and spine remember what decompression feels like. Stretch on the floor in the evening while you watch something, the way a kid does without giving it a second thought. Nobody's going to see most of this, and that's exactly the point. It isn't for an audience. A body that moves well through the other twenty-three hours needs a spine and a set of joints capable of supporting that movement, and stretching is the maintenance nobody ever puts on a highlight reel.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ARCHITECTURE OF IDENTITY

LONGWAY TRAINING CO.

The structure nobody sees you building.

Here's something I'll admit to you directly, because there's no honest version of this chapter without it: this is the part I've failed at more than any other. I've believed in every piece of what came before this chapter — the twenty-minute workouts, the whole-food eating practice, counting calories when it actually mattered, the movement through the other twenty-three hours. I've done all of it, for short stretches. And still, I've quit more times than I can remember. Not because the philosophy was wrong, but because I hadn't yet understood that lifelong fitness isn't a plan you follow. It's a discipline you carry, every day, including the days you don't want to.

That sounds almost too simple to justify a whole chapter. It isn't. Nobody except a masochist genuinely enjoys discomfort, day after day, forever, and even they're lying to themselves about it, somewhere underneath. Nobody wakes up thrilled about the four hundredth rendition of the same twenty minutes. The workouts, the food, the movement — none of it is designed to feel exciting once the novelty wears off, because novelty was never the point. Repetition is. And repetition, by its nature, gets boring long before it stops working.

Here's the part that matters more than the boredom, though: the majority of a lifestyle like this eventually runs on autopilot. You stop noticing you're doing it. That's the actual goal underneath everything in this guide. I want to be honest about what that does and doesn't mean — you're never going to reach a point where you genuinely forget you're doing pull-ups on a Tuesday morning. That's not the claim. What happens instead is that the dread thins out, session by session, until the thing becomes something you simply cannot not do. For me, the closest comparison is flossing. I didn't floss growing up, and barely touched it through my early twenties. When I did, it was painful, and my gums bled every time. Then a bad dentist damaged the tissue between two of my teeth, and for close to nine months the whole area stayed inflamed and sore. My wife told me the pain would go away if I actually flossed that spot properly. It sounded brutal. I did it anyway, and within a week, the pain and the bleeding were both gone. I haven't missed a day of flossing in seven years. If I'm honest, I probably do it two or three times a day now. I don't think about whether to do it anymore. I think about it, and I do it, without resistance. That's what we're actually after here. But nobody starts there.

Where people actually break.

There are two different failure points hiding inside this, and it's worth naming both honestly rather than picking the tidier story.

Some people never make it past the first attempt. They get genuinely excited, do one workout, and never come back. It's not because the philosophy failed them, but because the experience hadn't been repeated enough times yet to mean anything other than discomfort. The mind doesn't file away that first session by its actual cost, twenty honest minutes. It files it away by what it felt like in the moment: unfamiliar, uncomfortable, maybe even a little humiliating if the body couldn't do what the mind expected of it. Left alone with nothing to counterbalance that, unoccupied and replaying the day, the brain tends to hold onto the sting of it far more vividly than whatever came after — the meal, the shower, the quiet satisfaction of having actually shown up. That's not a character flaw. That's just how memory weighs a single, unrepeated data point. It takes more than one rep to outvote it.

Other people get further than that, and it's the sameness that eventually gets them, not the difficulty. Twenty minutes is nothing. Most people could physically manage that indefinitely, and the workout itself was never the real obstacle. What ends it is the boredom, the total absence of a finish line to look forward to, the fact that modern

life has trained all of us to expect stimulation and visible progress on a schedule, and this philosophy offers almost none of that by design. It offers a pull-up bar, a plate of real food, and a Tuesday that looks exactly like last Tuesday. For a lot of people, that flatness is a harder thing to sit with than the actual physical effort ever was.

If you can't hold that discomfort, the drudgery, the repetition, the uneventful sameness of doing the same right thing over and over without applause, no amount of belief in this philosophy will get you to the version of yourself this guide is actually pointing toward. Belief gets you started. It has never once, in anyone's life, been what keeps a person going for thirty years.

What actually keeps you going.

Here's the piece that changed it for me. You don't become disciplined by deciding to be disciplined, the way you'd flip a switch. You become disciplined the same way you become anything at all, by accumulating small proof of it, one action at a time, until the identity is simply true because of the evidence you've built.

This is worth sitting with longer than a single paragraph, because it's the actual engine of the whole guide. Most people have the causality backwards. They assume identity comes first; that you become a disciplined person, and then disciplined actions follow naturally from that new self-image, the way water follows a slope. It runs the other direction almost entirely. You watch yourself show up on a day you didn't want to, and some quiet, observant part of you takes note. You watch yourself cook the meal instead of ordering it, again, and the note gets a little harder to ignore. There's a name for this in the research on how people come to know their own minds: when your internal state is ambiguous, when you genuinely don't know yet whether you're a disciplined person or just someone having a good week, you infer the answer from your own behavior, the same way you'd infer it about a stranger. You watch what you do, and you draw the obvious conclusion. Identity, in other words, isn't a belief you install first and then act from. It's a verdict your own mind reaches after enough evidence has accumulated to make any other verdict feel dishonest. That's not a metaphor. That's closer to how self-knowledge actually gets built, one witnessed action at a time, whether the subject under observation is someone else or yourself.

To put it plainly, every time you show up for the twenty minutes on a day you didn't want to, you're not just training your body. You're casting a vote for who you actually are. Every meal you cook instead of ordering, every set of heel drops at your desk you didn't skip, each one is a small, almost invisible piece of evidence, filed away by the same part of you that would notice and judge that pattern in anyone else. This is identity architecture: not a metaphor for discipline, but the literal, brick-by-brick process by which a self gets built out of what it's actually witnessed itself do. Stack enough of that evidence and you stop needing to convince yourself you're the kind of person who does this. You just are that person, because you've done it enough times that there's no longer an honest argument to be had against it.

Here's the most practical version of that, for the days resistance actually shows up. When you don't want to do it, and you won't, plenty of days, the answer isn't to grit your teeth and force the hardest version of the effort. It's to find the smallest, shortest, easiest version of the same action, and do that instead. One set instead of four. Five minutes instead of twenty. A single pull-up. The evidence doesn't care how big the vote was. It only cares that the vote got cast. A small action taken is worth infinitely more than a large one you talked yourself

out of, because identity is built from what you actually did, not from what you would have done if conditions had been better.

That's the actual mechanism underneath everything in this guide. Not motivation, because motivation is unreliable by design, here today and gone tomorrow, dependent on how well you slept and what kind of day you had. Identity, built one small action at a time, is the only thing steady enough to survive fifty years of Tuesdays.

The whole standard, together.

Everything in this guide is one philosophy wearing different sets of clothes.

Chapter one told you the actual problem: *the machine*. It's the mainstream fitness culture, optimization culture, and the bourgeois consumption dressed up as health, working against you in nearly every direction at once. The truth is a body that stays capable for decades on almost nothing is a body that never needs to buy anything again. That chapter also told you the other half of the same truth: living a long life in genuinely strong, capable condition isn't some rare achievement reserved for the disciplined few. It's actually simple, closer to the default setting for a human body than

the exception, once you stop paying for complexity you never needed in the first place.

Chapter two gave you the actual method: twenty minutes, four days a week, built around a small handful of movements, one clock, and one simple rule for pairing them — a framework plain enough that you could still be running it at sixty-five, in a garage, without anyone having to remind you how.

Chapter three gave you the eating practice: whole food, cooked mostly by your own hand, judged by what's actually on the plate rather than by a diet's start date or its finish line, built to be run for the rest of your life instead of finished and abandoned like every program before it.

Chapter four gave you the piece almost nobody talks about — NEAT – non-exercise activity thermogenesis, the movement scattered through the other twenty-three hours of your day that has nothing to do with a workout and everything to do with how your body actually feels. It carried the quiet, uncomfortable truth that how you move through an ordinary Tuesday matters more, over a lifetime, than how hard you trained for twenty minutes of it.

And this chapter, the last one, is the thing that actually holds the other four together over decades instead of months. Not motivation. Not belief, even, on its own; belief is only ever the ignition, never the engine. Just the discipline to keep casting the same small vote, day after unremarkable day, until you're no longer someone trying to become the person you want to be.

You already are that person. You just have to keep proving it.

You've just read Capable. Defiant. Free. Now decide what you do with it. Most people file this away and change nothing. A few will build the practice on their own, using what's here.

However, many are interested in doing this with the support of a professional coach. If that's you, I take on a small number of qualified individuals for 1:1 coaching every few months. It's not a program. It's a partnership with an expert in the fields of health and behavior psychology and fitness, and a mentorship towards a deeper understanding and practice with what is presented here. You will do the work, and I will guarantee you the results.

.
Apply here — spots are very limited.

Capable, defiant, free.
— Erik