

Working through pain to achieve success

FOR THE PAST NINE YEARS, I have been an independent, small business owner here in Bozeman focusing on fitness and the muscular system. It has been a wild ride beginning in 2006, when I opened Fluid Motion Golf and Fitness. Opening a golf-specific training center in Bozeman with state-of-the-art equipment was a bold move. At that time there were no comparable facilities anywhere outside of a major city. For the first year or so, business was great. I was booked with clients all the time, I had two people working for me, word of mouth was spreading and everything seemed easy. I love the game of golf, and getting paid to help people play and feel better was a dream come true. Reality hit hard when the markets crashed in 2008 and I was forced to relocate to a much smaller facility and sell all of my launch monitors (electronic devices that measure different aspects of golf swings), 3D analysis equipment and even some of my exercise equipment just to keep my business alive. Like many, I had to put my head down and try to keep my business alive with a limited amount of resources.

Around that time, I encountered another problem that had a profound impact on my career. My left hip and back were becoming increasingly irritated. Gone were the days of being able to play golf and exercise without pain. I started masking the problem with anti-inflammatory drugs, but by 2010 I had a major problem. Things had gotten so bad that I couldn't play golf at all. I could not even bunt a 9-iron. I was devastated — plagued by the very problems I spent my days fixing in my clients.

I sought the help of just about every type of healing modality out there. The recurring message I heard was that my muscles were tight. I was told repeatedly that if I could just eradicate this tightness, my pain would be relieved. This seemed to make perfect sense, but unfortunately things were getting worse. I eventually reached the point where I could not function, and after a while nothing made sense to me any more. I had no idea what was going on with my body and felt increasing guilt and lack of confidence as a personal trainer. I kept asking myself how I could charge



ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

Chris Ross, owner of Fluid Motion in Bozeman, helps his clients improve in their overall function and well-being using a holistic view of the body.

people for personal training when I could not even help myself. I couldn't even come close to a weight room, and I figured I had no business working with clients with the shape I was in.

My last hope was that I had some clients who were having great success with local physical therapist Ryan Johnson and the assessment and treatment tool he was using: Muscle Activation Techniques (MAT). I had no idea what MAT was, but I had run out of options. In my first session, I didn't know what to expect or what was happening in my body. However, after a short period, I could tell immediately it was a different process. For 90 minutes, Ryan took a complete inventory of my body and assessed all my joint range of motions. I was astonished that he actually understood every possible muscle in my body that might be affected by range of motion asymmetries. To my surprise, when I asked which muscles were tight, I received a completely different response than I had from any other practitioner. He was more concerned with the muscles that were inhibited and weak. What I came to discover is that if a muscle cannot efficiently contract, the limb or joint will not be able to generate enough force to move. Although this may give the appearance of muscle tightness, muscle weakness is often the primary problem. I couldn't believe that not one person in all my schooling had ever demonstrated this to me.

After a few treatments, I was finally showing some improvement. I was blown away and knew that I had to become a MAT Specialist. Becoming a MAT Specialist is no small commitment. Specialists must complete a vigorous 10-month internship in Denver with a two-day exam. Although a long bumpy road, things fell back into place for me during the yearlong process of the internship. I was slowly feeling more like myself again. I felt more confident and passionate about my work and helping my clients. I started to see results with my clients that I had never before experienced. I was feeling better physically.

During my internship in Denver, I met Tom Purvis, a physical therapist from Oklahoma City. Immediately, I realized I had even more to learn about exercise and biomechanics. At that time, I had not been able to exercise in a couple of years. I had so many questions about the injuries I always seemed to sustain while working out. Upon completion of my MAT training, I was off to Oklahoma City for another six-month internship. Completing those two internships were the best personal and business decisions I have ever made. The skills that I learned have proven invaluable, and I am now able to ski, golf and hike without any pain.

I feel so lucky that all these things happened the way they did. I would have never believed it when I was going through it, but now on the other side, I am incredibly grateful for what I have experienced. My body feels better than it ever has, I have a more targeted, simplified business plan and I am in a much better position to help my clients having experienced the way that MAT and proper resistance training can address muscular dysfunction. The market crash, almost losing my business, the injuries: all of these things taught me invaluable lessons about myself, what's important and how to run a business. My business is as near to recession proof as possible, and most importantly I have discovered a way to enjoy my favorite physical pursuits while helping my clients do the same.

Chris Ross is the owner of Fluid Motion, a physical therapy business located in Bozeman.