The Manual Labor Work Out

Part II

I’ll never forget the days or times when I’ve seen guys who are strong as an Ox all from doing manual labor type work. These guys don’t lift “weights” like we normally do (or used to until The Underground converted us!), they lift stones, wheel barrows, sandbags, sledge hammers, bricks, cinder blocks and more!

I have had a mason working on my house the past week, he is almost 60 and he works circles around his 25 year old son and the other workers. I watched him dig out a 3 ft. ditch that must have been 12 - 15 ft. long! The heat at this time was hitting near 100 degrees with nasty NJ humidity!! He was sweating bullets but never stopped his endless overhead swings, digging the dirt out through the brutal sun and heat. These swings went on for a few hours, not a few minutes! I kid you not I just couldn’t believe how this man kept on chopping away through the dirt and the roots that had be removed for the wall to be created!

When I started doing sledge hammer swings with a 10 lb. hammer I was busted up after a few minutes. This sledge was 20 lbs and this MAN weighed around 150 lbs if that! Talk about work capacity!
Above, one of the workers who helped pave the driveway was JACKED!

Above, a lumberjack chops through wood at a furious pace!

Is there any secret as to why kids who grow up on farms are strong as all heck? No secret at all. Bailing hay and performing manual labor for years on end has given them what some people term as “real man” strength.
If you want to step up your conditioning and overall GPP, you have to go beyond normal “in the gym” activities and movements. Athletes, especially combat athletes will benefit from this style of training. Another very important factor with manual labor is that it always requires a rotational component. Rotation is often neglected through traditional strength training yet it is a highly prominent movement during all athletic events!

The jacked up paver pictured above was a monster! He saw my Underground garage gym and we chatted for a bit. He told me when he started working for the business he was too
tired to hit the gym. So he started lifting stones and slabs of cement when they pulled up drive ways. He pushed the wheel barrows around and raked the cement. He told me that at first he really missed the gym, but after a few weeks he got much stronger in his lifts such as dead lifting and overhead pressing. He also mentioned how he lost some unnecessary weight he was carrying through all his bodybuilding training which didn’t help him much at his job.

Above, a BIG contractor overlooks the workers and does some “training” himself while my old drive way gets pulled up.

He was embarrassed when these 150 lb. light weight workers ran circles around him pushing wheel barrows and lifting slabs of cement and stones that weight almost as much as they did. So he figured he would just work out while at work!

Here’s another story for you. His name is Tony, and he drives this old pick up truck from the 1950’s. He is a welder and for extra cash he hauls away large garbage that can’t be
picked up by the township. With all the work done to our house Tony had to cruise over every 2 weeks at least. Big Tony reminded me of Steve Justa, author of “Rock, Iron, Steel”. On one occasion I had loaded up about 20 contractor bags with sheet rock and other garbage. They were pretty heavy, a good 75 lbs. or so, and Tony stood in the bed of his truck while I lifted them up and he grabbed them and situated them in the truck. I would grab and lift each bag with two hands and Tony would casually grab each bag with one hand while he casually spoke with me as if we were having coffee. The shocker was he was so busy talking that at one point he was holding two bags at once with out even flinching. Even freakier, Tony held one bag with a straight arm and just kept on rambling and didn’t flinch a bit with his arm locked out. This motivated me to get my ass in gear and start training with more odd objects!

This is exactly why Tony was so strong. For endless years he has been lifting odd objects while at work. Carrying large steel beams, lifting, carrying and throwing heavy garbage bags. Some other odd objects that Tony would have to haul away would be automobile engine parts, kitchen and bath appliances and old wood. Did Tony ever do traditional weight training? I doubt it. He was hauling away heavy loads and welding since he was 16. He already was “lifting weights.”

What else do these strong men do that resembles what we can use? Have you ever seen them laying bricks and stones on a platform? They carry around buckets of cement and stroll around on a board that is 4 – 6” wide carrying buckets of cement in each hand! Here you have balance and strength working together.

The higher up they go they eventually begin tying rope to the buckets of cement and rope to bundles of brick. This is where they get those strong forearms from. They pull on heavy weights hand over hand for hours on end! How can you resemble this training? Get a 30 – 50 ft. rope and tie it to your tire, sled or kettlebells and perform hand over hand pulls until the weight reaches your feet. That equals one rep, repeat for 10 reps minimum or for extended time periods.

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Or, take this idea that I snagged from Tony Reynold of www.PSSAthletics.com – he sits down and throws a rope over a pull up bar, the rope is tied to a bunch of Olympic plates, he then pulls hand over hand until the weights get close to the ground, then lowers the weights in hand over hand fashion.

You can do this at a park where the money bars are, or in your own gym, or over a tree branch somewhere. The most difficult version is to get a rope and choke it around a heavy duty branch. I have my wrestlers perform these rope climbs up to 3 x week. They go up once using a hand over hand fashion, and come down hand over hand (no sliding or jumping off).
Sunny or not, we get our asses outdoors and train!
Let’s get the Manual Labor II Work Out Rolling mixed in with some traditional training:

1) sledge hammer Over Head swings x 50, side swings x 25 L / R
2A) Rope climb x 1 ascent x 4 sets
2B) carry and squat with log or sandbag x 4 sets – walk 30 – 40 ft, squat 3 – 5 reps, walk back and squat another 3 – 5 reps
3) 45 lb Plate relay: take all the 45’s you have and pile them in one spot. Pick one or two at a time, jog them to the end line 40 ft away, keep going until all your plates are piled at the finish line. Repeat this work for 5 minutes non stop. No plates? Grab stones, logs or anything else you can pick up and run with!
4) Farmer walks with Trap Bar! Three sets until fatigue – push to your max, pick that bar up and haul ass!
5) Finisher: 5 minutes of barbell power clean, 5 reps per set using approx. 65 % of your bodyweight. Do as many sets of 5 as possible in these last 5 minutes!

This work out oughtta thoroughly kick your ass! And remember, manual labor type work outs are not just for athletes, this style of training works wonders on individuals who want to improve their overall fitness, burn fat and build muscle. It works big time because you are using full body lifts all the time.
Above, my Dad, almost 60 trains Underground in the back yard!

This is the real functional training! Now get out there and get your hands dirty and test your physical and mental fortitude!

For more information on Zach’s hardcore training methods visit www.UndergroundStrengthCoach.com – You’ll find endless articles on hard core strength & conditioning and an active forum where you can exchange ideas and learn endless training information!