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Just One Rep: The Powerful Passion of Alex Leonidas

How do you motivate an audience of young aspiring lifters and bodybuilders, and calisthenics athletes to push themselves past perceived limitations to become top athletes? Well Alex Leonidas seems to have the formula figured out. He has a demeanor that can only be described as “spartan-like”, with a no bs attitude towards lifting and hypertrophy. He doesn’t share his personal life on social media, but he has videos dating back to nearly a decade ago, with his lifting career being much older than even that. He started out doing calisthenics, a discipline involving exercises with your own bodyweight, and accomplished great feats of strength including one arm pull ups, a nearly 10 second front lever, and over 200 pounds of added weight on the dip (Leonidas). He then transitioned to bodybuilding, where he achieved even more, including a 400-pound bench press and 500-pound squat. He leverages these attainments, and the fact that he’s a natural lifter, in his videos, where he uses his powerful and commanding voice to guide and inspire an audience of fellow natural lifters to achieve greatness. He isn’t always the most genial in his speeches, often having a “snap back to reality” tone in his videos, an approach which some see as unnecessary and overly critical. However, despite the harsh expression Alex Leonidas uses in his videos, the qualities of speech he exhibits in his videos lead him to effectively motivate a community of lifting, bodybuilding, calisthenics, and general fitness enthusiasts.

In his video “The Power Of Adding ONE REP!”, Leonidas makes the argument that adding one rep on an exercise is actually major progress that should be something to be celebrated and not disappointed in. Speaking in 2023, during a time where social media dominates the content landscape and misinformation is prevalent, Leonidas makes an attempt to bring his audience “back to reality”, to suggest that something seen as miniscule in the modern era of fitness, is a sign of great progression. Leonidas sets up his main premise, which is essentially a restatement of the title, followed by a description of a scenario, an anecdote of sorts. The scenario he describes is as follows, “You see many beginners get used to adding multiple reps a week so when they gain some experience then suddenly knows a drop off in progression, they often become impatient since for the last one to two years they were experiencing the complete opposite, rapid, predictable PRs as practically every session now they find themselves lifting the same weights for several weeks in a row.” (“The Power Of Adding ONE REP!”, 0:00-0:25). He knows who his audience is, they’re the lifters who are in the intermediate phase, the ones who can’t identify with the plethora of beginner lifting advice that already exists but aren’t at the level where they have professional coaches telling them what the right move is. Leonidas leverages this to appeal to their pathos, offering up a scenario that they most likely found themselves in before, making the audience feel heard. With this simple opening, he has already captured the attention of an audience that often gets missed out in the modern era of fitness culture. Continuing the aspect of the audience, Leonidas does something that is really a signature move for him, addressing them directly. About halfway through his video, he directly addresses his audience stating, “If it's the minority of exercises, you must have faith in the system, you can't be discouraged or selectively choose what you want to accelerate on a non-specialized program, it's just how it is.” (“The Power Of Adding ONE REP!”, 7:51-8:02).

Leonidas argues that even if not all exercises are gaining in volume, one must trust that eventually, they will start to gain. This is the most motivating part of the video, when he directly addresses the audience using the word “you” 3 times within 11 seconds. When the audience is directly addressed, they feel lectured, spoken too, and it individualizes the speech. It’s no longer a general statement, but a call to action. It seamlessly blends into his purpose, to convince his audience of intermediate lifters to trust in their training and celebrate seemingly miniscule progress. “You can’t be discouraged,” “you must have faith,” these statements serve as demands, giving his audience no other choice than accepting his argument.

Although Leonidas uses pathos-oriented tactics to effectively convince his audience, one may say that if he were to be an average person, the message, no matter how well delivered, would not come across. So why is Leonidas a credible source of information on this specific topic? Well, there are 2 main elements to his credibility. One element is his anecdotal experience with the issue he describes in the video. With the video being about stalling or minimal progress, only being able to add a rep to an exercise after a week or multiple weeks of training, Leonidas shares his experience with the same issue, saying, “It took me exactly one month or around eight workouts or so to add a single repetition so on a normal day I get nine reps and on a bad day eight reps ... until one day I magically added that final rep” (“The Power Of Adding ONE REP!”, 4:19-4:33). Leonidas shares a real experience that he had directly relating to the topic of his speech, showing that he knows what it feels like to be stuck on a weight for an extended period. It's an appeal to ethos, showing the audience that he is a credible speaker that can walk the walk and talk the talk. A common phrase when trying to convince others to empathize with another party is “put yourself in their shoes”, and Leonidas has effectively done that in a nearly literal sense which serves as a combination of appealing to ethos and pathos, empathizing with

the audience. On the other side of Leonidas' credibility, there are the achievements that he has made. As mentioned earlier, Leonidas achieved incredible feats of strength and continues to achieve incredible feats of strength. His physique is what much of his audience aspires to attain over the course of their lifting career. A person who can show and tell is perceived as much more trustworthy than a person who can just tell.

And while achievements and empathy are an aspect of being trustworthy, having a logical basis for an argument is also a key element. Leonidas, although not very associated with the more scientific lifting community, does use evidence to back up the claims that he makes. A good example of this is where Leonidas says, "Progressive overload doesn't need to be forced it's actually evidence that hypertrophy has already taken place ... the primary way your numbers will increase is by gaining lean muscle tissue" ("The Power Of Adding ONE REP!", 1:15-1:29). Using an appeal to logos here, Leonidas argues that any gain in repetitions of an exercise is an increase in muscle mass, and more importantly, that adding repetitions is not a driver of muscle growth but a result of it. It adds to his argument that adding even one repetition is significant as most of his younger audience of moderately experienced or inexperienced lifters run under the assumption that repetitions must be forced in order to gain muscle. Within that statement, Leonidas works off conclusions that have been supported many times in research studies, so while it is not a direct reference, the statement utilizes widely understood concepts to make the argument. A more direct example of logical reasoning however, can be seen in another part of the speech where Leonidas uses real numbers to support his argument in the statement, "It took me exactly one month or around eight workouts or so to add a single repetition ... some might think that's terrible progress but when you plug those numbers into a max calculator, you'll see that's the difference between a 405 bench and 420"(The Power Of Adding ONE REP!,

4:19-4:51). This example uses more of a quantitative approach to support Leonidas' argument, using the example of plugging 315 for 9 into a 1 repetition maximum calculator and 315 for 10 into a 1 repetition maximum calculator, showing the 15-pound difference that it makes in the 1 repetition maximum. Leonidas uses an appeal to logos by using actual data and how that data supports the claim that 1 repetition is significant progress towards strength goals.

Despite the techniques Leonidas uses in his video, there are some aspects that hold it back in terms of his demeanor specifically. Showcasing this is a statement that is as follows: "In this case by definition you're not experiencing a plateau you're just being unrealistically ungrateful" ("The Power Of Adding ONE REP!", 6:35-6:40). This serves to demean the audience in a way, an audience that likely doesn't know much better and is going to the video to gain information and a new insight into lifting. Leonidas focuses much of his speech on relating to his audience of intermediate lifters with only 3-5 years of experience, that this feels like a major misstep, because the audience doesn't have the experience to know what a plateau really is. It is an example of Leonidas overstepping and losing the empathy he had for the audience.

Alex Leonidas is a man who achieved greatness and want to help others do the same. Although he is often harsh in his delivery, he makes use of his discontentment to deliver powerful messages to young intermediate lifters. "The Power Of Adding ONE REP!" is a showcase of his best abilities, his connection to the audience, his empathetic approach to sending a message, and using logic alongside real world scenarios to erase any doubt in his trustworthiness.

Overall, I liked writing this essay. I think it came out easily especially since it was about someone I regularly watch and enjoy. This is also much more formal than the last essay, and in more of an argumentative style. I'm pretty comfortable writing this way which meant I could focus on the smaller details like transition and word choice since I was very comfortable with the overall structure. The only real hard part was the conclusion, and it wasn't too hard but in general wrapping up an essay always takes more thought than the essay itself.

Works Cited

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