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HOW I MADE IT: TONY HORTON

Personal trainer to masses

STUART PFEIFER

The gig: A longtime personal trainer and nutrition expert, Tony Horton is the face of the hugely successful P90X fitness video series, which has sold more than 3.5 million copies. The 53-year-old Horton has the body of a professional athlete and a background in theater that makes him a natural on camera. In addition to P90X and sequel P90X2, Horton has been featured in a host of fitness videos: "Power 90," "One on One with Tony Horton," "10 Minute Trainer" and "Power Half Hour," to name a few. All told, Horton's videos have more than \$500 million in sales.

The beginning: As a child, Horton struggled with a speech impediment and was not much of an athlete. "I used to get beat up at the bus stop. I was always the last kid picked for teams," he said. At the University of Rhode Island, Horton studied theater in hopes it would improve his speech. He also took a weightlifting class, which inspired a decades-long dedication to fitness. "I was a scrawny little kid with a belly before that," he said.

A road trip: In 1980, while just a few classes short of graduating from college, Horton decided to join a friend on a cross-country road trip to Hermosa Beach. He took an immediate liking to Southern California, which has been his home ever since. "I guess it was a 30-year summer," he said. In the early years, Horton made money performing mime, doing carpentry, waiting tables, acting in commercials and modeling. Money was tight. "We'd walk through alleys to find furniture. We'd go to the Goodwill to buy sheets," he said. "We were in California and it was gorgeous." After a couple of years, he joined a gym and started employing techniques he'd learned in his college weightlifting class.



JAY L. CLENDEREN/LOS ANGELES TIMES

TONY HORTON, demonstrating a workout from his P90X fitness video series, says he was a "scrawny little kid" until he started lifting weights in college.

The turning point: Horton's muscular build caught the attention of music talent manager Harlan Goodman, who asked Horton to start training him. One of Goodman's clients called Horton at home one day. "It's Tom Petty," the caller said. Horton hung up, suspecting a prank. The phone rang again. "It's really Tom Petty," the gravelly voice said. "I'm going on tour and I want you to train me." His work with Petty led to training gigs with other celebrities: Bruce Springsteen, Billy Idol, Usher. He said he thought the rockers took a liking to him because he was gentler and more thoughtful than other trainers. "I wasn't a meathead. I wasn't a tough guy. We could talk about other things," he said.

Why P90X works: The videos allow people to exercise in their living rooms at a comfortable pace. The routines are fairly simple: push-ups, sit-ups, aerobics, yoga, karate, light weights. But the concept is unique. The

idea, Horton said, is variety. "People get bored if they're doing the same thing day after day. They won't stick with it," he said.

Why the United States has an obesity problem: "You have the fast-food companies. They made fat, sugar, salt and chemicals taste so good... People have gotten lazy. They're not moving. They've cut fitness programs out of school." He's no fan of weight-loss surgery, which he sees advertised on freeway billboards throughout Southern California. "It's a travesty," he said. "It's people not willing to do the work to create the change."

Nutrition first: Horton advocates a diet rich in fruit, vegetables, whole grain, lean meat and spices to make it all taste good.

"The real issue is not lack of exercise. It's poor eating habits. Your mouth ultimately causes the problem, and it's also the solution," he said. "The one thing about

P90X is you have to eat food. It gives you the fuel to go out and kick ass."

A weakness: When it comes to nutrition, Horton advocates a 90/10 plan: eating 90% healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain and lean meat, while leaving 10% for something you like. For Horton, that's chocolate. "It's chocolate-chip cookies, chocolate mousse, chocolate pudding," he said.

A young man's game? "I'm 53. It feels better than 23 ever did. Retirement seems silly to me. Why would you stop doing something you love? I guess when the phone stops ringing."

Personal: Horton lives in Santa Monica with his girlfriend, Shawna. In his spare time, he enjoys skiing and travel. He owns a condominium in Jackson Hole, Wyo., and hopes to get in 40 days of skiing this year.

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BUSINESS BOOKSHELF

Climbing Coke's corporate ladder

ALAN RAPPEPORT

Twice in his career of more than 30 years at Coca-Cola, Neville Isdell was offered positions at PepsiCo, the archrival soft drinks company and perennial No. 2 in the cola wars. For some, the rivalry was always a marketing myth, but for Isdell, who rose to become Coke's chief executive, loyalty to the red team runs deep.

"I have a belief system that when the Good Lord created the world, he created Coke No. 1 and Pepsi No. 2," Isdell writes in a new memoir, "Inside Coca-Cola: A CEO's Life Story of Building the World's Most Popular Brand."

His book, written with David Beasley, an Atlanta-based writer, is a tale of climbing the ladder to lead one of the world's most recognized brands, by way of fascinating stints in Africa, Asia, Europe and Atlanta — Coke's headquarters.

Beyond the biographical details, however, it is also a case study in management, detailing Coke's recent history as seen by one of its most successful CEOs. Isdell's experience dispels any notion that a career at one company is limited. For anyone seeking a short history of Coke, a lesson in juggling family and a job or a look at how to turn around a stumbling giant of a company, the book published by St. Martin's Press is necessary reading.

Irish-born Isdell joined the company in 1966 in Zambia, after graduating from the University of Cape Town. A job in Johannesburg, South Africa, was soon followed by a global career.

In 2001, Isdell retired as head of Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Co. at age 58. By then Coca-Cola was struggling. Its earnings and stock price were depressed and it was reeling from what Isdell describes as a culture of arrogance.

By 2002, Coke employees and board members started

lobbying for Isdell's return in the top role as investors grew frustrated with Doug Daft, the incumbent. He resigned after 18 months, and in 2004 Isdell returned to the helm.

Isdell's story of his tenure at the top details how a CEO can restore order at a tumultuous time. When he took over, Coke was facing an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission for allegedly "channel stuffing" — shipping excessive concentrate to bottlers in Japan. It also was accused of hiring death squads to scare union organizers in Colombia, and European regulators were threatening an antitrust probe.

Isdell also had to smooth relations with McDonald's, Coke's biggest client for fountain cola, and, he explains, to marginalize his own company's president, Steve Heyer, who had offended McDonald's by trying to play favorites with Subway.

Isdell pulls no punches when describing colleagues who failed to live up to his standards. Of Heyer, Isdell writes: "Clearly, I agreed he did not have the right skills to be president. I wanted to ease him out quietly."

He dubs his most significant leadership accomplishment "the manifesto for growth." He refocused the company with five principles: people, portfolio, partners, planet and profit. With the top 150 executives backing its new core values, morale at Coke began to lift.

In 2009, there was a more or less seamless handover of power to current CEO Muhtar Kent, who has navigated Coke through the slow economy. For Isdell, Kent's success illustrates the view that the company is always bigger than any individual.

"I do not have a legacy unless my successor is successful," he writes.

Reviewer Alan Rappeport is a New York-based reporter for the Financial Times of London, in which this review first appeared.