

John Macgowan: Hi, welcome to another episode of the Indoor Cycle Instructor Podcast. I'm John Macgowan your host and as always, I am very appreciative that you're listening. If you have been following the Indoor Cycling Instructor Podcast for probably the last year or so or are an ICI/PRO member, you've heard me advocate for more simple version or a more simple system of communicating heart rate training zones to our customers, to our students.

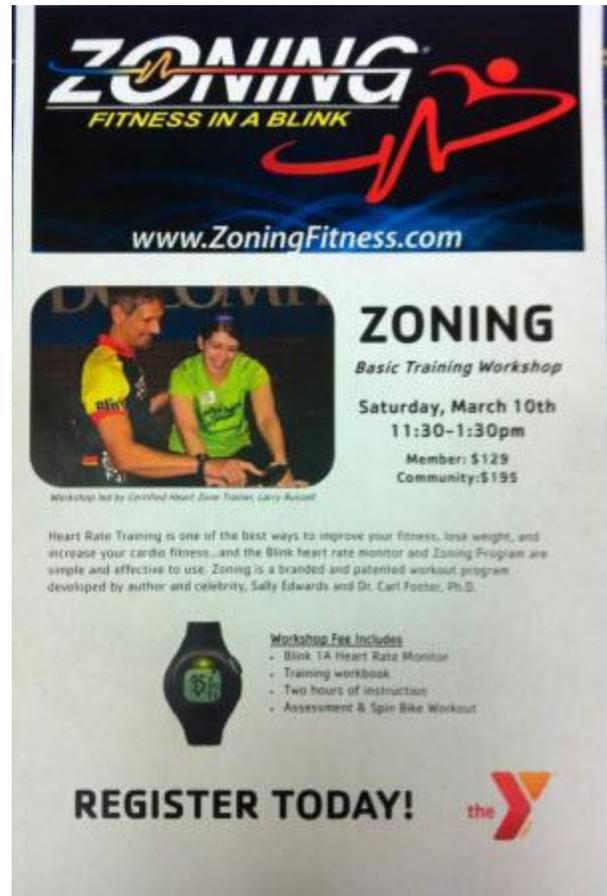
I had been a long advocate of the 2 Threshold/3 Zone system where it is, in my experience, just as applicable to a brand new student as it is to a training athlete. We have a low threshold, we have a high threshold and we build zones around it. I also advocated, and I continue to try to come up with more of a standardized way for us to communicate heart rate zones. We just finished our Ultimate Instructor Class Profile Contest and one of the difficulties we had both in judging and then as we went forward in recording and producing the winning submissions was everyone had different way of communicating heart rate, and I don't see that that's good, so I'm going to continue to advocate for something easily understandable and yet specific enough so that it doesn't cause our training athletes, triathletes, cyclists in our classes to feel like we're dumping it all down.

So to that end, I have somebody joining me, who has got a lot of experience introducing the zoning program, which is essentially the 2 Threshold/3 Zone system. Not only has he had success in just using it from a class profile perspective, but he's actually making money on it, and so I want everybody to meet Larry Russell and he goes by the Link. Link, welcome to the Indoor Cycle Instructor Podcast.

Link Russell: Hi, thank you. Glad to be here.

John Macgowan: In one of the ICI/PRO conferences, you might have had a chance to meet Link. He's incredibly fit good-looking guy that was wandering around the contest.

Link Russell: Thank you.



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John: Conferences. And I know my wife enjoyed meeting you and you're just a bundle of energy. Tell me a little bit about you and first of all, where you are at?

Link Russell: I'm in Marblehead, Massachusetts and it's a cold store community, about 18 miles north of Boston. I've been a personal trainer for 17 years, and I've always been an average cyclist outdoors, and never really thought too much of so-called spinning classes. So, until I was introduced to Tom Scott from Stage Five Cycling and five or six years ago I got certified as an Indoor Cycle Instructor, because it became real that you could bring outdoor cycling indoors and that's how I wanted to teach and train. So, kind of fit into my profile, and now, we are moving forward with zoning.

John Macgowan: Now, and you are one of the Stage Five guys. I know you are privileged to be out there and with that group, you guys go out and do a lot of outdoor stuff together, do you don't, yeah?

Link Russell: Yes, I ride with Tom not as often I would like, but we are in contact with Tom Scotto and Gene Nacey from Cycling Fusion. I've been to Pittsburgh and trained with them in their studio along with Tom and at studios in Boston as well.

John Macgowan: When were you first introduced to zoning?

Link Russell: At the ICI/PRO conference, it was at the last September, October?

John Macgowan: Correct.

Link Russell: So almost a year ago, and I got my first Blink Heart Rate Monitor, which came with that conference and I took to it right away. The heart rate monitor blinks and that the name blinks in colors of your zone, which I've never seen before, which I thought was amazing.

John: Right. Oh, yes, I love mine. I just, but I love simple. I've got my buddy next to me with this altimeter government and mine just is changing colors as I ride along.

Link Russell: Well, that's the thing about the heart rate monitor, either you buy one and you use it a couple times and you go out, I don't even know what all these numbers mean. Here you get the blinks of the zoning program and the colors kind of relate to your mood and to your effort versus just a single number. And so when you look down and you go, oh, I'm in blue, it obviously, it blinks in blue, yellow, red based on the three zones.

When you see the blue, you go, I'm just cool, I'm just getting warmed up and there is not a lot of effort here, and you can actually feel that in your body when you look at that color. So as the colors progress, you notice the change in the body and those colors correspond as yellow becomes warmer and obviously the third zone red is hot and hard. So you can tie your body to your heart and your mind, which is one more step in that heart rate monitor that you don't get with just a number.

John Macgowan: Exactly, and I can already hear you telling this to your class.

Link Russell: Well, absolutely am passionate about it, it's a mind and body thing which I'm all about and we can get into it a little bit later about testing for your thresholds, but when we do the field testing, it really ties people to how you breathe and how you train.

John Macgowan: Without being intimidating.

Link Russell: Exactly. Because you can't fake it, like when I'm training, teaching a class, I point my blink, I put it on my handlebars and face my audience...

John Macgowan: Oh, I do the same thing, awesome.

Link Russell: And so when they, I can't say, all right, let's get into the yellow, and I can't be in the blue. You know what I'm saying, I can't fake it, and no one else can fake it either, because you see the colors blinking and sometimes I've actually forgotten my blink and everyone goes, "where is your blink," so they want to see the colors, they...

John Macgowan: Right, so maybe instead of Link Russell, maybe you should just be Larry "Blink" Russell.

Link Russell: There, you go.

John Macgowan: All right. So you were introduced to the blink and then at the same time this 2 Threshold/3 Zone system, had you been training or trying to communicate a more complicated version of heart rate zones. I know, well, let me step back you are also a heart zone certified instructor, correct?

Link Russell: Yes. I mean, it's similar, it's just a break down, it's multilevel in the five zone system. The three zone system makes sense in the fact that working with Sally and her explanation is, everyone knows what a threshold is, but we always tested for the second threshold when we didn't really understand that there was a first one.

Second threshold was always kind of like just before you got into red out of breath kind of thing, and we always tested it for that and I, we can do that in class, we did field testing, I've been doing that for four or five years now in my cycle classes, but what we didn't realize is, there was a first threshold which we called T1. We always tested for T2, so T1 and Sally working closely with Dr. Carl Foster who is an exercise geologist from the University of Wisconsin, past President of ACSM and many, many years of study and I think he has worked with Sally for 20 years on zoning and...

John Macgowan: Well, just the whole zone based training; Sally was really the initiator of that long ago.

Link Russell: Right. But Carl kept saying to Sally, there is another threshold here, there is not just this T2 or threshold that everyone spoke about, there is actually one lower zone that breaks us into three separate areas, which we call the blue, yellow, red or easy, moderate and hard, and everyone knows a threshold is like a transition from one room to another. You step over a threshold like you come into another room.

So the blue room is the first room, and then when you start to change and breathing a little bit you notice that change, it might be just a little bit harder to talk, but you can still talk. You cross that first threshold now you're in this yellow zone, which is another room and things are changing physiology, you're getting warmer, it's sustainable, but you know you're working and then you get to that T2, that's second threshold you cross that and now you're in the third room and this room is on fire.

It's really hard to breathe, you don't want to talk to your neighbor, you're focusing on your workout and you can feel that in your breathing and you notice the changes in your body and how hard you're working. So, you have those three chambers but you notice when you cross each threshold and that's what zoning is all about, and it really brings like I said the mind and body into the color of each zone and once you understand that, and have had the field testing done, people can say, okay, now I know how I'm doing and where I am.

John Macgowan: Awesome. All right. But you decided to take this a step further. You've got your own blink, but you wanted to bring this back to your students. First of all, tell me where do you teach?

Link Russell: I teach on two studios. One studio is a fairly new YMCA, the Lynch/van Otterloo YMCA, which is in the state of Marblehead, Massachusetts and I teach at Energy within the studio, which is a private small studio, where we have 10 CycleOps bikes, which are bikes with heart rate monitors and power with watch. So I've been power training for five years at that studio, which is nice because you can tie your watch to your thresholds as well, which is really cool to see.

John Macgowan: Oh, I can imagine. All right. So, you wanted to bring zoning into your studio?

Link Russell: Yes, originally when we first started, we did it in a five-week program, where it was a one hour night and up progression each night. That was my first class that I had. I had seven people in that class.

John Macgowan: Okay and just sort to understand, so that, but you were charging them to participate in this.

Link Russell: Yes, for that class. Originally it was \$159 per person and it came with the blink heart rate monitor. The Blink 1, there are two blinks; the Blink 1 is very simple. It shows, you can program it for your two thresholds, which we can talk about later and it just has basically a watch and a heart rate monitor. It doesn't record anything. So it won't record your, how long you've been riding and how long you've been in each zone, but it does have your threshold set in it, so it will blink based on your personal fitness level.

John Macgowan: Exactly. All right. And so, and that was a program that zoning had actually put together, we've talked before, Chuck Cali has been on and I think I talked to Sally Edwards as well how they've been trying to create a turnkey program, like all the zoning in a camp will still do that, so you've got all these resources.

Link Russell: Yeah, so the impact, which would be it's 10 blinks as your initial order. You get 10 blinks and you get posters and wall chart, there is a wall chart, zoning wall chart for each color and explains each level and then obviously, we have a e-book, a zoning e-book that you can send to college students prior to zoning fitness class. And then there is also I was going to just mention quickly the Blink 2, which does the same thing the Blink 1 does, but it has a stop watch and record, which you can start at the beginning of your training session and that will record how long you've spent in each one of your three zones.

John Macgowan: Got it.

Link Russell: So you play that back at the end and go, okay, I spent 10 minutes in the blue, 20 minutes in the yellow, 5 minutes in the red.

John Macgowan: What's your preference?

Link Russell: From my teaching experience, basically, people that are fitness people, the Blink 1 is all you need, because they come to class, they get to see how they're training for that class, they take the blink, put it back in their bag and they go home, they don't want to think about it again. The Blink 2 is maybe for the next level person who might do triathlons or training where they really need to record, because they might be on a regimen but the Blink 1 is simple and that's where I've kept it, I've traded people up to the Blink 2 that have come to me and go, I understand this program, but I would like to record what I'm doing and it's very, I've only had two people ask for the Blink 2.

John Macgowan: Yeah that's kind of my take on it as well.

Link Russell: You know it's available, but too much right out of the gate for the first time user, and if you want to keep them using a heart rate monitor, the Blink one is the simplest way to go.

John Macgowan: Exactly. Okay, so you said, you started with the five week program, but my understanding is it that didn't sell very well.

Link Russell: It sold well, it's just that I realized that all these students were already taking my classes and they could move faster than the average person and each class was fun, but I brought it down to three weeks, the next session, and then between Chuck Cali and Sally Edwards and myself I said, I think we can do this in two hours. So, what I've done now...

John Macgowan: And just explain, did the two hours meaning you can do the full introduction, concept, training and have them ready to start zone based training.

Link Russell: I do a video conference, I mean a conference using a key note. I have a key note slide show that I do, and I have everyone get their blink heart rate monitors at the beginning. We all get them setup and we don't get their thresholds because we have to test for those, so in the first hour we sit and we just talk about zoning, understanding the thresholds where they are, the colors and how we're putting this whole package together, how to program the watch and then we spend the second hour in the studio on the bikes, and that's where we

field test which we can get into for an hour and we get the initial setting for the blink in the class room.

John Macgowan: Got it. So at the end of this workshop, your students have a functioning blink that have their threshold set.

Link Russell: Correct.

John Macgowan: So they're ready to go, run, walk, take some rehearsal class.

Link Russell: Yes. Initially somebody write, getting off the couch hasn't worked out in five years. Generally we just test for T1, it's optional to go to T2, but most of the classes that I've been doing are students that I have, so I know that they've trained, so I do take them to T2 in their first workshop.

John Macgowan: What do you do when... how do you set that up for threshold if you're only testing for the low threshold, T1.

Link Russell: Generally T1 to T2 can be 20 to 30 heart rate beats. So generally what I safely do is, add 10 points to their T1 and let them go from there, and then have them spent four or five weeks of just training in and around the T1, and then I will retest them for T2.

John Macgowan: Okay.

Link Russell: We find that is the safest way to do it.

John Macgowan: Right, because 10 beats is going to undershoot them.

Link Russell: Yeah. Absolutely undershoot them, if they go, took over 10 beats, they'll be in the red and that's to tell them to back off.

John Macgowan: You spoke very earlier about that whole mind body connection.

Link Russell: Yes.

John Macgowan: And my experience has been that, you get people starting to like you said that, transition and they're recognizing, but the feeling changes. So you're really teaching these people to sense these thresholds?

Link Russell: Correct.

John Macgowan: For the early person, and so, when they have that experience later when you're trying to help them understand T2, it is that you're experienced that they're more understanding of that?

Link Russell: Absolutely. And I have one student that after every cycle class, she didn't take a lot of classes from me initially and one of the other instructors, Beth Johnson, who owns Energy within said, "I want you to take this woman that comes to my classes. At the end of the

class, she has no energy, she is exhausted and I don't know what's going on and I want her to take your zoning class, and I said, yeah, let's sign her up.

So, right out of the gate, she is in the red, like we set a little threshold, but what happening was she was skipping, she was going from blue, getting on the bike blue, nice and easy. Next thing you know, she is in this red zone, and so she is like, I thought you had worked hard all the time and I go, no. You can't work hard all the time. I said, that's why you can't get out of the class, because you're so exhausted, because you're training too hard, too much.

And so, once she understood and saw how the blink related how she felt, she actually took the five week class, which was great her, because I told her for the first three weeks you're not getting out of the yellow. I said, as soon as you see a red you back off the resistance, take your cadence down, you just trim it back and so, once she figured that out, after the five weeks she gave me a big hug and said, Larry, you saved my life, because I had no realization that I was training too hard and not giving myself any recovery time and not realizing that there was a middle section that I find John that, you probably noticed this too that, when you teach a class we as instructors have to start people up in the bike we've got a class room going trying to figure out exactly what's going to go on in our class.

By the time we get on our bikes people are already been warmed up five to eight minutes and then here we are going from blue to red ourselves. So, we skip this yellow zone as well, which is really where the fitness happens, great calorie utilization and for fat loss is in that middle zone that I what I talked 20 to 30 beats of heart rate. So, we as instructors can talk in the red, but it's not so good for us either. You know what I mean.

John Macgowan: No, exactly. We skip that whole aerobic base and development.

Link Russell: I went really focusing and when I wasn't teaching my classes, I was spending a lot of time on the top of the blue, which is actually that transition of that first threshold T1, and in the yellow, building my base, which really helped me because, as an instructor, we can train in the red for quite some time and not realize some of the damage that we might be doing and missing out on that really good heart rates training.

John Macgowan: But we're limiting our fitness going forward. I guess, it's yeah, exactly. Okay, so let's talk specifics here, Larry. You're doing this because that's your job and you're trying to make money at it.

Link Russell: Right.

John Macgowan: All right. The blink packages you buy at wholesale and you get reorders at wholesale. How much money are you making on, one of your workshops.

Link Russell: Just for you to understand when I taught at the Y for these two hour workshops I charge a \$129, the YMCA charges a \$129 per person for the two hour workshop, which includes the Blink 1 and all the paper work, and like I said, you get the zoning booklet and you get two hours of understanding and training and when you walk away from that you can run your blink, there is also a zoningfitness.com, which can back you up on anything, has plenty of information and Sally also has published a book, I think maybe her 25th book on zoning.

John Macgowan: Right

Link Russell: But this one specific to zoning which really gets into more programming and training so if you are triathlete and move forward. But I make \$50 per head. I give the YMCA \$29, The Blinks package I think right now, they are around \$50 to \$55 your cost, I think they retail for \$80, \$85. So I'm making about \$50 a person. So if I can get 10 people in my zoning fitness workshop for two hours I make \$500.

John Macgowan: Not a bad afternoon

Link Russell: So if you get five people, you're still making over \$100 an hour. So, you can start out with a small base and within control, because what I found is as the classes get bigger, there is always an issue with like one person with the blink, once you get it, that's why I always get them set up before we get on the bike, because okay, here is your blink, you're pedaling the bike let's get it set up and it's like, I'm not getting a heart rate or something people don't get them wet, so we get everything set sitting in a class room and help make sure everyone is functioning before they get on the bike, which simplifies it and that also came from my earlier experience doing the five week program. But once we get the blinks straight away we're off and running and it's good money maker, definitely.

John Macgowan: I mean for you either an instructor or as a studio owner and I know everybody is looking for it, and it's not one of those things where we're just selling something to our students. This is something that's incredibly valuable. Isn't it?

Link Russell: Yeah. And I have followed up from people from last fall who are still in my cycle classes that's love it, absolutely love it.

John Macgowan: And without it being intimidating or overwhelming.

Link Russell: Yeah. And the other thing is being instructor, when you get enough of your students blinking on the classroom, the training becomes easy because you go whelming up when you are in the blue.

John Macgowan: Bingo! You're exactly right. You don't feel compelled to reeducate everybody, every single class, right?

Link Russell: Right. And then so it's basically that you should be at heart rate 120, you're at 124, you can be at 128, if the blink is set based on your level. So your yellow is your yellow. So if I say everyone be in the yellow, it could be a range of 10, 15 heart rate beats between each student, but they are working at their level at the same level. So yellow class, if I do 20 minutes in yellow, you can be pushing it. I can tell people to go to the top of the yellow just before you're T2 and so on and so forth. But we're all working together, I can say we're doing a four minute climb, we're not going to get out of the yellow on this climb. Second climb, we're going to hit the red for one minute at the end. And so it's based on color, effort and how you're training.

John Macgowan: I would think then there's a, maybe I call it pure pressure, if you've got people in your class that have not been through your program and yet they're looking around at all these blinking heart rate monitors and the thing that that is a pretty good social proof that they too should participate on your workshops.

Link Russell: Absolutely. And when they see me with it, and like I told you one time, I forgot to bring it and everyone's like "where is your blink, where is your blink? I want to see your colors." So they are very focused on it as well. It's really cool.

John Macgowan: I'm a sales guy and I'm very focused on the 'what's next' and I've seen that as a... the failure may be or just a limiting factor where an instructor wants to educate, but at the same time doesn't want to sound like a broken record, the same people come into their class because they happen to noticed just one new student. Are you able or do you have a workshop scheduled into the future, so that in your classes, you can reference that and say, if you want to learn more about zone-based training, you can after class, you may... you can sign up for in this...

Link Russell: Yes.

John Macgowan: ...in this workshop.

Link Russell: Yes, the YMCA also promotes me with posters and I have them outside my, the cycle studio and up around the aerobics rooms and they will do a zoning poster for me for free. But I do announce it, well, I'm going to have a workshop at the end of September, I haven't set the date yet, but I've been getting people enquiring about it and hopefully, things will cool down weather wise, so we can get more people in, we get stuffed in the summer.

John Macgowan: Oh, of course it is. Yeah, we're recording this at... and you can be hearing this often in the future. But we're recording this here in the middle of August 2012. Alright. So but your YMCA is actively working with you, which I think is incredibly important.

Link Russell: Yeah, absolutely. They are totally in on it and Sally being inducted into the triathlete Hall of Fame and the zoning fitness program has a U.S. pattern and as far as I know, it's the only cordial based system, not equipment, but just system that has been honored with a U.S. pattern.

John Macgowan: I know. That's cool and that I know Sally has fought hard and long for that. Okay, so you came to them and said, "I want to start these workshops." Initially they were five weeks, but now they are, you are doing one day, two hour. Did you present it to them and as... and financially saying, "we're going to charge this and you're going to get this much, I'm going to get this much and we're going to have happy students," or how did you do that, how did you negotiate that?

Link Russell: My five-week program originally was \$159, but that was, that's five hours plus preparation compacting it and getting it down to the two hours at \$129 and basically I broke it down, I gave them the sheet and they didn't have to know what the Blinks cost me. I just said I wanted \$100 per head and then the Y gets \$29.

John Macgowan: And, but the financial part of it, the actual... the customer is paying the Y and then the Y is paying you back the 100, is that how that works?

Link Russell: Yes.

John Macgowan: Okay.

Link Russell: Yeah. Basically what they, what my Y wanted me to do was to basically invoice them for the hardware and then they paid me for my time. So it almost came up to be like I invoiced them for the blinks at \$85 a piece and then they paid me \$15 I had on top of that, but your profits built into the blink, you know what I'm saying.

John Macgowan: Exactly, exactly.

Link Russell: And the Y is tax exempt. So there was no worrying about that. So it's basically they wanted a separate invoice for hardware so that we...

John Macgowan: Yeah, they want to be able to expense that separately from your labor, right, I understand that. And your students, what was their experience when you tell them, it's a \$129, do you have input as to some of their, maybe early objections before they...

Link Russell: No, they feel, because if you deduct the \$85, right, from that, basically you have about \$44 or something like that. As it come out to 40, 60, it's not much as like \$30 an hour for them to take this course.

John Macgowan: Right. And so you were really selling them on the programming and the education that they were going to develop from it.

Link Russell: That and everyone thought that the heart rate monitors cost over \$100.

John Macgowan: Oh, okay. So you're covering. Okay.

Link Russell: So you know what I mean, if you...

John Macgowan: Yeah.

Link Russell: You can buy any expensive one for \$35, which doesn't tell you much except your heart rate and it's based on maximum heart rate, which we all know now is not wave heart-based training is taught, it's not based on 220 minus your age, because age has no... you can be fit at any age.

John Macgowan: Exactly.

Link Russell: And be unfit at any age.

John Macgowan: Link, did you get some people coming to you saying, "I already own a heart rate monitor?"

Link Russell: Yeah, “and I don't know how to use it, it's in my bottom drawer of my dresser.”

John Macgowan: Right. So did you tell them, yeah, you can bring your existing heart rate monitor or did you insist that they get a Blink?

Link Russell: No. They... I mean, the program won't work with our... a regular heart rate monitor. I mean you can set the thresholds, but...

John Macgowan: If you can figure out how to set it.

Link Russell: Exactly.

John Macgowan: Oh my gosh, I have had no shortage of experience with, I've spent hours on tech lines with Puller, now, I'm trying to... how do I get this thing to do what you show me in the manual or the picture.

Link Russell: I'm... you know when I teach the workshop is first thing, question I ask, “how many people own a heart rate monitor” and everyone raise their hand and then I'd say “how many people use it.” No one raises their hand. It's not just... it's not a gimmick. The colors are, the body, the mind, how you feel when you're training and that's what I love about it.

John Macgowan: Alright. And you're improving people's lives.

Link Russell: Absolutely. And it keeps in them using their heart rate monitor. That's the fun thing about it.

John Macgowan: Awesome. Alright. Now, Link, you and I are going to continue our conversation, while we're going to talk about some of those specific programming you're doing in your classes. But I want to end this part of it right now. And so thank you for participating. This has been very eye opening, especially the financial part, I think for an instructor of small studio that's looking for some additional revenue. And this could be awesome. So Link, thank you.

Link Russell: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Host: Now with summer ending and our season right in front of us, with some additional revenue for your studio or maybe just a little additional income as an instructor, do you have some interest, you can go to indoorcycleinstructor.com/zoning. It takes you over the zoning site and there is information about the zoning can, which is the full turnkey package, everything you need to implement exactly what Larry “Link” Russell has been doing at his studio. It doesn't take any special certification. Any indoor cycling instructor is going to be fully competent and capable of implementing this. It's going to take a little work on your part.

But as you heard earlier, the potential rewards for both you, the instructor, your studio and your students can be huge. Stay tuned, I'll be publishing the second half of this episode here probably in September, where we get to a little more detail on Larry's procedures as far as doing that first threshold discovery and help you to understand as well, how he implements this blue, yellow, red into his class profiles. Also, if you just search the zoning at

indoorcycleinstructor.com, you'll find links to a number of other interviews we've done. I know we have a couple of audio profiles that are tied to the 3 zone system as well. So thanks for listening.