

## Jay Blahnik on Introducing Power, Part 1

**Jay Blahnik:** You know, I always say to people that we have an activity that's been around for twenty some years and it's, it's taken on an art of its own because it didn't have measurement. I can compare it to classes I've been teaching for twenty years, I've been teaching at treadmill class for twenty years and of course I have had measurement the entire time. So it's taken on an art of its own where we've in the absence of measurement we made it entertaining and we've created styles of instructors who can make being in a room interesting. And what I often say is that when you add measurement to it people kind of either reject it because they just don't know how to fit into what they currently do or they go the opposite end and they overdo it and they make it you know about as sexy as an EKG crossed with an excel spreadsheet. And then they lose the art and the magic of what they have created over the last ten or fifteen or twenty years that they've been teaching, so we tend to take the principle that there's a, there's a really happy medium that doesn't have to disrupt what you currently do. Then we think that's the best place to start and then you'll, like everything else you graduate people to where they want to be as you go.



**John Macgowan:** You're listening to Jay Blahnik, my guest on the Indoor Cycle Instructor Podcast. Jay welcome.

**Jay Blahnik:** Great to be here.

**John Macgowan:** Yeah, forgive me, once I get somebody gets started, I don't want to stop them. So I've developed kind of a different format for my podcast that I picked up with Lawrence, just continue here recently that once you start talking I'm just going to let you go so. Well, welcome and you know, the whole industry as you were saying is twenty years old, yet its changing and lot of us don't really know the right way to go about it as far as introducing power, into our classes and you are nice enough to be available here today. Your impression that people are excited about power but then they, they get the bikes but and then they're confused?

**Jay Blahnik:** Yeah I think what we've experienced, because we've been in this base kind of since the, you know, the very beginning Schwinn has been in space. What we've experienced is that there's you know there's number of different groups, there's one group that really believes measurements going to ruin the experience, so they're very emotionally connected to the way cycling has always been done and they don't see the advantages and that's both instructors and members. So they don't want to disrupt what they have become very addictive and obsessed with. Then there's another group

that's you know really open to technology because they've to embrace in their lives through Facebook and Twitter and all the ways with which technology has changed our lives outside of the cycling room. So they're very eager and interested and then when they see it, they allow themselves to get a little bit overwhelmed because it does require them to go back to being a tiny bit of a beginner in we learn in a little bit of their approach, and when you become successful and you fill the room with people who like what you're doing, it's hard to do something new.

So they like the idea of it but they struggle a little bit with the implementation and then you know, there's kind of a third group that both likes the idea, embraces it right way and they're using it right off their back. So we've just found that it's important to have discussions about the simplest ways to incorporate this because I'm a big fan of simplify and amplify that's kind of one of my, one of the phrases I use with our master trainers a lot. And I'm usually getting big ideas to stick is much more about the art of subtraction than additions. So you have to really strip away at the core proposition of an idea and then really try to amplify that, make it sticky and then if you do that well you'll have a lot of permission to do more. So I think power and measurement, been able to track our workouts as huge opportunity long term but I think sometimes we jump all the way to step three and six and consumers and many instructors are still at step zero. And so what we've got to successfully do is get everybody to step one, and then they will come along to step three, four, five and six.

**John Macgowan:** Okay. So give me a good example of simplifying and amplifying in this context?

**Jay Blahnik:** So in the Schwinn program, we came up with a really simple construct that works with our Schwinn cycling coach's pyramid. So I know many of you listeners may not be familiar with the pyramid that hadn't been through our course but the pyramids designed to make coaching indoor cycling class easy and provide you with a construct that regardless of what program you've been trained in, what it allows it to do, is it allows you to be able to evaluate yourself and make sure you're giving enough of the right information in the right areas and also not leaving anything out. And what we found is that's what we've been using for the last ten years in our program and its really useful tool to create consistency.

We believed that adding power to the experience needed to fit into the pyramid. Meaning we couldn't tell people what we tell you this pyramid for ten years and now there's power and now you've got to do it this way and it's completely different look over here. We believed it needed to be an extension of our core proposition and core coaching construct. So if you know how the pyramid works, power or measurement fits in on the second level. The first level is content and the second level we call it clarity.

So content is making sure your students and your members really understand what they're supposed to be doing so the technique or the body position, is it a climb, is it a flat, make sure that they know how fast they're supposed to peddle, so you're giving them guidance on RPM. Make sure they know the intensity and make sure they know

the time how long it's going to last. So before every song, before every stage, before every part of class your member should know what they're doing, how fast to peddle, how hard to work, how long it's going to last, that's the basic content everyone should be clear on. Once you then have that, we believe the next level is providing a little more clarity meaning how does this section of class fit into the rest of the ride, how is this particular section going to unfold that there're easy bits or there're the hard bits, you know how many times am I going to do it so you know I always say, if I was going to tell you as a personal trainer we're going to launch and that's all I said, you would be asking questions like how many, how long, how much weight, how far do I have to go, how many times, so I've got to answer all that for you once I've given you the core proposition, so we think the clarity is where the console and the power story can come into play.

So you've said to me we're going to climb this for about ten minutes, we're going to be somewhere between sixty and eighty RPMs and I want you to push yourself but don't go breathless. Well, now I kind of know the basics, so clarity comes in by using the console to say things like hey! Notice what your wattage is, when you're pushing at that intensity. Notice how far you've gone halfway up this hill, can the second half be as good as the first half. Take a look at where you're at in the class and how this still fits into it and provide a measurement that gives them something interesting to look at. So we say that second level with power is about giving your students observations, goals or challenges, three simple things. So our whole approach to power is give your students something to observe, give them a goal, give them a challenge. And that's that second level of the pyramid when you have a power or wattage bike. So give them the content, then give them clarity through the lens of observation, goals and challenges.

So an example of an observation would be me asking you to look at something on the console, but not necessarily telling you to do anything with it. So I might suggest that you take a look down at how far you've gone so far in class based on your power and knowing that there's ten minutes left, you know you'll look at that and kind of go, I'm at you know seventeen miles today in this class, I wonder if I can get that close to twenty by the time we're done. So observation is pointing out something on the console that they may have forgotten to look at that will then instill something in their own mind without you forcing it on them. You might say, notice what your wattage can be as we go up this hill and we finish off class. You might say, take a look at your calorie burn from the last hill now see what it can be on this hill. It might say take a look at your distance on the first hill and let's see what it is on the final hill. So observations are just a really light way of getting your members and students to notice things on the console that might go over their head and then allow the negotiation to take place in their own mind.

We think this is the easiest entry into power because you don't have to ask anything of them other than to look. And what they start to do is they start to learn what they didn't know before. I have to always, we know this works really well because if you take a look at people that are on the treadmill by themselves or on the stair climber by themselves, if somebody is on a stair climber and they're about to get off and they've

noticed that they've done ninety seven floors, what do you think they do before they get off.

**John Macgowan:** Or two hundred and eighty five calories.

**Jay Blahnik:** Exactly they round it up right and they start to then say to themselves oh! I've been working out for twenty seven minutes a good workout for me is three hundred calories or whatever it is, and they start to remember that and they start to compare and they start to think back at other workouts and they start to learn what's a good day, what's a bad day, what's a great day. So observations we say are kind of to bear the minimum, even if you're afraid of power, even if you don't really understand it, even if you're not totally aware of what a big guy in your class should be pushing versus a smaller female. Everyone can teach with observations because it – all it does is it guides the student to look at a number and start learning how that number stacks up against what you're currently teaching. If they keep coming back to class they'll start to learn oh! I love this song, I love this ten minute climb that this teacher does, I love this interval, and I know what I normally get or I know what's the good day or what's the bad day. So observation is open to anybody it's not hard to do, you don't even have to be super skilled that understanding power, you don't need to be a hardcore cyclist who is ridden with the power top, we think that's a easy entry.

Goals is the next level which is you can add clarity to the ride by giving your students a goal connected to something that the console is providing. So for example, let's say I'm having my students go up a ten minute hill climb, I might have them look down every two minutes at how far they've gone, based on their wattage. So you know on the Schwinn console, we predict distance based on intensity.

**John Macgowan:** Mm-hmm.

**Jay Blahnik:** So wattage plays into distance, so what I might do is I might have everybody reset the stage timer, everyone knows we're climbing ten minutes. And all I have them do is glance down every two minutes, and I simply say look at the distance you've gone, can you make the next two minutes as good as the two minutes before. So then what I'm doing is I'm giving them a goal to not fade as the climb goes on. And what they'll do is they'll say, "Oh! I went this far in two minutes. All I got to do is match the next two minutes." And what that does is, helps them become a better consistent hill climber, so that they don't overshoot in the beginning and then not push as consistently at the end or I might do it even simpler and say, we're climbing ten minutes, we're half way there, look at how far you went in the first five minutes, can you go a little farther in the second five minutes? And now, they're going to try to actually finish the hill pushing harder than they did on the first half. So what makes it a goal versus an observation is not that I'm telling them to shoot for a certain wattage, because we all know that that's not fair because everyone pushes different wattages based on the weight, but what it does is, it gives them something to shoot for, it becomes an active relationship, they may not do it but now they something in mind and it requires a little bit more agreement or negotiation. I may say, we're going to do ten you know, intervals in a row. Ten one

minute interval pushes, where I'm going to ask you to push breathless recover, push breathless recover. And a goal may be as simple as saying, "Hey! The first three of these ten intervals, I want you to see what your wattage is and then I want the remaining seven intervals for you to try to get as close to that wattage as you can. Now it may not be possible, they may fade after interval number five, but they now have a goal of what they're trying to repeat as opposed to it just been open ended.

And we find that, that the goals can be very powerful, they can be simple, they can be simply, "Hey! You did this ride with me last week." I want your goal to be that you burn as many calories or close or go as far or farther as you did last week on the same ride, same music, same approach, same imagery, same exact ride, let's just see if we can match it or beat it, well, that's really powerful, because now I'm coming in and I'm like, "Well, you know, last week I did, I broke twenty miles but barely this week I'm going to see if I can do twenty one." And that means the whole class they will be kind of going a little harder than they've done before finding those moments where they can break away and that goal allows them to step up to something, it's not just an observation.

**John Macgowan:** Jay let me interrupt you real quick here because this ties into something that Lawrence was talking about and that was to set up a teaser at the end of your class as your...at your transition as he called it now you cool down. But this will be awesome something to be able to talk to your class and say okay now we're going to do this right again next week. And so try to keep some understanding of where you're at and see what if you can show me some improvement next week.

**Jay Blahnik:** Yeah, in fact one of the things we do with our Schwinn program is, we actually say that turning off the console and getting your averages and your maths and your totals should actually be an event not an accident. There is a feature in our console that when you end the workout you see averages and maxes displayed, you see totals, we actually say do that with them, everybody do it at the same time, make a moment in your cool down to have people memorialize and visualize and think about what it is that they've earned, treat the measurement as currencies so it has value and it has a moment of celebration, has a moment of ritual as opposed to just hoping they accidentally remember it. Because in my case, I actually all my workouts, whether it's my railing workouts, my running workouts, my cycling workouts, my students all know they always get to do them twice. So we repeat everything twice, if you did it with me this Monday, we're going to do it next Monday.

So you always get a second shot at it. Some instructors actually do that for more rides than me and some don't repeat anything but I always, I give two which allows me give enough variety, it changes often enough, but it allows comparison, so I make what you're saying a big part of class. You know I say, "Hey! Let's focus on calorie burn, let's take a look at distance, you know, remember this so next week you know what you're going to do." And I think the important thing to remember is, as trainers we're always looking for progress and progression, but when I say like a goal, it isn't always about being better. A lot of people find great joy in just not being worse. For me, as I get older I, you know, I don't have to be faster than I was last year, I just have to not be

slower so. So sometimes what I'll say to people is, all I'm asking is that you come back next week prepared to do just what you did, if you know that's not going to be possible because of travel or whatever else that's fine, but you at least have a marker with which to go against and that idea of repeating is really valuable to a lot of people in fitness and you know, if they gave their all to you, they don't want to be treating every work out like the whole goal is to beat it, because sometimes it's not going to be, but there is a huge reward in getting close to it again.

So if you just thought this amazing workout that was really tough you know the language should not be beat it next week. You know, that probably shouldn't be the language, the language should be you guys kicked butt, so make sure on Sunday that you don't over work yourself because Monday next week we're going to do it again and I would like to try to see it if we can match it, maybe you will even beat it. But let's come back fresh so we can finish this particular workout and have some consistency. So language is important and you've got to be careful not to have it always be about been better. Because for some people just been the same is better.

**John Macgowan:** Yeah, every year we get older and so you're right, not going backwards is a good thing.

**Jay Blahnik:** I talk about that a lot in some of the Nike services that I've worked with Nike and Nike+ is that you know, maintenance and consistency for a lot of people is progress.

**John Macgowan:** Mm-hmm.

**Jay Blahnik:** You know it's, it's not maintenance, it's actually progress because perhaps they were only able to do five workouts in a row and now they've been able to do ten, the workout may have been the same, but the fact that they were able to do it ten times instead of five before they broke their intensity or they broke whatever it is they were shooting for, that's a big deal. So you know I would say progression, regression maintenance, those are the three things that get people excited, show me I'm better, show me I'm worse, show me I'm staying the same and show me I stay in the same is actually very valuable in fitness.

**John Macgowan:** It is okay now I got you off topic though because we are going to talk about challenges as the second one...

**Jay Blahnik:** Yeah so that's the thirty, yeah so it's like you teach the basics and with power and wattage consoles you either give them an observation, simple take a look at something they'll start negotiating what it means. Goals means look at something on the console and give them something to shoot for that is specific to them, it's not, it's not a wrong number, it is a relational goal, like make the second half better than the first half or see if you can match these intervals. The third thing we say is actually using it for challenges and I like to say that challenges are kind of like goals on steroids. You can't do them every single workout, they have a tone and then the attitude that are special

and they won't work with every single group. So there's two ways to look at challenges when you finally have measurement in a cycling class and you've never had it before, challenges could be used to actually get people to do what they couldn't do it before and that is to measure those days and those moments where they really do go for their PRs, where they really do try to step up in a way that they cannot do every day. So it could be something as simple as I did this, this week in a training in Florida well I said, look on these intervals today I'm going to give you three thirty seconds intervals with some breaks in between, but your goal is not to last for thirty seconds, what I want you to do is take ten seconds of the thirty and give me the biggest wattage numbers you've seen in six months. Literally I want you to unleash to break away from a number you know you can hold and find one you can't hold.

And the language changes to be look this is it to hold it for thirty, this is to spike it for one second to literally you know, like what would you do in a race where you know, I may train for a 10K or a 5K but rarely in my training do I ever go as hard as I do in that last hundred meters when everyone's cheers to come in and that cloaks up there that moment when you cross the line you look in for the puke bucket. And you know you all know anyone has done a race, bike race, foot race, whatever it is, there are moments in competition or challenges where it isn't realistic to do it all the time but you need those moments to make you believe you can do better to make you remember what it feels like to go over the edge. And we couldn't do that before in cycling because we didn't have measurement. Now occasionally you can, you can ask people to really do something that's disruptive from what they normally do. And that's really like a PR personal best.

But you can also flip it and turn challenges into real competition. We do this in a lot of my railing program workouts that I created with Josh Cosby – Indo-Row and Shockwave – where there's actually an element of competition, you're trying to either beat your own score or beat somebody else, so a way to do this we say might be maybe you divide your class into groups of three. So let's say it's me, you John and Jose or whatever other Schwinn master trainers and we're in the front row and I'm rider 1, you're rider 2 and Jose is rider 3 and I divided the rest of the class in groups of three. And here's the goal, I'm going to go as hard as like I can for a quarter mile then I'm going to pass it to you, then you're going to go as hard as you can for a quarter mile then you're going to pass it to Jules and we got to go through it for four times.

So while each has done in mile, in quarter mile increments, and you tell this to all the class and you say first group of three done first wins. And so, literally it's a competition right and of course it's not fair because if there's a team of three small girls they're not going to beat the three big boys but you divide it up so it's somewhat fair and here's what happens. When I'm going you and Jose are screaming for me resting, then you're going I'm resting, Jules is screaming for you and then when Jules goes I'm screaming for Jules all there is an interval in disguise right, one work two rest four times through, but it turns into a competition that we're actually trying to win and it gives people a flavor of something that they've never had in indoor cycling which is competition. And if you got the right group of people, that can be the most energetic five minutes of your class.

And I can't do with people I don't know, I can't do in every class but as long as there is people that are willing to know they may not be on the strongest team and they may not win but they are all going to bring each other in, it changes the energy in a way that makes it really fun and we can never do it before and that's the third thing that you can do with wattage and consoles but measure is this thing we couldn't do before this level of challenges that creates either personal records or best or competition.

**John Macgowan:** I like that, I like that a lot. No that sounds like a lot of fun, but that's not something that you can interject to a class where you just don't know everybody.

**Jay Blahnik:** Yeah, absolutely, I mean, look even in my own cycling classes, we use forms of challenges that they tend to be more personal challenges the first example I gave which is like okay we've been going for ten weeks and I've asked you to empty the tanks for reuse it. Today, we're going to do a race day ride and what I'm looking for is best wattage numbers in the last three months you know and I prepare them, they know they're coming in for that, they try to take some rest, and we really do try to treat it like an event. I do that a lot more than the team competition interval thing that I mentioned to you, sometimes though the competition could be simple I'll give it to two minutes, see how far you can go and people really do compete to get the best numbers knowing that it's not fair and that someone else is mile and half is better than somebody else two miles because they are way less, but it still creates a different energy, it creates an energy that I think it's being missing in the classroom I mean indoor cycling is based on cycling after all and a part of cycling is racing. And you know, a lot of people do races not because they think they're going to win but simply because they love the thrill of competition and the thrill of bettering, you know, bettering your best and showing up. So I think it's a, it's not a way you can use it everyday but it is the third way that we have to recognize can be very effective.

**John Macgowan:** All right, now Jay, we're going to get little long and you brought us something's right at the very beginning as far as you know those three different personality types. You know those that tend to reject, and those that are opened and those that are embracing power. Can I get you to stay around a little longer; we might have to split this into two, but to kind of go through your ideas on how to communicate, encourage whatever those different groups?

**Jay Blahnik:** Yeah, you bet.

**John Macgowan:** So that concludes part 1, my interview with Jay Blahnik in Schwinn Indoor Cycling, our ICI/PRO members can look forward to part 2 coming on December 8<sup>th</sup> where Jay and I are going to discuss those three personality types and the best way to communicate with them. Now if you're not an ICI/PRO member, there is a little chill in the air and that's driving everybody indoors, this may be the perfect time for you to at least give our seven day trail a try it's only a dollar and you can find more information about it at [Indoorcycleinstructor.com/pro](http://Indoorcycleinstructor.com/pro). Thanks for listening and if you have any other questions, you can always email me [john@indoorcycleinstructor.com](mailto:john@indoorcycleinstructor.com).