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What Winning a National Vertical-Leap Title Taught Me About Everything Else

By Scott Tischler · July 28, 2026 · 9 min read

The Two Feet That Changed How I Think

There is a specific silence that happens right before you leave the ground.

Your whole body goes quiet. The gym noise falls away. It is just you, a strip of tape on a wall, and the question every athlete secretly asks in that half-second: ***did the work actually work?***

I have lived in that silence more than most. I'm a national champion in the vertical leap — a YMCA competition I won against a field of more than 250,000 competitors — and four years earlier, in 1997, I won a national karate championship in the heavyweight division. Two very different sports. One identical lesson.

Here's the thing nobody tells you about winning a jumping title: **the jump is the least interesting part of the story.** The interesting part is the months of unglamorous, repeatable, boring work that made two extra inches of air possible. I didn't know it at the time, but I was building the exact operating system I'd later use to build companies, recover from failures, and keep showing up when quitting would have been easier and more forgivable.

Let me walk you through how a vertical jump is actually trained — the real stuff, not the hype — and I promise you'll recognize the blueprint for almost everything else that matters.

(Quick, honest note before we go further: what follows is general guidance from my own experience, not a prescription. Explosive training is high-force and high-risk. Get cleared by a doctor and work with a qualified coach before you start jumping off things.)

Principle 1: You Cannot Improve What You Refuse to Measure

The first day I got serious, I didn't train. I measured.

I stood flat-footed, reached as high as I could, and marked it. Then I jumped and marked the top of my reach. The difference between those two marks — that gap — was my vertical. It was smaller than my ego wanted it to be.

That number was humbling, and that's exactly why it was valuable. A vertical jump is brutally honest. You can't talk your way to a higher mark. You can't network your way into more hang time. The tape on the wall does not care how you feel about yourself. It just tells you the truth, over and over, until you either respond to it or quit.

I write my starting number down. Every serious athlete does. Because progress in explosive power is slow and invisible day-to-day — you gain in eighths of an inch, not feet — and without a baseline you'll swear nothing is happening and walk away one week before it clicks.

In business, I've watched brilliant people fly blind for years. They "feel" like the company is growing. They "sense" the marketing is working. Feelings are a terrible altimeter. The founders who win are the ones willing to stand against the wall, take the honest measurement — cash, churn, conversion, whatever the real number is — write it down, and let it hurt a little. You cannot improve what you refuse to measure.

Principle 2: Progressive Overload — Small Loads, Relentlessly Increased

Here is the actual mechanism behind a bigger vertical, stripped of magic: you make your body produce more force, faster, and you do it gradually.

That breaks into a few pillars, and a good program touches all of them:

Strength is the engine

You cannot fire a cannon out of a canoe. Before you can jump higher, the muscles that extend your hips, knees, and ankles have to get stronger. That means foundational lower-body strength work — squats, hinges, single-leg work — built patiently over months. Strength is the ceiling. Everything else is how high you reach toward it.

Plyometrics are the tuning

Strength makes force. Plyometrics teach your nervous system to release that force **explosively** — in the fraction of a second a jump actually lasts. Think controlled jump training: box jumps, bounding, depth work, pogo hops. This is powerful and it is also where people get hurt, because it's high-impact and seductive. More is not better here. Better is better. Quality reps, full recovery between them, and a slow ramp — that's the whole game.

Technique is free inches

Most people leave real height on the table simply because their movement is sloppy — a weak arm swing, a mistimed dip, a plant that leaks energy sideways instead of driving it up. Refining the mechanics of the jump itself gave me inches that cost zero additional strength. Sometimes the biggest gains aren't from doing more. They're from stopping the leaks in what you already do.

The word that ties it together is **progressive overload**. You add a little — a little more weight, one more inch on the box, one more quality rep — then you let your body adapt, then you add a little more. Too much too soon and you're injured. Too little and you stall. The art is the **slightly uncomfortable, sustainable increase**, repeated for longer than most people are willing to repeat anything.

I have never found a business problem that didn't respond to the same law. You don't build a company in a heroic weekend. You build it in small, relentless increases — one better process, one more customer, one improved product cycle — loaded onto a foundation, allowed to adapt, then loaded again.

Principle 3: Recovery Is Where the Growth Actually Happens

This is the counterintuitive one, and it's the one I got wrong the longest.

You do not get stronger during training. You get stronger during recovery. Training is the stimulus — it's the message that says "**we need to be able to do more.**" The adaptation, the actual physical rebuilding, happens later, while you sleep and eat and rest. Skip the recovery and you've sent the message with no time to answer it. You just accumulate damage and call it discipline.

Early on I thought exhaustion was virtue. Train harder, train more, train hurt. My numbers stalled and my body started sending warnings I was too proud to read. What finally moved the mark wasn't more grinding — it was sleeping enough, eating enough, and giving explosive sessions real space to absorb. The gains showed up on the rest days.

I'm an entrepreneur now, in a culture that romanticizes burnout the way I once romanticized overtraining. And I'll tell you plainly: the founders who flame out are running the exact program that stalled my vertical. Stimulus with no recovery isn't dedication. It's a slow injury. The body — and the business, and the mind — grows in the rest.

Principle 4: Showing Up Is the Whole Skill

Want to know the real secret behind out-jumping a quarter-million people?

I showed up on the days I didn't want to.

That's it. That's the edge. Almost anyone can train hard when they're motivated, fresh, and the mark is climbing. The championship is decided on the other days — the flat ones, the tired ones, the ones where the number didn't move and the couch made a compelling argument. Over months, the gap between me and the person who finished second wasn't talent. It was the count of days we each still showed up when showing up felt pointless.

Motivation is a guest. It visits, it leaves, and it is never there when you need it most. Discipline is what you build so you don't have to wait for the guest. **The jump is a test of a single moment; the training is a test of ten thousand ordinary ones.** You win the moment by winning the ordinary days nobody's watching.

Every company I've been part of has been won and lost on the ordinary days too. Not the launch. Not the big meeting. The Tuesday. The follow-up nobody would have noticed you skipped. The unglamorous rep, done again.

Principle 5: Compete Against the Tape, Not the Room

At the national competition, surrounded by athletes who'd also beaten enormous fields to get there, I learned the last piece.

The competitors in that room were not actually my opponents. **The wall was.** My only real job was to jump higher than I ever had — to beat my own last honest mark. If I did that, the standings took care of themselves. If I spent the day measuring myself against the guy stretching next to me, I'd borrow his nerves, chase his rhythm, and lose my own.

Competition, done right, isn't about diminishing anyone else. It's about extracting your absolute best by putting yourself somewhere your best is required. The room raises the floor. But you still jump alone, against your own ceiling.

I've carried that into every venture since. Watching competitors is fine for information and useless as a scoreboard. The only comparison that ever made me better was against my own previous mark. Beat that, consistently, and you eventually look up to find the room has fallen behind — not because you obsessed over them, but because you didn't.

What the Tape on the Wall Really Measured

Years later, I understand that the vertical-leap title was never really about the vertical leap. And the karate championship was never really about karate.

They were both proof — proof to myself, in a language too physical to argue with — that a specific way of living actually works. Measure honestly. Load small and relentless. Recover on purpose. Show up

on the empty days. Compete against your own ceiling.

That's not a jumping program. That's a life. It's how I've tried to build every business, raise every effort, climb out of every failure. The tape on the wall just happened to be where I learned to read it.

There's still that half-second of silence before every hard thing I attempt now — before a launch, a hard decision, a bet with no guarantee. Whole body quiet. The same old question: ***did the work actually work?***

And there's still only one honest way to find out.

You leave the ground.

Key takeaways

- ② Measure honestly before you train. A vertical jump — like a business metric — is brutally truthful, and you can't improve a number you refuse to write down.
- ② Train the full system: strength builds the engine, plyometrics tune the explosive release, and clean technique gives you "free" inches by stopping energy leaks.
- ② Progressive overload is the master key: small, sustainable, slightly uncomfortable increases repeated far longer than most people are willing — not heroic bursts.
- ② You grow during recovery, not during effort. Skipping rest turns discipline into slow injury, in the gym and at the office.
- ② Championships are won on ordinary days. Discipline beats motivation because motivation is never there when you need it.
- ② Compete against your own last mark, not the room. Beat your ceiling consistently and the standings take care of themselves.

Frequently asked questions

How long does it actually take to add real inches to a vertical jump?

In my experience, meaningful gains come over months, not weeks — explosive power improves in small, almost invisible increments. Progress often feels like nothing is happening right up until it clicks, which is exactly why a written baseline matters. Timelines vary widely by individual, training history, and consistency, so treat any specific promise with suspicion.

Is plyometric and explosive jump training safe for beginners?

It's powerful and effective, but it's also high-force, high-impact work where injuries happen when people rush. This article is general guidance from my own experience, not a personalized program. Please get cleared by a doctor and work with a qualified coach who can assess your foundation, teach proper landing mechanics, and scale the intensity to you before you start.

How do the lessons from vertical-leap training carry into business?

The same operating system runs both: measure honestly, load small and relentless (progressive overload), recover on purpose, show up on the days you don't feel like it, and compete against your own previous mark rather than the room. The jump just teaches those principles in a physical language that's impossible to argue your way out of.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.