

# THE PERFECT FIT

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CHALLENGE YOURSELF

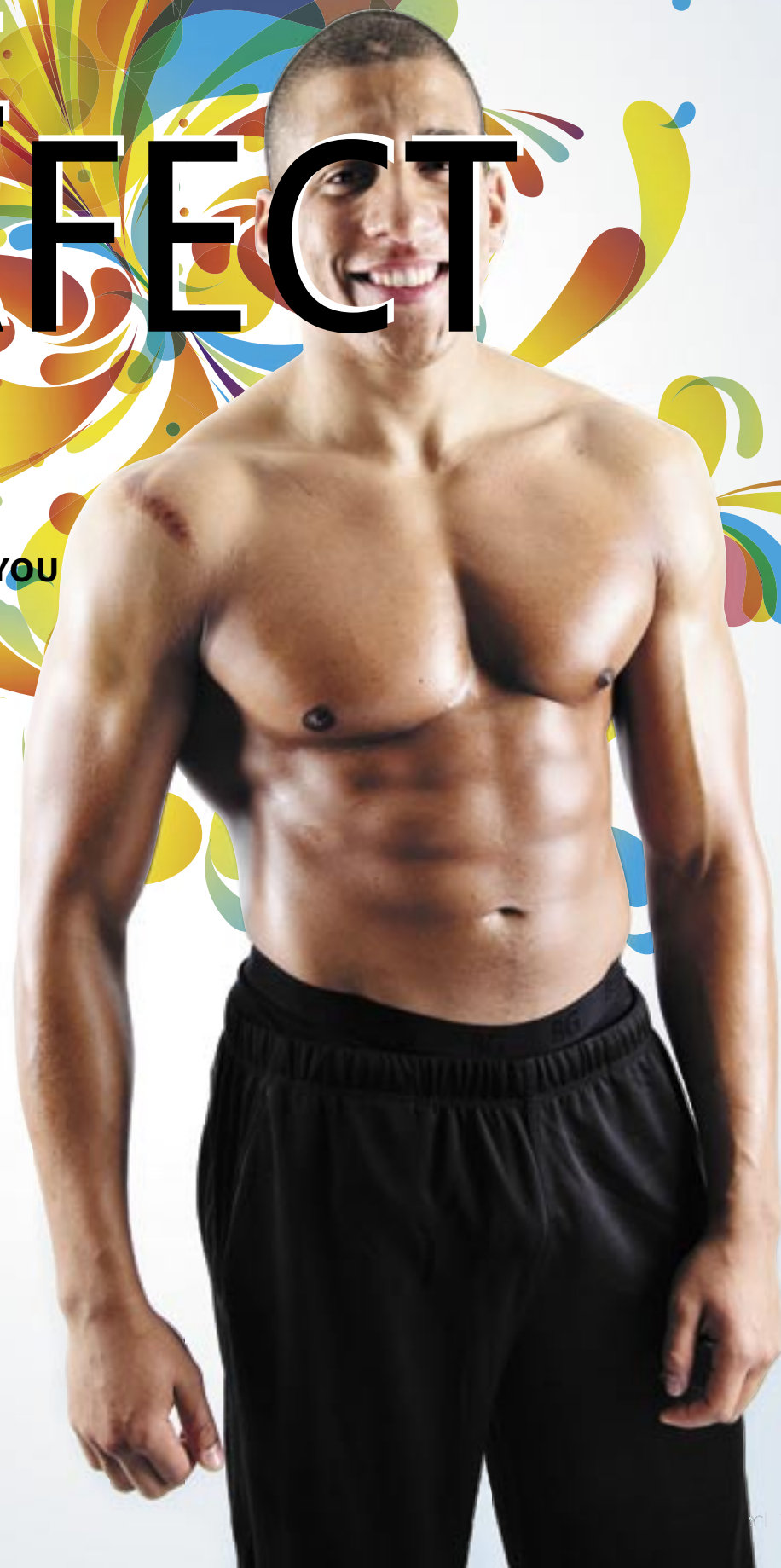
by Jonathan White

**T**ony's was a name that I kept hearing. He was a young man, I was told, who had turned his life around and was now helping others do the same. They said that I wouldn't believe his story. So I made arrangements to take a training session with him.

When Tony greets me at the Human in Motion gym, I fear I may have bitten off more than I can chew. From the photos, I expect that he'll be in good shape, but in person he looks like a cage fighter. Yet he's unerringly polite, well-spoken and has the posture that your mother used to clip you around the ear for slouching out of. It's the air of someone who rose to be the head of the school in a British military academy.

I'm told that I will start with some running, which leads me to expect a jog outside. Instead, Tony leads me to a five-meter strip and gets me sprinting and lunging. He wants to study my technique – and to see where my body is imbalanced – so as to devise a program for me.

After spending an hour battling gravity, resistance bands and my own body weight, I realize that getting the body of an Adonis is sweaty, nauseous work. That isn't the only thing I'm learning. For every exercise, Tony explains the science behind it with a clarity and enthusiasm that communicates not just knowledge but a desire to educate.





Seeing Tony with the kids at the afterschool physical-fitness sessions that he runs at the Western Academy of Beijing (WAB), it's obvious that he's a natural leader.

The dozen or so kids, who are at that stage where hormones have more hold over you than anything except your peers, are excited to see him. At once in charge and at ease, Tony slips into work mode and starts handing out high-fives before asking the kids what they've been eating for lunch. "Annie's," say a few kids. Tony's response is a quizzical raised eyebrow. The other members of the group fall silent until a healthy answer presents itself.

"I had pasta," volunteers one girl.

"Which sauce?" Tony demands.

Another awkward pause. "Meat ..."

"Good."

Such an approach might seem strange with teenagers but the students are responding to it.

Not only is attendance at these voluntary fitness classes sky-high, but the kids participate in the workouts – which comprise group circuits using the participants' own body weight or high-tempo sparring with pads – with unbridled vigor. Tony's enthusiasm is contagious. He's passionate to the point where you feel that you'd be embarrassed if you gave less than 100 percent. Most of all, he's got what they want: a physique that most of us think only achievable with an airbrush.

He didn't always look like this. It was last summer when Tony realized that he needed to change his life. After completing his Chinese studies at Tsinghua, he – like most of his peers – faced the problem of how to make ends meet. Unlike most new graduates, however, he was drained emotionally. In 2009, Tony had made a trip to Dubai to visit his father David, who worked as a football and swimming coach. On the last day of his stay, his dad suffered a cardiac arrest in front

of him. Not only did Tony have to rush his father to the nearest hospital, but it was a private facility and the costs soon spiraled. Tony extended his stay in the Emirate, raising funds from the parents of David's pupils to cover the medical bills as well as the cost of repatriating his father to the UK. Three months and thousands of dirams later, Tony finally managed to bring him home on life support, but doctors told the family that he would never recover. A week later, David passed away.

After returning to Beijing to finish his studies, Tony chose a path that most of us wouldn't be able to survive: working 16- to 20-hour days spread over a variety of jobs. The hours between 9pm and 6am were spent in a call center; daylight hours were spent on a combination of teaching Chinese, coaching sports, substitute teaching and even babysitting. It was a far cry from his goal of joining the British Royal Marines as an officer. Tony's sleep, diet and his home life suffered. "What I gained in money I was losing in spirit," he says of that time. "Each day I wasn't just fighting exhaustion, I was fighting grief."

"I found myself overworked, overstressed and feeling like I was trapped in a never-ending cycle. At 113kg with 24 percent body fat, I had no energy and little motivation. I asked myself when I had been happiest – it was when I was healthy and when I was a leader. None of my jobs were offering that," Tony says. "I started to do some real soul-searching."

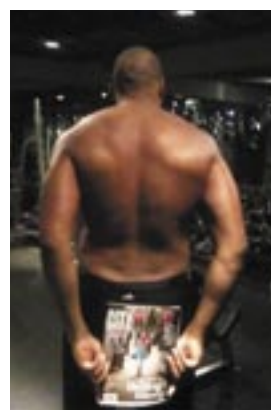
Epiphanies are all well and good but they are worthless if you don't act upon them. Fate stepped in when Tony saw an advertisement for the World Health Store's 12-Week Challenge. For some reason that was the day that the words "Transform Your Body & Life!" resonated. And the promise of a cash prize didn't hurt. Tony set himself the goal of looking like Gerard Butler in the film 300.

His devotion to that goal was Spartan.

With his assortment of jobs, it would not have





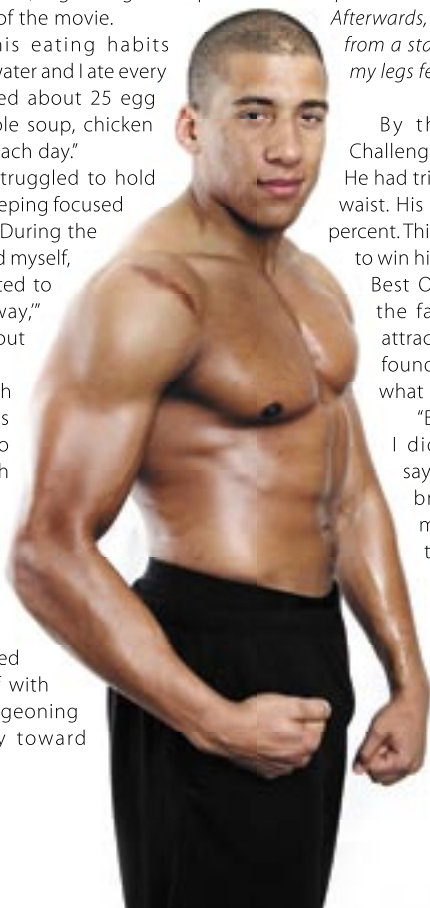


been practical for him to spend all day at the gym, so he maintained his work schedule and somehow managed to squeeze in two hours of training each day, six days a week. He always started with 20 minutes of high-intensity cardio, followed by 15 minutes of core exercises, and then mini-circuits without resting – alternating days on the upper and lower body – split equally between weights, machines (if he could make it to the gym) and body-weight exercises. At the end of each month, he tackled the “300 Workout,” a grueling 300-rep routine used by the cast of the movie.

He also changed his eating habits completely. “I only drank water and I ate every three hours – I consumed about 25 egg whites, broccoli, vegetable soup, chicken and four protein shakes each day.”

It wasn’t easy. Tony struggled to hold down all his jobs while keeping focused on his training regimen. “During the 12 weeks, I continually told myself, ‘As long as I am committed to my goals, I will find a way,’” he said. “I didn’t think about anything else.”

About halfway through the three months, things began to change. Not so much in Tony – although his physique was growing ever-more chiseled – but in other people. People started to ask him exactly what he was doing. “Do you think I can do that too?” they asked him. Tony found himself with a following – and a burgeoning sense of responsibility toward them.



*When we meet for a second session, Tony has decided that my hips need to be balanced and my core strengthened. Apparently, years of playing football have left me lopsided. He leads me through more resistance work, this time even more tailored to my needs. In that hour, I discover exactly how much my legs can bend. “They might feel like they are going to break, but the human body is strong,” Tony tells me before he bends me like Stretch Armstrong. Every stretch brings the feeling that something must snap – but through the pain comes relief.*

*Afterwards, I can reach well under my toes from a standing position. The next day, my legs feel brand-new.*

By the end of the 12-Week Challenge, Tony was 16 kilos lighter. He had trimmed eight inches from his waist. His body fat was down to eight percent. This transformation was enough to win him the prize for Best Male and Best Overall Competitor. Despite the fact that he’d initially been attracted to the prize money, Tony found that his new lifestyle was what he valued most.

“By becoming healthy again, I didn’t just gain fitness,” he says. “My dedication and focus brought me the respect of my friends, colleagues and the community. My attitude and new healthy lifestyle conveyed the image and manners of someone to follow, someone to lead.”

After his victory, the requests from staff and kids to be trained came in even more thick and fast. Tony put together his own

training system, Four Point Fitness, based on the four principles that underscored his own regime: discipline, focus, commitment and momentum. It’s these principles that are guiding the pupils at WAB, that are guiding the regimes set for Tony’s adult clients, and that have earned this fledgling fitness company an expanding roster that already includes, in collaboration with the Human in Motion gym, two Chinese Olympic gold medalists. “I’ve realized that I want to inspire others to be their best,” Tony says. “To find the discipline within themselves to focus on their goals. To commit to a plan and with each success, no matter how small, they build momentum that carries them to their ultimate goals – whatever they may be.”

Tony’s story would have been inspiring enough if he had merely transformed his body, but people are responding to him because they see a man who transformed his life as well – and is eager to help others achieve their potential. It’s a tale that is as fleshed out as his physique. The focus he learned under the tutelage of the military is no longer used for catching five-minute naps between shifts. He’s using it now to do what he knows and loves.

In December, he even found himself seated at the top table of the British Chamber of Commerce’s annual Christmas party, having been invited to introduce Four Point Fitness to an audience that included the British Ambassador. Tony is as surprised as anyone by the speed at which it has all taken off, but that doesn’t mean he’s slowing down. He won’t be pinned down on where it’s going, though. “When I look at where I was – and where I am now ...” He grins and shakes his head. Whatever the future holds, he’s not losing sleep over it.

*For more information about Four Point Fitness, contact Tony Nicholson at [4pointfitness@gmail.com](mailto:4pointfitness@gmail.com).*

# SURVIVOR: BEIJING

HOW IS LIFE IN A MEGALOPOLIS AFFECTING YOUR LIFE EXPECTANCY?

START

Instructions: Players take turns rolling one die; the first to reach the final square wins.







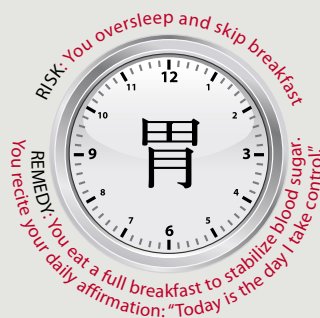
**3-5AM**  
**LUNGS**  
associated with grief  
and sadness



RISK: Fitful slumber rocked by crushing indigestion



**5-7AM**  
**LARGE INTESTINE**  
associated with worry



**7-9AM**  
**STOMACH**  
associated with mental anxiety

RISK: Your sexting ex suggests booty call. You're furious yet curious.



**1-3AM**  
**LIVER**  
associated with anger  
and frustration

# VISCERAL EMOTION

## ROUND-THE-CLOCK QI

First of all, we should tell you that the *Beijinger* is not trained in TCM. We have to admit that. Now that's out of the way, here is our Dummy's Guide to the Qi Cycle (and that's by dummies as much as for dummies.)

Qi (which we shall translate as energy) moves along the body's meridians (think of them as energy pathways associated with certain organs). Over the course of a day, it stays in each meridian for a two-hour period, boosting the energy of that particular organ. Each organ is also linked to a specific emotion - and the two influence each other strongly. When the physical organ is weakened, emotion may get expressed in a grossly distorted way. On the other hand, unregulated emotion can do damage to its corresponding organ.

The more we read about TCM, the more confused we got. Not being able to grasp the complexity of this system made us anxious. We began to fear that we weren't as smart as we'd imagined. But the more we thought about it, the angrier we got. "Stupid TCM - who needs all those needles and foul-smelling herbal concoctions anyway!" As the day wore on, though, it just made us really depressed. And that's when we realized that a whole day - and an entire Qi cycle - had gone by, so our mood swings kinda made sense.

Here are our suggestions for what perils might befall you as the day goes on and what measures you can take to counter them. Let the Qi flow.

RISK: Craving a fatty midnight snack, you make a beeline for Stadium Dog.



**11PM-1AM**  
**GALLBLADDER**  
associated with resentment

RISK: You feel depressed about going to a friend's leaving party.



**9-11PM**  
**TRIPLE BURNER**  
maintains balance, transforming negativity into positivity

**7-9PM**  
**PERICARDIUM**  
buffers heart from emotional excess

RISK: While out for dinner, you see your ex with their new beau.



**5-7PM**  
**KIDNEYS**  
associated with courage, willpower  
and sexual potency

RISK: As the work day winds down, your productivity slips; you're tempted to head down the NSFW superhighway.



RISK: Your hands tremble before that dreaded meeting with the boss to ask for a raise.



**3-5PM**  
**BLADDER**  
associated with fear

RISK: While watching hilarious viral videos on Youku, your uncontrolled laughter attracts a suspicious look from the boss.



**11AM-1PM**  
**HEART**  
associated with excitement and joy

RISK: That indigestion from last night just won't subside.



**1-3PM**  
**SMALL INTESTINE**  
associated with discernment and judgment