

EPISODE 205

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: Welcome back to So Money everyone. I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi. Episode 205, can you believe it? We've got a special kind of guest on today. We have with us a fitness entrepreneur, high profile personal trainer, life coach and teacher. He is the co-founder of the newest boutique workout in New York City called "Model Fit". His name is Justin Gelband and he has been dubbed "The Model Whisperer" from the New York Times Magazine, with a client base including some of the world's hottest models and celebrities, including Miranda Kerr, and Taylor Swift.

He's super accomplished in the personal training field, obviously! He's got certifications from the National Academy of Sports Medicine and APEX Nutrition. He says his passion for fitness started at a young age where he grew up swimming competitively and playing tennis and soccer. He's now revolutionizing workouts for women by combining a mix of Pilates, Yoga, movement, motion balanced stability, functional training, and much more. His belief is that all women can attain being "model fit" by working with your body to feel comfortable in your own skin and eating right. Eating's very important he says!

Three takeaways from our conversation with Justin, include rising the fitness training ranks. How did he do it? Started out making just \$8 an hour, believe it or not! And of course today he trains celebrities and has his own popular boutique studio. How Justin combats pressures from the modelling industry that insists women be really, really, really skinny. How opening his own gym in Los Angeles years ago marked a major money mistake for Justin. That and lots more!

Here we go, unleashing Justin Gelband.

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[INTERVIEW]

FT: Justin Gelband, the model whisperer, welcome to So Money! Great to have you on the show.

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JG: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

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FT: I wanna talk all about Model Fit in just a moment, but let's take it back several years to when you were a competitive swimmer. Now you're training the stars, particularly models. How did you get to where you are? Did you always aspire to be training this particular niche of clients?

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JG: It started when I was about 15. I swam basically my entire life. I started at five, I swam for a national and collegiate team. My national coach, his name was Jim Wood, he was one of the most inspiring intellectual disciplinarians that I've ever been around, to the point where he gave you the motivation, the self-esteem, and the drive to just be the best that you can be with your own body.

When I went to college I decided I was going to be a physical therapist, but at the same time I was working towards being in the fitness field, I wasn't sure where. I did an internship with the Metro Stars, which was a professional soccer team and I was working as the assistant to the director of marketing and sales, so there was a lot of things going on. It was almost like, almost a full plate, so I wasn't sure where I was gonna go with it. I graduated with a five year degree in exercise science, and then I moved out to California.

My first year and a half I worked any job under the sun just to make money, from being a pizza delivery boy, to coaching and working at a YMCA. I was doing anything, and I was working as an extra in movies as well. So I didn't really know where, what, how, and when. And then one day I was in the 24 Hour Fitness in West Hollywood and the fitness advisors - there was two of them - asked me if I wanted to be a trainer. And I said, "Nah, not really." And they're like, "Well,

you happen to train differently than anyone we've ever seen. Everything you do is based on balance and stability and movement and motion, and you're not pushing yourself in a way that we see can harm somebody, and you really seem to be focused on how to get the body in shape, not how to break the body down." And it starts primarily with nutrition. 85% of what you do is what you eat.

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FT: Two things; what in your experience are common foods that we should all avoid for the most part, that we tend to overeat, and what are some super foods that are affordable that everyone should incorporate more of into their diet?

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JG: One thing that we really have to look at is fruit, you should try to stick to mostly berries. Not to say that you can't have melon or apple or orange, but for some people apples, oranges, pears, peaches, could become very acidic. Melon doesn't seem to be very digestible. As far as food is concerned, gluten free today is probably the best way to go, especially when you're dealing with bread because of the fact that the gluten itself, it causes you to become bloated, hard for you to digest, doesn't really give you the energy you need.

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FT: Let's fast forward a little bit and talk about Model Fit and what - I know, again, it's very catered to the individual, but what is a typical model fit workout that maybe listeners at home can emulate, if even possible?

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JG: For people at home, they really need to see what fits their activity levels the best. For me when I start a program, I always start with obviously what I said before, food. And then cardio. Building your cardiovascular system is really important. Whether you're walking, running, hiking, biking, playing a sport, it's something that you really need to enjoy and really need to go out first

because people always relate exercise to a gym, and it's not true. Gyms itself happen to be very intimidating, and happen to be an area that most people don't feel comfortable going to unless they actually understand what they're doing.

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FT: You know the fitness market has been booming over the last several years, particularly with this surge of boutique gyms, fitness classes, not one on one but the group classes - SoulCycle, Barry's Bootcamp, your program, just to name a few. And people will pay upwards of \$35-\$50 a class. What's going on? How would you characterize this boom? What's driving it other than just people wanting to be fit?

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JG: The idea of fitness exercise is again, to bring unity to the fitness world, for people to really understand that in order for them to feel good about themselves they would like to be in a class environment, meet new people, try new things, and feel more encouraged. I feel that when I do classes especially, I'm very encouraging to each and every individuals and it's almost like I'm having 15 one-on-one clients in a 15-person class. And I really go around and I work on the posture, the form, the resistance.

Exercise and pain do not relate. I know a lot of people feel that, and it's very, very important and I wanna stress this over the radio and of course if I ever go on TV, it is one of the things I will discuss too. Pain and exercise are not relative, okay? They do not relate to each other, and I'm saying it again.

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FT: So I imagine you cringing watching The Biggest Loser because that is kind of the opposite of everything you've been talking about today, where that show is really about taking you to the limit, the max, not really catering the workouts to the specific individual or gender, and really kind of breaking you down. You have to lose so much weight on that show. Is there any merit to going to those extremes to get the momentum going?

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JG: Alright, so I'm a very honest person so I'll be honest; I never like to put down the craft of other people. So The Biggest Loser may be something that I don't agree with, but I'm not gonna say that it's bad. I just feel that I would approach it in a different way. That's all.

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FT: That's fair, that's fair. That's all we have to say about that.

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JG: Injuries and health conditions are really huge in our sight today. More people are getting hurt through exercise through fitness, so when I decided to create my method, I decided that I was gonna create a method that was based on the individual, their injuries, health conditions, lifestyle, how they are throughout their daily life, and how can we improve their daily life so that when they do exercise, they feel good about themselves. People always say, "Oh well you train models for a living." I got into training models because I was tired of the stereotype that all models need to drink, do drugs, and starve themselves in order to be fit.

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FT: You just actually read my mind because there is this, I don't even know if it's a stereotype, I mean it's a sad truth in some cases that models are too thin, they don't look healthy on the runways. The industry, particularly the magazines and the people who are booking these models for these gigs, they seem to be promoting thinness over healthfulness. So as someone who is in the industry, working with a lot of women in this industry, how do you work within those pressures?

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JG: The pressure is like no one's ever seen. I will say this to you, I feel very loyal and lucky and honored to work with the clients I have worked with. I appreciate the fact that each and every client that I've ever trained has put me in the place that I am today, has given me the willpower to empower the most beautiful women or the best of actors and actresses in the world, to be the best at their job. But one of the things I feel like I was put on this earth to help people. And one of the things I teach each and everyone of my clients is there's no quick fix. There's no drink, there's no drug, there's no pill, there's no exercise that will ever get you in the shape that you wanna be, unless you're gonna eat properly, do the proper cardio, get the proper rest.

I've trained a few models over the past three years who stopped modeling actually, because they weren't able to reach a certain size. And what I found was very funny, is during the time that we trained together, we had to push and pull and pick, and push and pull and pick, and find a way for these women to be a smaller size, based on what the sample size was. And when they stopped - and these are girls that start at 18, 19, 20 years old, and now these girls are - or let me call them women - are now 25, 26, 27, have better bodies, better mindsets, spiritually on top of the world, and look better and are leaner, fitter, and toner now doing the same exercises that we did five years ago, because they're happy.

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FT: This connection that you're talking about between your health, your physical health and your mental health, is something that I hear a lot on this show, and I love hearing from people with your background in the health space, in the fitness world because it is not a coincidence that I would say you're very good at making decisions about life in general. When you have a clear mind, when you're not stressed, when you're healthy, when you feel good, you make good decisions.

And so let's transition now to some financial questions because I'm curious, Justin, to hear about things like your financial philosophy, your habits, as they pertain to money because I think you have a very, very clear conscience. So if there is a financial philosophy that you have, Justin, you are an entrepreneur - let's not forget - what would it be?

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JG: When I was 28 years old, I decided that I had been training in Los Angeles with, at the time, a lot well-known celebrities. I had started with celebrities first, and obviously this was after building my program and working two and a half years at 24 Hour Fitness, and working with strictly overweight women. And obviously I knew my niche was women, but I was still working with a few men at the time. But what I didn't realize is that you much really step back and look at the whole picture first and recognize that in order to be successful in life, number one: you have to have a passion for what you do. And I know it's hard sometimes when everybody's looking for that job and like I said, I'm the story of the story because when I started working at 24 Hour Fitness in the year 2000, I was making \$8 an hour.

I was making \$800 a month and I was basically getting by between that and the other jobs I had - enough to pay for my car, my car insurance, and a small apartment for me to live, and enough food just to stay healthy. And I was still - and I'm not gonna lie - I was eating the rice and beans, the Oodles and Noodles, cereal, oatmeal - I wasn't really able to afford that much. And what I learned is I learned how to basically take the money that I had and save it as much as I could.

But what I did do at 29 years old, was act on impulse. And I think that people today don't realize that impulse is a huge, huge, huge denominator as far as it can really help you, but it can also hinder you in a way where you can make the wrong decisions, like you said. You're thinking on your feet, you're not stepping back and looking at the whole picture. And I bought myself a gym in Los Angeles at 29 years old because I had all these famous clients and I was afraid that I wasn't able to handle the gym that I was working at at the time because the paparazzi was always outside, people were always bothering me, no one was leaving my clients alone, and I thought I was gonna lose my clients. So I acted on impulse.

Three years later I had to close the gym because I wasn't successful. But what I was successful in was learning. And I feel like everyone in life has learning experiences and I understand that you hear stories about Donald Trump and all these other "big-wig" financial entrepreneurs that lost all their money and gained all their money back, and I feel like the common denominator with the winning and the losing is - I always look at myself as the weeble-wobble. Years ago they used to have this toy called the weeble-wobble, "You get your weeble-wobble, but you don't fall down."

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FT: Yes!

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JG: And the thing is, is that I always looked at myself as the weeble-wobble because no matter when I was growing up as a kid, I was always on the shorter side. I was a great athlete, I could play any sport I wanted, I was picked on a little bit, bullied a little bit, I was on the nerdier side. But I always made sure that I always put myself in situation where I was going to succeed, no matter how much I was pushed around, picked on, bullied, I knew what my goals and objectives were. And so when I did lose my hat with the gym, I didn't look at it as a negative, I looked at it as, "Okay Justin, you know what? You made a mistake.

I started in LA in the year 2000 with nothing. Started working with \$8 an hour, I worked myself all the way up to \$150 an hour, and when I sold the gym in LA I moved to New York with zero. Okay? Nothing. I had worked with one big client, which I will mentioned, her name is Angela Lindvall, who's a big model. Who to me has been one of the most inspirational people that I've ever had in my life, and who introduced me to the right people in order for me to start training Miranda Kerr and NV cause those were my first. NV, Linda V, and Miranda Kerr were my first three clients in New York City.

And what I learned from was the fact that - and not only did I learn the whole modelling business, but I learned how to respect, not only what the women do as models, but how to achieve the goals and objectives you need to. So I went out there to each and every agency and I said, "Listen. I sell packages of 10 sessions for \$10 and I know that most people don't pay until after their sessions's done. But for me, because I've had people people burn me in the past, I would appreciate it if we could actually do it the other way, that you pay me upfront. But what I'm gonna do for all of you is I'm gonna show you that my exercises work for his genre, for these people, and I'm gonna train these girls for 10 sessions first, and if you're not happy at the end, then you don't have pay me. But if you're happy with my service at the end, then obviously I expect to get paid.

And I have to say that not one person didn't pay me, and I built my whole business around not only being with my clients and on top of my clients and really entering into their life, but also being a life coach. Giving them the self-esteem, motivation, discipline, the love, the attention, the cuddling, the exercises, the movement, the motion, the stretching, and I really became a family member. And I've always treated people that way, and I've always felt that in order for you to succeed and actually earn the money that you wanna earn, it all starts with your personality and how you approach your clientele, especially in a service business. Regardless of how angry, how upset, how unnerved, how pissed off - in a service business the client is always first.

And I know sometimes it's very hard for all of us to grasp this, but if you really really step back and you really look at who you are and what you can do for other people, no matter what niche you're in, you will earn the money as long as you provide the good service.

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FT: I love that. Now let's do some So Money Fill in the Blanks. This is where we wrap the interview. First thing that comes to your mind, finish the sentence. Ready?

[00:17:23]

JG: Alright.

[00:17:25]

FT: [Laughs]

[00:17:27]

JG: Oh hey I'm not gonna spit out the words so give me, after each phrase, at least give me a second to think about it.

[00:17:31]

FT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course, of course. Don't overthink it though!

If I won the lottery tomorrow - let's say someone dropped off \$100 million dollars on your doorstep - I would _____.

[00:17:41]

JG: Open my foundation for Type II Diabetes and childhood obesity.

[00:17:46]

FT: Love that!

The one thing that I spend on that makes my life easier or better is _____.

[00:17:52]

JG: Food!

[00:17:54]

FT: My biggest guilty pleasure that I spend a lot on is _____.

[00:18:00]

JG: Travel.

[00:18:00]

FT: And you're in Brazil right now, we should say!

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JG: Yes. I travel all the time. I love to travel for work. So if I have a chance to train people in Paris or in London or in Brazil...

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FT: You go where the client is.

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JG: ...of anywhere outside the United States. Yes, I love to travel. It's the one the thing that I always suggest to people when I meet them for the first time, second time, third time - whether they're from my country, not from my country. One of the things I found was very interesting and why I fell in love with Brazil - and I know everybody, the first thing they're gonna say, it's all about women, but it's not. The culture, the people, the food, just the way that they are so family oriented, and in America I don't always feel like the families are as oriented the way that they are here in Brazil.

And number two, it's just the passion that the people have. I think that life is about you and you really need to take what's given to you and really spiritually love and believe in yourself, and that will allow you to love other people and give back to other people. And so when you stay put in the same place all the time - and I know not everybody has the money to travel. So I don't want people to look at it and be like, "Well I can't afford it." Leave your city, leave your town. It doesn't have to be leaving the country.

But I feel like people bottle themselves up in the same town, in the same city, they're always doing the same routine, whether it's going to the same bar, the same club, the same library, the same pool, the same gym. You have to change your location...

[00:19:24]

FT: Get outside your comfort zone. Yes. Get out of your comfort zone.

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JG: The more you're in your comfort zone, the harder it is for you. I'm rambling, sorry.

[00:19:30]

FT: No, no. This is all good!

One thing I wish I had known about money growing up is _____.

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JG: How evil it can be.

[00:19:39]

FT: Really?

[00:19:41]

JG: Yes. Because...

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FT: Why would you say that?

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JG: Because I feel that people put more onus on how money can affect their life, whereas - this brings back to what we were talking about culture. My wife happens to be one of the happiest people all the time and she never came from a lot of money, but she's always happy, she's always in a good mood and when she goes into a room she lights it up. And there's not one person that doesn't know my wife that doesn't say that. They always say, "Lainey, oh my gosh

I've never seen somebody so happy all the time," and she's not rich, and she doesn't come from a place that has tons of money. She comes from a place in Brazil that everybody worked, and everybody grew up and 5, 6, 7, 8 people lived in the same house.

And so I don't like it when people put an onus only on money and that it's very important, "You have to make this money in order to survive." You need to love yourself and believe in yourself and understand that whatever job, or whatever career you take, is something that you're going to hopefully enjoy and that the money will come along with it. But if you only put the onuses, "I have to make the money. I have to make the money. I have to do this," that's where it causes number one problems. And you see this all the time in the news when people are getting robbed or things are going on that aren't supportive to our society, and it's because everybody's always talking about money.

I think that money is important, but your health is important first. So I think that people need to realize, if you wanna smoke, you wanna drink, you wanna do whatever you do, do it in moderation. No one says you shouldn't. You wanna eat a burger or pizza or whatever, do it in moderation. Nobody's perfect. Same thing with money; you wanna earn money, that's great. But make sure that while you're earning the money, you're earning the money for the right reason, not because you have to earn it.

And I struggled, and I lived in 300 square foot apartments, and I had a raggedy car and raggedy clothes, and I couldn't go out, and I couldn't do certain things in my life. But it made me stronger and it made me better, but I never put the onus on, "Oh my gosh I have to make this money." And when I did do that, which I have done in my life like everyone else does, it caused me more stress, more anxiety, and more pain in my body than it did when I actually stepped back and said, "You know what? The money will come Justin. You just have to be positive and you just have to have a good outlook on how you're going to earn that money."

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FT: And last but not least Justin, finish the sentence for me; I'm So Money because _____.

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JG: Because I have a passion for my career and for what I give back to people in each and every person's daily life.

[00:22:06]

FT: Beautiful. Justin Gelband, thank you so much! We really appreciate all of your insights, your generous advice, and being so open and honest with us on the show. Good luck to you!

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JG: Thank you very much.

[END]