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Realising a dream: Personal trainer Jeff Willoughby says opening Studio 41 has been a long-term vision and goal.

Photo: JOHN NICHOLSON

In peak form to offer fitness

Jeff Willoughby is classed as one of the most qualified fitness professionals in Europe.

As a teenager Jeff Willoughby had planned to become a pilot in the Royal New Zealand Airforce. However, after failing to make the cut in the final stages he was left scratching his head, wondering what to pursue next. So he decided to become a personal trainer and undertake a Bachelor of Physical Education at Otago University instead. "At the time I thought it would be something pretty cool to do, I was always into exercise, you could say I was a sports nut – by the time I was 18 I was sole instructor of a martial arts dojo in Johnsonville, on top of two 1st XV rugby trainings a week, as well as basketball and tennis." And Mr Willoughby has never looked back – 16 years on he's classed as one of the most qualified fitness professionals in Europe and has just opened his own studio in Wellington. "I've been working towards this studio for a number of years, so it's great to finally realise what has been a long-term vision and goal," says Mr Willoughby. "Success is being able to understand where you want to go and to make sure you're taking steps in the right direction so that you eventually achieve whatever it is your goals are. "I have a passion for learning and I'm someone who very much works towards goals, so finally realising this dream is very satisfying indeed."

As Mr Willoughby says, it's been a long time coming, but he's brought more than a decade's worth of experience, most of it from overseas, with him to his new venture. He, wife Erica and 20-month-old son Isaac only returned from Britain in December, then set to work on establishing Studio 41. The business benefits from the extensive fitness industry knowledge that the pair have gained overseas. In fact, he says, extensive research into health clubs, fitness centres and personal training establishments has allowed them to pick the best aspects of each and create what they believe to be a new gym experience. For starters, he has strength and fitness training qualifications from the Charles Poliquin Institute, the namesake training more Olympic athletes than any other trainer in the world; he's done an internship studying strength training with the famous Juan Carlos Santana in Florida and he's studied with Gary Gray, a world-renowned physical therapist. "I guess I have picked up a lot of knowledge along the way, but I love to learn and if you stay too long in one place you become stale and complacent. If I'm not in a position where I'm learning new things I want to move on."

Mr Willoughby launched his career at the Les Mills gym in Wellington where he was one of about 50 trainers, looking after numerous clients. "Personal training is a tough profession, it's a sink or swim, and luckily I was able to make a reasonable living out of it." After two years he left for Dublin where he took a job as one of just three trainers at a 10,000-member club. "I was naive enough to think every club had 50 trainers, so it was quite a shock walking into that club. "Ironically, it was harder to pick up clients, purely because a club that has 50 trainers creates a culture that personal training is okay and acceptable, whereas in a club that has only three, it creates the idea that it's only for the rich. "But I truly believe everyone can afford a personal trainer. It's not about the money, it's about values. If you value health and fitness you'll be going to the gym, if you don't you'll be the one shouting a round of beers on a Friday night." While working in Dublin Mr Willoughby's thirst for knowledge took him to a fitness convention in Washington DC, where he expanded his networks and job prospects. He managed to land a job distributing Les Mills' personal training systems throughout Britain, ensuring trainers at the 30-something clubs were up to speed with the Bodytrainer programme. He soon realised the need for more skilled gym instructors, took his concerns to Fitpro, the distribution hub of all Les Mills products, and helped to create a solution. Called 10 Minute Gym, it's a fitness instructor-based upskilling interaction programme, a programme he took to clubs throughout Britain which is still in use today. After another two-year stint working for Fitpro, Mr Willoughby decided it was time to return to the gym floor, taking a self-employed position at the Exclusive KX club in Chelsea, London, though he continued to teach 10 Minute Gym on a part-time basis. "That was tough – I'd do 30 sessions from Monday to Wednesday, then that night I'd jump on a plane or a train to wherever the course I was running was, take the course for two days, then travel back home on the Friday night ready to do another three or four sessions on a Saturday morning. "I can say I've been to most places in the UK, but I haven't really seen them. It was complete madness and I did it for two years. It definitely took its toll but gave me a great amount of experience."

Now back home he says it's his MAT studies that sets him apart in terms of results and knowledge from other therapists. By combining MAT and his strength knowledge he can look at a person biomechanically and help them become pain-free and stronger in a way he claims no-one else can. Mr Willoughby says it's all about activating the weak musculature, a type of training that carries over to his clients' everyday lifestyles, a type of training that can often mean no pain for the first time in a long time. He gives the example of a common problem, a tight hamstring, which most people attribute to tightness. "In the presence of instability the body tightens itself, it's a beautiful protective mechanism. MAT is understanding the premise that tightness is secondary to weakness, and it comes down to a whole series of muscle testing to figure out what is so weak that it's causing, the hamstring say, to be so tight." In the case of the tight hamstring, he says it could be due to lumbar instability close to a disc bulge, where the hamstring has tightened up to lock down the pelvis to decrease lumbar movement. "Finding the actual problem is almost like being a detective, and the results I've got in getting people out of pain have been just unbelievable." Mr Willoughby talks of a woman who had experienced knee pain for years. After a series of muscle tests he treated her lumbar spine and now she is completely pain-free. "It's like an eight-cylinder car where only four cylinders are working. It'll still work, but you might think those four cylinders are overheating so when you open the bonnet you pour water on them. In actual fact they're doing a perfect job helping out the other four cylinders that aren't working. "For most of us humans, we're working on four cylinders, so it's all about trying to balance the muscular system. "When I can help someone get out of pain like that, using all the knowledge I've gained over the past few decades, I have to say it's incredibly rewarding, it's a feeling you just can't beat."

Careers NZ puts budding journo through his paces

CAREERS New Zealand, which provides free and independent careers information and advice, decided to offer a work experience opportunity to someone aged between 17 and 24, as part of the recent Youth Week. It put a message out through Facebook, Wellington cafes, university noticeboards and its own personal networks to find the right student to work with its website content team. Budding journalist Alex Ashton happened to see the advert, applied and got the position. "I'm in my last year of school, I'm keen to get into journalism and I saw it as an opportunity to test the water first," the 17-year-old says. And he wasn't disappointed – after a week conducting interviews, writing web content, writing a blog post, taking photographs and carrying out some user testing of Careers New Zealand's online tools, he's still keen to pursue journalism as a career. He now plans to take up a bachelor of communications majoring in journalism at Massey University when he leaves school. "If anything, this experience has just made me want to do it more – I really

enjoyed the work I was doing, it didn't feel like work and the time just flew by." Working closely with the website editors, Alex says the amount he learned in a week was "mindblowing", his biggest discovery being that writing for the web is completely different to writing for print. "I found the whole experience invaluable. I've had pieces published on the Careers New Zealand website now and hopefully I'll get a reference out of it too." Alex kept Careers New Zealand's website team on its toes during his tenure, churning through the workload so quickly and efficiently they had to find him extra work to do. "Alex was just awesome," says website content team leader Lindsay Alderton. "He's enthusiastic, he's dedicated and we definitely underestimated how fast he could work, which suited us because there's always work to be done." This is the first time Careers New Zealand has offered a young person a work experience opportunity as part of Youth Week. Due to the success of Alex's time with the service, Careers New Zealand is considering offering

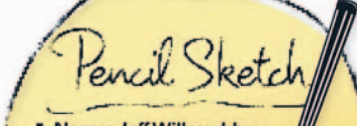


Debrief: Lindsay Alderton from Careers NZ discusses Dominion Post articles with Onslow College student Alex Ashton.

similar opportunities outside of Youth Week. "One of our key audiences is young people. It's really important we connect with them and this is one way of doing that," says Ms Alderton. "It's great to be able to give a young person an opportunity to test the water before they launch into their chosen career path." For Careers New Zealand, using Alex to test its online tools and having his input into a new self-help package

currently being designed was also invaluable. "We're a careers organisation, which provides a vast wealth of different ways to connect to people underneath the 17 to 24-year-old umbrella. We need to make sure we're reaching those young people in the different areas of their working life." For more information go to: careers.govt.nz

Being headhunted by a high-end exclusive fitness studio in Mayfair changed all that, but the learning continued. He'd discovered the Muscle Activation Techniques (MAT) while attending a fitness convention in New York and asked the inventors if he could take it into Britain. They said yes, he committed himself to commuting to Colorado for three to four days once a month for two years to become a MAT specialist and then spread the word in Britain. In fact, Mr Willoughby was even hired as the exclusive MAT therapist for the London Wasps professional rugby team where he regularly treated England internationals like Phil Vickery and Tom Rees and former Hurricanes Riki Flutey and Joe Ward. "As athletes are usually healthier and have good muscular systems, they are easier to treat than your regular individual so results with them can be exceptional."



Name: Jeff Willoughby.
Inspired by: Greg Roskopf founder of MAT.
Favourite Movie: Pulp Fiction.
Favourite Album: Best of Red Hot Chili Peppers.
Favourite quote: "When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when it is convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results." - Ken Blanchard, author, The One Minute Manager.
Favourite website: studio41.co.nz