

Erwan Le Corre - The Roots of MovNat

Sometimes, on rare occasion, you meet a person and think to yourself, “This person knows exactly why they’re on the planet.” That is how I felt talking with [Erwan Le Corre](#). Passionate and perfectionistic, Erwan is not your everyday human being and his fitness philosophy is not your everyday gym fare. Erwan Le Corre is on a mission, and his mission is to save you.

To Erwan you are the human equivalent of an animal in a zoo and you deserve your freedom. Our modern lives have trapped us in cages that prevent us from eating, moving, and behaving as our natural and true selves. But unlike the animals in the zoo, it is harder to help a human break free. Said Erwan, “It’s hard to wake up a zoo human, because there’s a difference between the animals in the zoo and us. The



animal in the zoo knows they are in the zoo. They know they are captive and are not free. We think we are free, but we’re not. The cages are virtual and, in fact, the bars reside in our own self-imposed limitations, whether we are conscious of them or not.”

Not only do we not know we are caged, according to Erwan we don’t even know what fitness is. Modern gyms, careers, and lifestyles have removed us from natural physical expression. Erwan explained:

Conventional fitness starts with the compartmentalization between strength training through muscle regulation and cardio through ellipticals and that kind of thing. That’s what people think. People think they’ve done that and that’s exercise. Back in the day and back in the years a long time ago, it was all movement based. There were all real-life, practical movements. That goes beyond functional movement. For functional movement, I step on the BOSU and I swing to the side and that’s functional, that’s reality. Well, no. I’m going to tell you what functional is. Functional is you climb a ladder. You jump over an obstacle. You crawl under this one, you lift and carry and throw and catch this object. That’s practical. The thing is, if the body’s not functional, you cannot do anything that’s practical. Now you can do functional drills, without doing anything that’s actually practical in real life. Just because you’ve done functional things doesn’t mean you’re going to be practical and efficient at climbing a tree, or lifting a fallen log, or balancing on a tree across a river. They are supposed to help these movements, but

if you were to actually train these movements, then you have a direct diagnostic level of physical competence. What can you actually do that's real, that's practical?

For the first few decades of his life Erwan explored his own physical competence. Born in the French countryside, Erwan shunned the “physical education” offered in school and educated his body through endless adventures of climbing, crawling, and jumping outdoors – skills and movements he refers to as a human–species–specific, universal and evolutionary background. The team sports in school offered nothing compared to Erwan’s outdoor gymnasium. Said Erwan:



None of what I was presented with in the so-called PE classes at school resembled any of what I was doing on my own in nature. And what I was doing on my own in nature was so amazingly more fascinating and enjoyable than learning rules that are completely objective about how to score points, and then there's a referee, and you always have to stop, and I was like, "I'm wasting my time!"

To Erwan what mattered was climbing a tree, jumping a gap, or sprinting to a landmark. And, having the freedom to move and do as he pleased.

At the age of fifteen karate caught Erwan's eye and for the first time he committed himself to an organized sport. Like everything else, though, Erwan did it a little bit his own way. He trained every day at multiple academies, eventually adding his own conditioning training on the side as well. In three years he earned his black belt and was nationally ranked.

The next phase of Erwan's physical education would come after a brief stint at university studying psychology. Two months in, he decided these studies were not for him. Instead, he joined up with a fringe group doing workouts using the landscape of Paris. Erwan described their workouts:

We would do these crazy workouts in Paris, consisting of climbing very high scaffoldings, swimming across the Seine River at night, in the winter, in the cold with no electricity type of thing. Jumping from roof to roof, running barefoot. It was really completely unique, completely unregulated and untamed. It was strengthening the body



and the mind through movement, and defying convention. Something that was also correlating with the idea of practical movement – could you pass that obstacle, could you climb here, could you go through that dirty underground dark, and things like that. Could you hang from that bridge and let go and dive into the river at night, and then swim in the water, seriously commando style?

Erwan would live this philosophy and practice this training for seven years. It was, in his own words, marginal. “You create a separation between you and others because you are so immersed in completely different – personally different – lifestyle, including diet, including how you eat, drink, move, everything,” said Erwan. But this lifestyle did have benefits. During these years Erwan was able to constantly challenge and question himself. Through this training, he got to know himself very well:

Most people live a normal life, and then that normal life gets freaking boring! They get bored, and then you never get to know who you really are if you never challenge anything, and if you don’t challenge yourself, conventions, normality. You don’t get to know what is normal and what is not, what is good and what is not, what you are made of, if you never know that you can stay awake all day and all night, and be moving all day and all night. For instance, being in a big city at night when everyone is asleep, and you are on top of a famous building that you climbed, and nobody knows you were there. You know that people have lived their day-to-day, boring routine and that you are in the same environment, but with a completely different mindset and behavior. You are free, because you choose – it’s like sleeping in my bed. Tomorrow I may go to work, but in between I have exposed something true.

That something true is something Erwan now aims to share with the world. In 2008, after decades of contemplating human movement and human potential, Erwan created the system he named [MovNat](#). He believes MovNat is good for anyone to train, indoors or outdoors, and has organized a structure to make that possible. Erwan explained:

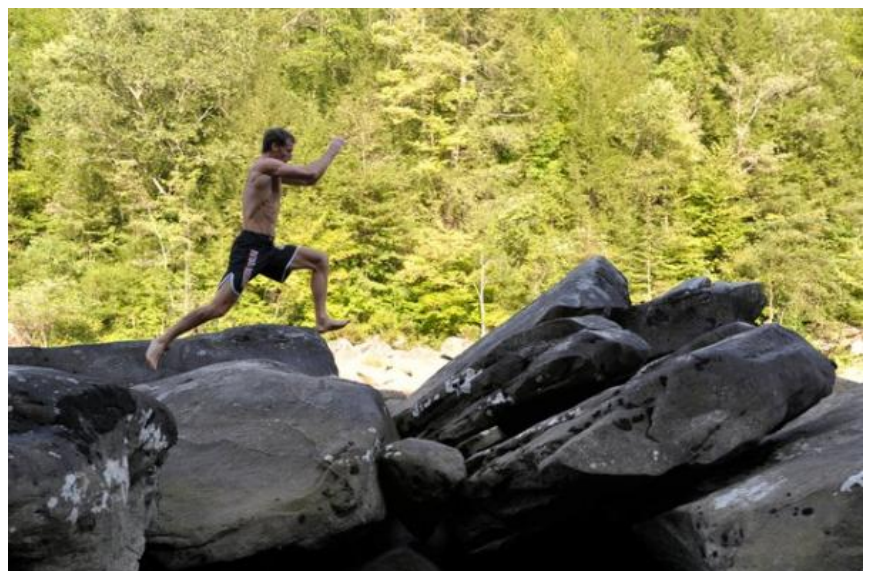


When I lived in Paris I had a unique lifestyle. I knew that was radical and too extreme, not for me but for most people, but I still thought in the back of my mind that it could be useful for people if it was made less intimidating and more approachable, and maybe more systematized, instead of being informal if it could be made a bit more methodical.

From that idea would grow the system that now encompasses workshops and certifications for trainers, and will eventually include books, DVDs, and an online portal for learning. But Erwan's vision goes far beyond such simple physical items:

My mission with MovNat is like a move nation. A nation of people who would wake up and every day do some natural human movement. Imagine a nation and the empowerment, on a personal level, a communal level, a national level, if every day people were to run, jump, climb, and do all those things solo or together. Imagine the radical change of energy, of health, and think about it in America.

In an attempt to understand the concepts of MovNat, people first learning about it often ask how it differs from parkour. Ironically, Erwan Le Corre and the founder of parkour, David Belle, grew up just a few miles apart in France. Their physical and ideological lives took very different paths, however. Erwan created what he believes to be an entire system with MovNat. In parkour he sees only one element in the bigger picture of



human movement. Said Erwan of parkour:

I think parkour is awesome and there are some amazing athletes there, as well as a fantastic community. There is a common origin and some overlap between parkour and MovNat, but what I'm trying to do is to restore in modern time a sound, complete physical education system that would be based on overall practical performance. Unlike parkour, if you have a practical performance mentality as in MovNat, you can't just focus on jumping skills and some other moves, mostly done in urban environments. You also need to address manipulative skills, such as lifting, carrying, throwing, catching. These don't exist in parkour. Swimming skills – don't exist in parkour. Combative skills – don't exist in parkour. Those skills and many techniques are completely left behind. Not a critique, but a simple observation. It makes it a rather specialized discipline, broader than most, but still emphasizing specific and limited movement skills.

Using a historical metaphor it's kind of like parkour is the karate of modern martial arts and MovNat is the old samurai way, the entire martial system. MovNat is more complete, and it's also more systematized in the sense that there is a lot of work on the pedagogy, the teaching and coaching system. What we're trying to do is make it possible that people can learn techniques the same way using a similar methodology everywhere, and last but not least that they are also training the full scope of human movement skills.

Erwan sees this system he is creating as being useful worldwide. A student of human movement history, he would like to see a return to the physical education systems of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where practical movement was taught in the schools. "It started with the vision that one day we would see people of all ages exercising this way, solo or together, on the beach, in parks, in homes, in the backyard, at home, and even in some gyms adapted for it," shared Erwan.



To Erwan, MovNat is an easy option for people to undertake because it is based on natural movement. It feels good to both our bodies and our brains. It is something our we were built to and desire to do, unlike most modern fitness methodologies. Erwan explained:

Something unique to MovNat as a philosophy and a practice is that it's really based on natural movement. Nothing beats nature. Nature is something that is familiar to your body. If I tell you, "Today you're going to have to do bicep curls or workout on an elliptical," you're going to be like, "Oh my goodness. That's a chore. You want to punish me for being fat, or lazy, or too skinny? You want to make me do this and suffer." It's a

chore. Some people – most people – approach the idea of fitness and exercise in this biased way. I have to do it because I'm a bad boy or a bad girl. I didn't do my fitness or whatever. People are desperate. I'm not criticizing anyone; it's just an observation.

This desperation, according to Erwan, is incited by a fitness industry based on the wrong principles.

The commercial fitness industry, what we see on TV and in magazines, has most people believing that being in shape is about looking fit and not being fit. It's about discipline and pushing yourself hard so you can burn calories for a weight loss kind of thing, mostly for cosmetic, superficial results. It is mechanistic and reductionist. It is such a radical impoverishment of our true potential.

I'm sorry, but it's absurd. What is the way a wild tiger, eagle, or horse stay fit? Do they go to a gym, isolating muscles and doing cardio on a treadmill? I know it makes people laugh because it is laughable. I have a question: why would it be any different in us? What they do is they practice a full range of their own species-specific



movement. The horse will run and jump. The tiger will also walk and crawl, balance, climb, jump. The eagle will fly. That's all because of evolution, or creation if that is your personal belief. In any case, the reason those animals are the way they are and move the way they do is that it's just their nature. They don't come up with super complicated, sophisticated drills presented in fitness experiments. It's something completely basic, yet powerfully effective and real.

Our modern lifestyles have made this basic approach to fitness challenging, though. People have lost flexibility in their bodies, mind, and schedules. Movements that once were "natural" have become unfamiliar. According to Erwan:

Because it's natural, people think, "Oh if it's natural I don't have to learn it." But the way you jump can be effective but not efficient. The way we jump is loud, stiff, heavy, a heavy landing. People need to learn to move humanly again, with grace and power and agility, the same way a tiger has learned through instinct to become this amazing, powerful tiger. The thing is, we have become zoo humans, so it's not so easy for us modern people anymore. You can't just say, "Okay, I'm going to throw you in the jungle," and I'll have an amazing athlete after a few days. It doesn't happen that way.

To give people access to relearning natural movement, Erwan created [MovNat workshops](#). He is also busy [certifying coaches](#) in the system so they can teach people in more geographically diverse areas. Currently there are over three hundred certified MovNat trainers. For the future, Erwan has a book and DVD planned, as well as an online learning portal with videos and lectures.

These channels for learning are important for the success of both MovNat and its students. More than anything else, Erwan believes in technique and efficiency as the path to effective movement:

There is a great emphasis in our program on proper technique, because to us, physical competence is not just conditioning, and it's not just movement skills either. It's the combination of movement skills and conditioning. In most of the fitness industry, there is a heavy emphasis on general conditioning and not as much on skills, if at all.



Skills are left to specialized sports training. The way we approach physical competence in MovNat is that we don't dissociate conditioning from skills, or expect the former to produce the later. We're going to accomplish it through the mindful, progressively challenging practice of movement skills. It is our observation that the most applicable conditioning will be developed in the process of skill practice, while conversely movement skills are rarely the by-product of general physical preparedness programs only.

Once people have an understanding of the basic methodology behind MovNat, the second confusion that can come to mind is that it must be done outdoors. This is not the case, according to Erwan:

A lot of the type of physical actions you would do in nature, you can reproduce indoors. It's not necessarily a bad thing. I'm not saying you have to be in nature whenever you train. However, I advocate moving naturally when you train, even when you're not in nature, because if you're a zoo human and we put you in the woods, it doesn't mean you're going to behave like a hunter-gatherer. If you take a Chihuahua out of his apartment and plunk them in the woods, it's not going to become a wolf. Now if you were a wolf and put them in an apartment, you can't expect them to behave like a Chihuahua. So what's your inner nature? What mindset drives your behavior? Are you a Chihuahua or a wolf? It doesn't matter where you will find yourself. What matters is how you will behave and perform where you are. What's your nature, and what do you expect for yourself? What you do is an expression of who you are. Moving naturally is not like something

you have to do, like I have to exercise. Moving naturally is an expression of who you are as a human being.

This expression of your being through movement speaks for the underlying, yet bigger theme in MovNat. This is the theme of personal expression – of freedom – both mentally and physically. For Erwan more and better movement relates directly to more possibilities in life.

You want to know that you possess physical competence for yourself, but also others. You're strong, and potentially strong and helpful to your community. That is walking through life with an enormous self-confidence. With self-confidence and even self-esteem. You know what you're made of. You know what you're capable of. You also know where your limitations are, unless you are unrealistic about them. In any case, you know you could help in a pinch, not just in thoughts, but in physical deeds.

As you get more advanced you can climb more, jump more, lift more, and do all these things. So it's not only an idea of freedom, it's an experience of freedom. It's an experience of freedom through movement. Because think about it: movement is the first experience of freedom. If you cannot move anymore – and especially if you can't move well because you neglected your body for years and years, never moved, never ate right, and let your body become degraded – you've lost a big chunk of your freedom. You may have freedom to think, freedom to vote, freedom to travel, freedom to buy stuff, but you don't have freedom to move any more.

Walking from a chair to another chair, a couch to the bed, that's not really what I'm talking about. It goes beyond that. When you hear freedom of movement, it's a metaphor used for other things in life. I have the freedom to do this and to do that, but it's not just a freedom to move the way you want. I like to tell people when they practice



MovNat, they're not just exercising the body and they're not only exercising the mind, but their whole being. You have to be mindful of the way you move, because movement has to adapt to the environment. What I like to say, and it is more philosophical but very true in my views at least, is you are exercising your freedom.

You can't ask for freedom, you need to take it, to nurture it within yourself and cultivate it both physically and mentally. Nobody can do that for you. You see, it goes way beyond the size of your biceps and how much you can bench press. We are meant to shine, to soar and elevate ourselves. Of course it takes some commitment and hard work. MovNat is like a toolbox, you learn how to use the tools in the box and build yourself, recreate

yourself according to our common, ancient biological design. In the end, what matters is an improved experience of yourself, a liberation and empowerment. Because if you can't empower yourself, who will?