



# Manual Handling – A different approach

Stewart Cruikshank – Pristine Condition

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Stewart is a former Olympic weight lifter having achieved medals in 1994, 1998 and 2007 and has broken British records which still remain unsurpassed today.

Pristine Condition was set up in 1994 as a strength conditioning agency. Manual handling was then only an aside.

The manual handling grew from when the MD received a request from a personal friend, the owner of a Paper Mill, to observe his staff and give his opinion on why they were experiencing so many manual handling injuries. As a result of his observations and one-to-one advice where he spotted poor technique, his style was commended by the employees and he was asked to provide some structured training. The company began to specialise in manual handling from that point forward. They now have a client base of some 2000; amongst them are some high profile companies.

The MD's unique approach is to apply the principles and techniques of Olympic weightlifting to manual handling situations of all descriptions within the workplace and to provide bespoke training to companies so that the techniques are applicable to those unique circumstances.

Unfortunately, standard manual handling instruction can repeat the same mantra of "straight back – bent legs" and use props such as square boxes, but the posture is not always appropriate to the actual work situation. Often, people having received non-specific instruction of this kind will soon resort to old habits. Pristine will actually review the specific working practices and offer alternative methods to help avoid injury. Their practise is to produce a bespoke video by going out to site and filming the way in which people perform their manual handling duties. The film is then reviewed by the group and bespoke practical training is then designed specifically for that organisation. There are two tiers to their approach. Tier one is to get the information across. Tier two is to monitor and support it.

Their main premise is for staff to "know what good looks like" and to suggest the correct ways to lift. Their advice is to ensure that the lift is "within base". This refers to the approach to the load and the relationship of the body to the load. Instead of being square, feet side by side, with the load in front, the advice is to shift the posture so that one foot is in front of the other with the load in between. This is actually a safer and stronger posture. Stewart gave an example of pushing a car; where one foot is in front of the other. The same posture would apply for pulling an item.

There is a reluctance for people to correct others where they see the wrong lifting practices being used, usually because of lack of knowledge or confidence of a better way. The best way is to be aware of "what good looks like" and to regularly undergo refresher training to confirm good and bad technique in order to change bad habits.

Pristine also advise carrying out an anatomical risk assessment to understand what pressure is being placed on the body. This then forms a written statement of a safe system of work.

When assessing the weight of an item, Stewart suggested simply trying to raise one side rather than going straight into a lift would give an indication as to whether it would be feasible to lift unaided. He also advised that there is no limit to what can be lifted as everyone is different in their makeup and their capability could change from day to day, depending on their fitness/health that day.

It was mentioned that there is HSE guidance which contains load and reach diagrams. For example, within construction some years ago there was an indication to lift no more than 20 kg without the aid of equipment.

The key points to this presentation today are:

- Know your physical limitations
- Move your base
- Test the load
- Use both hands
- Have one foot forward and avoid twisting

Stewart's message is to challenge people's habits by monitoring and keeping the message alive.