**RedZone Podcast Episode #111: Human Performance and The Benefits of Sauna with Glenn Auebach**

Bill M: 00:01 Hello and you are listening to Bill Murphy's RedZone podcast. I interview leaders who inspire me in the areas of exponential technologies, business innovation, entrepreneurship, thought leadership, enterprise IT security, neuroscience, philosophy, personal development and more. Welcome to the show.

Welcome back to the show, everyone. This is Bill Murphy, your host of the RedZone Podcast. So today's title of this episode is, ‘Human Performance and the Benefits of Sauna’, in particular Finnish Sauna. So how did this start? Well, a couple of years ago, I had on the show Wim Hof. Wim Hof has achieved notoriety permanently because of how many world records he has around cold exposure. Now, he trains people on how to train their body to elevate their body temperature when they're immersed in cold water. He's also become a human guinea pig for the health benefits of cold regulation, and breathing in cold in particular. He has an institute in Norway, and I trained with him in Poland. We went into the water for about 25 minutes. We built up from 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes up to 25 minutes in cold water, right around 35 degrees Fahrenheit.

I brought him on the podcast, and he was a big hit, and he's a great figure, a great person. I always wanted to see the benefits of sauna because at his training he always had a sauna off to the side for those that wanted to go into the sauna. He talked a lot about, it's called thermogenesis and the benefits of sauna relative to cold. There's been a lot of research now on sauna on how it can help with cardiovascular system. It can help with a variety of different diseases. It can help with just general health and wellbeing. I'm going to have links to all the doctors that have been cited relative to this, like Dr. Rhonda Patrick, Dr. Jari Laukkanen and others. So you'll find that on the show notes page, either on your phone or on the website.
So I asked the leading sauna person in the United States, his name's Glenn Auerbach, to come on the show. I met Glenn in Minnesota to look at a sauna that I was going to be purchasing from him and his team that he put together.

Now, in Minnesota, it's quite an ice fishing culture, so it's not a big step for them to build these really great ice- fishing houses. Now, they've moved into building these really custom saunas. You can see on Saunatimes, the website that Glenn runs, what people have done with saunas, especially these outdoor saunas across the country. We get into what the differences are between types of saunas, like Finnish saunas versus your 24-hour fitness type sauna, or an infrared sauna, and what the real differences are there between them. We talked about kind of ‘culture of sauna’ in Minnesota and Finland. We talked about, as I mentioned, the ‘Science of Sauna’ and the psychological benefits in alternating between cold and hot.

So, I covered a lot of ground in this episode. If you're interested in sauna, and potentially integrating that into your experience and learning more about it, this would be a great episode for you. With that, I want to introduce you to my conversation with Glenn Auerbach.
All right, Glenn, I want to welcome you to the show today.

Glenn A: 03:38 Thank you. It's great to be with you, Bill.

Bill M: 03:41 It's been a fun trip out here to visit everything that you guys are doing with sauna out here.

Glenn A: 03:46 Yes.

Bill M: 03:47 Take me back to the beginning of what got you interested. Because you're from New York.

Glenn A: 03:51 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bill M: 03:52 Tell me how you got into sauna and where did that start for you?

Glenn A: 03:58 Well, that was an impressionable time in my life. I went to Ithaca College, Upstate New York, and I took a junior year abroad program and just absolutely fell in love with Europe and so many different cultural elements to it, specifically Scandinavia.

After graduation in 1985, I went back to Europe and put my college degree to great use picking grapes in Germany, and then meeting my buddy at Copenhagen train station at 12:00 noon. We spent the entire summer of 1985 up in Scandinavia. We found ourselves on an Island in the Baltic working with Tolmi and Gooner, redoing Gooner's uncle's house on an island in the Baltic.
Every night we would finish work, come down off the scaffolding and hop in the boat and go to his other uncle's island where Tolmi and I would fire up the sauna stove, and Gooner and my American friend, John, would clean perch and flounder from the Baltic Sea, and oil potatoes, have a little beer and vodka and sauna like I've never saunaed before.

I had known sauna a little bit in America from, say, a health club, but I did not know the richness and how great sauna can be in nature with wood-fired in that environment. It stuck with me ever since.

Bill M: 05:17 Just to let all the listeners know, we are in the middle, let's say the middle, but we are in Minneapolis. We're probably in the middle of Minnesota.

Glenn A: 05:25 Yes, we are in the heart of Minneapolis. This is 4700 Nicolet. For those that may know Minneapolis, it is the heart of Minneapolis, and you're going to hear some planes going overhead, no question. We're only about 15 minutes from the Minneapolis Airport and 10 minutes just straight. You could get on the bus right from where we're sitting and go right downtown. It's a very urban spot where we are, Bill.

Bill M: 05:47 [The background noise you can hear is a traditional city.] I got into sauna by listening to Tim Ferriss' podcasts. Tim had Rick Rubin on, and he's interviewing him, and they were in a cold plunge. Then this was right shortly before or after Wim Hoff was on, who's the Iceman, they call him. I went out to Poland and then got trained on Wim's ice plunging, and then I've been on a mission to wrap that with the benefits of sauna. What do you think have been the predominant health benefits that you've had from sauna that you've seen?

Glenn A: 06:26 Yes. Well, there's a lot to it. The thermogenesis thing is so parallel with sauna as it relates to Wim's cold plunge experience. It's about opening the pores, and opening the blood vessels and increasing of circulation. There's all kinds of studies that are speaking about the benefits of cold immersion, the hot and cold. You and I each share this common thing in that we've each had Wim on each of our podcasts. He has been a great inspiration for me as well because he brings forth the other half, the Yin to the Yang of sauna. He's a huge sauna fan himself. I find that sauna is the hack to enjoy the cold plunge because I'm pretty hardy, and growing up in Upstate New York, I'm no stranger to cold water. Living in Minnesota, I'm certainly no stranger to cold water. But to the idea that one can sit in a sauna and get super-hot and then enjoy the cold water, to me, takes things up a notch. I enjoy the cold plunge experience so much more through sauna.

Bill M: 07:31 I think most listeners are sitting here thinking, "Well, I have a sauna at my health club. I go to the YMCA, or I go to my gym, and I have a sauna there. What's the big deal?" It would probably be good for you just to take a moment or two to explain the differences that we're talking about between this Finnish sauna type environment and the health club traditional environment.

Glenn A: 07:53 Well, there's a couple of directions on that question that I could respond to it. I could speak about thermal bathing globally. Mikkel Aaland's book, ‘Sweat: The Illustrated History and Description of the Finnish Sauna, Russian Bania, Islamic Hammam, Japanese Mushi-Buro, Mexican Temescal, and American Indian and Eskimo Sweatlodge. Mikkel has been on the show, too. His book is a great resource for those that are interested in sweat bathing and the practice of thermal bathing globally.

The Finnish sauna is one iteration, and if you really wind the clock back and think about man thousands of years ago when we harnessed fire, it wasn't soon thereafter where we realized that we could take a fire and heat rocks, and then roll these rocks under a tent with animal skins and enjoy what we now know today as sauna.

That iteration has been applied through many cultures through millennia here where you have the temazcal from the Mayan culture, the hamam in the Turkish adaptation of it, the Russian banya itself, and in the Asian culture as well. You can dot all across the globe and see different adaptations of what is a really, basically, fundamentally a traditional sauna.

That said, the Finns have been enjoying the sauna bathing practice for, they say, a few thousand years. I think the Finnish sauna has gained a lot of popularity in modern culture because it really is the most pragmatic and practical adaptation of sauna bathing. Did I get that question?

Bill M: 09:19 Yes. I think that, so just to put it in perspective, I didn't know this, but I think there's 3 million people in Finland.

Glenn A: 09:26 5.5 million.

Bill M: 09:27 5.5 million people. Then how many saunas are there?

Glenn A: 09:30 Over 3 million.

Bill M: 09:32 Over 3 million.

Glenn A: 09:32 Yes.

Bill M: 09:33 In the US, how many saunas do we have in the US, saunas? I think it's a million. I think I read that this morning - that there's a million saunas in the US.

Glenn A: 09:40 We have what, 300 million people?

Bill M: 09:42 300 million, Yes.

Glenn A: 09:43 The other aspect to your question is what is sauna, right? For many of your listeners, "Hey, there's a sauna at the health club." There's a sauna at the hotel where you may be staying, or what have you. That is one element to sauna that is kind of an introductory to the sauna experience. That's fine. That's great. After a workout, if you're at the gym and you step into their sauna and experience that you're getting something and you're getting somewhere with the experience. But we take it to a much deeper level with what I'm all involved in and what I'm doing. I could get into the nuances of the differences if you're interested.

Bill M: 10:24 Well let's talk about the difference because I think that it would be good to dispel for everyone so that when someone steps into the glass door sauna, the traditional one, or at the health club… Then for those of you, everybody listening, I'm in a mobile sauna right now. Right? Eric, the master craftsman that built this sauna, is standing close by. I know that you guys have a collaborative arrangement with you and your local team here. But let's talk about what the differences are.

Glenn A: 10:52 Yes. So this is a tough one in that I want to become more like a Finlander to answer that question. The Finns are very respectful to what is sauna, and I give them a lot of credit because it's very dear to their culture. I find them very generous about not throwing under the bus the health club sauna, so to speak. Okay?

Now there are potentially, and probably, some really decent health club saunas. But to be non-Finn about my answer and be American about my answer, the American saunas, while Mikkel Aaland says it well. He says, "In America, 90% of the saunas are bad, and the other 10% are worse."

This has to do a lot with the cheapening of the experience, as well as some of the legal rules that have to be followed at a health club. Where I'm going with that is there's a limit. First of all, they're all electric stoves, which can be good. But a problem with electric is that it's very hard to create the thermal mass, the heat mass, the density to heat these massive amount of rocks.

Bill M: 11:55 We're looking right now at a wood burning Kuuma. K-U-U-M-A...

Glenn A: 12:01 K-U-U-M-A, which means hot in Finnish.

Bill M: 12:03 This is a Minnesota company that produces this bad boy. This has real rocks on it and real wood.

Glenn A: 12:12 Yes. A lot of density. A lot of heat mass is created both from the combustion of the wood, which has done very efficiently by the way. With the armful of wood, you can get this sauna up to 180 200 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the temp that I enjoy, and create really heat mass. For those that may understand the idea of a house heated with forced air compared to a house heated with radiance, where the whole heat mass of the floor is warm.

Bill M: 12:44 Sure.

Glenn A: 12:44 I think you get a sense of how heat is not heat. 180 is not 180. This gets very nuanced and maybe hard for others to really understand unless you really feel it and experience it. That's what I experienced when I was in Scandinavia, and that's the kind of heat that resonates with me. That's the heat I tried to create, not only in my cabin sauna or backyard sound, but working with Eric at Custom Mobile Sauna. That's the kind of heat that we are bringing to other people.

Bill M: 13:15 Dr. Patrick, Dr. Rhonda Patrick, she's big on that health circuit and talks a lot about sauna. She talks about the benefits of heat and there's research, a lot of research out there now talking about the benefits of heat for heart and cardiovascular issues. Then they've also compared these wood-burning type saunas to infrared as a point of example. It's not saying that infrared is bad, but there's actual evidence that significant of just the exponential benefits that come from a wood-burning type environment.

Glenn A: 13:50 Yes. On that note, just a couple of things to pull apart on that. Again, I'm trying to be Finnish in my diplomacy of explaining this. Infrared is not a sauna by definition through the International Sauna Association, as well as other governing bodies in the space. Basically sauna, and I'm paraphrasing, is a room often wood lined, with a stove, sometimes electric, sometimes wood-fired, even sometimes gas, but the purpose of the stove is to heat a massive amount of rocks, a good a mass amount of rocks, whereupon water can be tossed on the rocks to create steam. That is the fundamental definition of sauna. Okay? To speak to Dr. Rhonda Patrick's work, which is absolutely wonderful, where she's really drilling into and identifying the health benefits to sauna, it's really on the shoulders in the heels of a famous study done in Finland by Dr. Jari Laukkanen, and a 25 year old study with 2,300 Finnish men charting biometrics and their life through 25 years of sauna use.

The results of the study are conclusively such that if you sauna four to seven times a week, is what the Finns know of sauna, and what I just described to your listeners as sauna, your risk of cardiovascular disease go way down. The incidences of Alzheimer's and stroke and dementia go way down. That is been a monumental study for sauna globally. All of the media have picked up on that, whether it's the Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, goes on and on and on. The Mayo Clinic Health proceedings have reported on Dr. Jari Laukkanen's work, as has Dr. Rhonda Patrick.

When I went to Finland, I was graciously welcomed by Dr. Jari Laukkanen, and we spoke to this. The thing that the Finns don't have a real context on is, that in America a lot of the manufacturers of infrared cabins are hitching their wagons to the reported health benefits of sauna and claiming it for infrared.

This is a danger point, and to the credit of the Finns, potentially they're not singling this out because they don't want to draw negative attention, and I respect that. But I think it's very important for educated people interested in sauna understand what is a sauna, and what is not and what is claimed as health benefits of sauna and how it is applied to sauna. That's something that is cousin or step-child, or a fabrication thereof.

Bill M: 16:25 Yes, and I was listening to her. You sent me the link to her speaking at the American Heart Assist or Heart Doctors, I forget exactly which group it was. But she said part of that study was your heart rate can go up to what 150 beats a minute. I think it was either a 10-, or, I think, 20-minute sessions that were built up to, over time, building up to 20 minute tolerance.

But that's quite a heartbeat range. A lot of athletes spend time on the bike or running and they're trying to train their bodies at 150. It's certainly for someone that's, if you can maintain that heartbeat once a day or seven times a week, four times a week coming to the side, that's probably a significant reason why the health benefits are playing out that way.

Glenn A: 17:14 I tell the story where I went for a regular checkup for just a regular checkup, and the nurse was applying the band around my arm to check my pulse and stuff. She had this frown on her face and it kind of worried me a little bit.

She readjusted the band around my arm and she did it again. She gave me this funny look and she says, "Are you a marathon runner?" I go, "No, no, I'm not." I'm hoping this is going in a positive direction. I said, "Why?" She said, "Your blood pressure is like way low. I don't see these kind of numbers for people unless they're marathon runners or aggressive athletes." I say, "Well look, I like to bike three times a week." I didn't really connect it at the time, but she said, "Do you do anything else?" I go, "Well, I sauna." Then she goes, "Well, keep that up."

Bill M: 18:04 Really, that's what she said?

Glenn A: 18:04 Yes.

Bill M: 18:04 Interesting.

Glenn A: 18:06 Yes. "Keep that up." So I do. I've been saunaing regularly and I love it. It's been a 25-year journey. For 30 years I've been saunaing. I have two saunas and I love sharing good sauna with people. I love this moment here with you, Bill, sitting on the sound bench and sharing good sauna because of its reported health benefits, great. I love it! I want more of that to come out, more studies. I'm very keen on clinical studies, but I don't need the results of clinical studies to tell me that's on it is good for me. I feel it in my bones and in my heart, my soul.

Bill M: 18:42 Yes. We were talking about that earlier. A lot of the listeners are going to want to know about the empirical evidence, but the traditional cultures of the world for thousands of years haven't needed the empirical evidence that we're now seeing the benefits of it.

Glenn A: 18:58 Yes, if I could speak to that and just real quickly. Look, we all know sleep is good for us. There's a lot of reports that talk about the importance of sleep and how often, and eight hours is what you need and all that. Well look, we don't need studies to tell us that sleep is good for us, do we? It's the same with sauna.

Those of us that know our bodies and our systems, well know intuitively what is good for us and what is not. If we go eat McDonald's every day, we know that's not good for us. If we sleep four hours a day, we know that's not good for us. Conversely, when we eat well and we sleep well and we sauna, we feel great. That's enough evidence for me.

Bill M: 19:42 Yes.

Glenn A: 19:43 That's what I'll continue to do.

Bill M: 19:45 You obviously incorporate cold into this. I know when I went and trained with Wim Hoff in Poland, we would go and do training anywhere from two minutes to 22 minutes in the extreme cold and then come out.

A big chunk of the participants would go into the sauna, and essentially your temperature would rise. There's some benefit. I haven't yet done this because there's some benefit coming out of cold that just having natural, raising of temperature. But then there's also the sauna benefit. You and I talked about this. What they found, and you've been experiencing Finland, they go in between the Baltic and the saunas. Is that something that people link sauna in cold and hot, or is it just hot?

Glenn A: 20:26 It can be just the cold too. I was in Tampere in Finland and I was on a bike. It was the morning and it was about the temperature we're experiencing out here today, about mid-forties Fahrenheit. I was biking around and I see this kind of municipal stone building right along the water, right along this lake in the town of Tampere.

I see two elderly women, they're in the water. This is early May, end of April and they're just swimming along. They're doing the breaststroke and they’re swimming along. Then I see this guy, he comes out of this little building and he walks down, and they have a very generous walking ladder system down into the water. He gently eases himself down into the sea. He's very gently doing the breaststroke and swimming. I'm like, "I’ve got to go check out this sauna. This is too cool. Right here in town, and there's another one of these saunas that I didn't see this one on the map."

So, I go biking across this little bridge and I go running over and I catch the guy. He's out of the water standing, and I go, "Is there a sauna in there?" He looks at me in a very Finnish way and he goes, "No." I say, "Well, what are you guys doing?" He says, "We swim." I say, "Is the water cold?" He says, "Water is not cold. Cold water is ice." I said, "Well, what's warm water?" And he goes, "Steam. Water is not cold." I go, "Really?" And he goes, "That's all you need to know about water." It's true.

To the Finns, cold water swimming is in their DNA, irrespective of sauna and it's like you don't need a sauna to cold swim in Finland. It's very therapeutic to them. A lot of people will wake up in Finland and do a cold water swim, and then get dressed and go to work without sauna. Certainly, they are like peanut butter and jelly in terms of the heat up and the cool down.
am a huge fan of cold water immersion because of sauna, I have to say. I love it. I love the whole extreme. I call it the rubber band theory where we talk about our heart rate. Your heart rate after being in a hot sauna for around 10, 15 minutes at 180 degrees or so, then exiting the hot room, take a cold shower, immersing yourself in a cold plunge – then just hanging out there and really getting present in that moment and internalizing in your space, getting to know and really reframing your mind a little bit and to think, "This is crazy. Okay. Yes, it's absolutely freezing out and I'm in an absolute ice cold ice tub."

This may sound a little crazy, but let's really rationalize this now. Your body is hot, right? You've heated yourself up in the sauna, so it's about reframing. That's a frame of reference within your own mind and back to whim, and the power of the mind, controlling that that mind and re-wiring the conditional response to say, "No, this is good." You take that and you give into that cold. The cold being the warm friend.

Bill M: 23:28 The cold is my warm best friend.

Glenn A: 23:28 Yes.

Glenn A: 23:31 Then when you exit, to describe the euphoria is not fair because everybody's endorphin rush is different at that moment of what I call equilibrium.

Bill M: 23:41 Right.

Glenn A: 23:41 When you're just out there in nature, breathing fresh air and your heart rate actually drops below baseline, which is really a clinical, or evidence, of the power of that experience of extreme hot and extreme cold and the neutral.

Bill M: 24:00 Yes, the cold is a definitely a teacher, and I'm looking forward to incorporating the hot into the experience as well because I think there's lessons to be learned at both ends. I do appreciate you coming on the show. I know you're dual recording for a SaunaTalk. Is there anything else that you wanted to ask me?

Glenn A: 24:21 I would love to ask you some questions, Bill.

Bill M: 24:21 Okay.

Glenn A: 24:23 There's another element here that I wanted to make. You had asked about what is sauna and what is good sauna. The thing that I learned, actually I learned a couple of things in Finland. I have been building saunas for 25 years. I wrote a book on how to build a sauna, Sauna Build From Start to Finnish, (with two n’s). I take a lot of love and respect toward the authentic Finnish sauna that we know. That is what I grabbed onto as my method of heat. I just wanted to make reference to ventilation and the importance of that when building a sauna. That's one of my key learnings from my trip to Finland, is how important fresh air is to the sauna experience.
For those that may be familiar with sauna in a health club or a hotel and stuff, I've heard this reaction, "Oh, I do like sauna but I get so tired." Well we have to really kind of back out is what is making one tired when one is in one of those saunas and all that. More chance than not, it is a poor ventilation. The wood-fired stove is really great because it does encourage airflow and ventilation more thermal mass. But that is a key component of good sauna along with thermal mass. So, Yes. That's sauna for me. Anything else you want to know from my world with saunas that relates to North America version of sauna? Before I go over to you, Bill.

Bill M: 25:48 Well, I think that we're now just on the cusp of understanding the science of sauna. There's a whole set of the population doesn't need the science to support feeling good. That's why there's a million saunas in the US now, and that's why there's two and a half million in Finland. But as the science becomes more prevalent, you're trying to get the word out about this via your platform on Sauna Talk, right?

Glenn A: 26:12 At saunatimes.com.

Bill M: 26:14 Saunatimes.com. If anybody wanted to reach out to you to learn more, either they wanted to build their own sauna, they want to be connected to understanding some of the mobile sauna options that you guys are talking about that I'm looking at acquiring. What's the best way for them to reach out to you?

Glenn A: 26:31 Yes, it's real simple here. Just go to Saunatimes. That's S-A-U-N-A T-I-M-E-S, saunatimes.com and get comfortable with the search bar. Anything you want to know is easily searchable through the website. I started Saunatimes in 2008 with the express intent to share my love of what my experience has been enjoying good sauna, the sauna that I know from my time in Europe. It's interesting how pain creates change. It's like great inventions are often out of need, right? I felt a need to communicate what is good sauna because there are so few good saunas, and it's been very rewarding to me to see others interested, and the sauna community has been so great. Wonderful. These are great people that have reached out to me. I've helped many hundreds build their own saunas and it's just been wonderful to overuse the word tribe.
We've built this great tribe of authentic sauna enthusiasts who are building their own backyard saunas or taking sauna with them. Even now there's some public sauna action happening in North America, collaborating here in Minneapolis with JP, founder of the 612 Sauna Society. Rod, where we're sitting here in Minneapolis is this urban sauna installation where we're having people come over and experience it.

Yes, I just kind of wanted to make reference to how rewarding it is for folks to contact me through saunatimes.com with their own questions. I can tell people that are into it by the email right away.

If they're a tire kicker and just want to who knows what, I can easily deflect them over to Saunatimes and the search bar because I've usually, there's not a question I haven't answered, put it that way.

Bill M: 28:20 We put stories on there. I think what's interesting is you talked about your cabin north, an hour or two north here, and my kids grew up on the beach, and we'd go for a decade there and then I sold the house. But they have very profound memories of being there. Then you've created experience for people that, and including your own family, where you've got this getaway little cabin with the outdoor sauna outside and this memorable getaway.
It's really interesting when people hit your website. People have submitted pictures to you and photos around the country of experiences that they've created. I think that's what people, I know myself just peering into your community. Maybe a year ago, I just didn't know. I didn't know... I knew how to spell sauna, that's about it.

Glenn A: 29:04 Yes.

Bill M: 29:04 I didn't realize there was a whole world that potentially you could be impacted by.
Glenn A: 29:09 Hmm (affirmative). Yes, Saunatimes, I often say that sauna is bigger than all of us. It's true. It's so rewarding for me to see other builds, other people leaning into this and creating their own health and wellness retreat at their own cabin in their own backyard. If one were to go to saunatimes.com and in the search bar type in guest posts, you'll see many other people. I consider myself just the guy with the microphone or the platform to help other people's stories of sauna. It's a huge inspiration to others to see how others have built saunas. I'm really pleased.

Like for example, these benches we're sitting on right now is my design. I probably borrowed some of the elements of this bench design from others that have built saunas, but this is the best sauna bench that I've ever sat on or experienced. So why not? I'm going to share exactly how to build this bench with others and I've yet to see a better bench. Right? But it's really fun to see this exact bench in other saunas because I know how great it feels on the butt. How does it feel with you?

Bill M: 30:18 Good.

Glenn A: 30:19 Yes. Sauna building. It's a great thing and sauna culture is a great thing. So I'm into both.

Bill M: 30:27 Well Glenn, it's been a pleasure having you on the show.

Glenn A: 30:29 Thanks Bill.

Bill M: 30:29 I'm glad I got to answer some of your questions. Until next time, enjoy.

Glenn A: 30:33 Cheers.

Bill M: 30:34 There you have it. This wraps another episode of Bill Murphy's RedZone podcast. To get all the relevant show notes, please go to our blog at www.redzonetech.net/podcast. Additionally, make sure you go to iTunes and leave your comments in iTunes about the show. This helps our show rankings enormously and help support the show. Until next time, I appreciate you very much for listening. Thank you.