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ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS IN FITNESS 55

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**ARE YOUR
TRAINERS TRULY
QUALIFIED?**

**EXERCISING
THE CORE**

**PILATES
PROGRAMMING**

LEADING TRAINERS

**Personal Attributes
To Look For in a Trainer**

Guest Editorial:

Are Your Club's Personal Trainers Truly Qualified?

To ensure your personal trainers prescribe safe and effective exercise programs for clients, try using a pre-employment assessment to measure their understanding of exercise fundamentals.

By Mark Iagulli

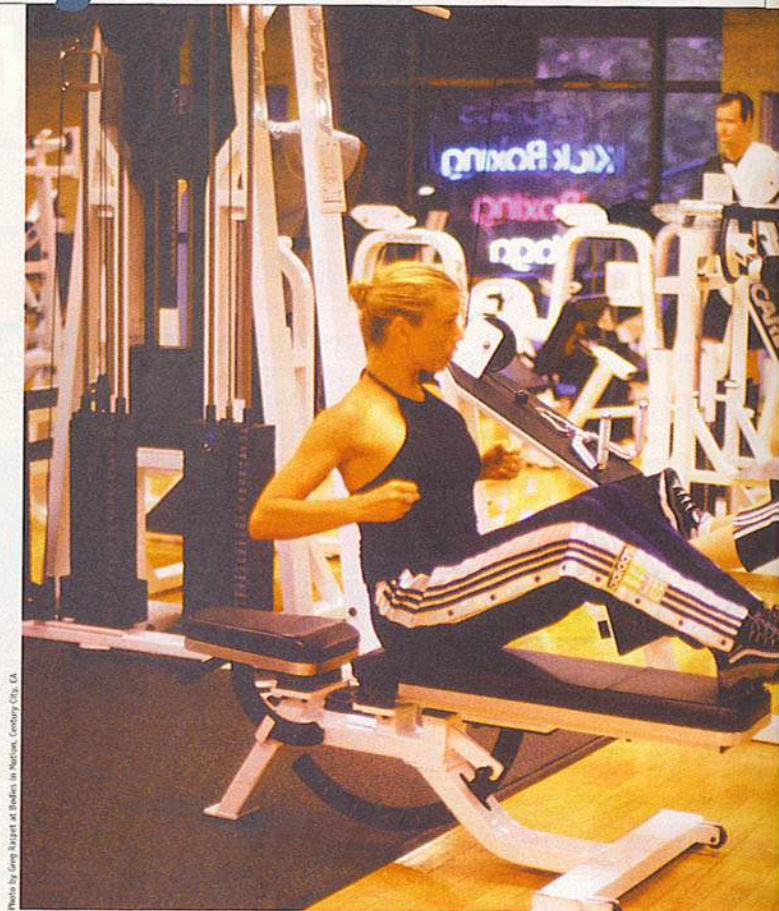


Photo by Greg Ruppert at Bodies in Motion, Century City, CA

Observing the health and fitness industry throughout past years has made me believe that facilities and trainers are selling what people want, not what works.

Granted, most people in this industry truly want to help others, but they may unknowingly be harming them. For example, selling clients on the notion that abdominal exercises will get the fat off their stomach, or recommending products or diets that may not work, can bring illusions of success, which often go unfulfilled. In addition, personal fitness trainers are thought of as educated, tell-it-like-it-is, fitness teachers and motivators. People come to them to see results and, by the time they do see a trainer, they are often unmotivated or tired of trying all of the gimmicks that didn't work.

Personal trainers have an obligation to re-educate their clients to stay away from gimmicks and exercises that don't work or that cause injury. When "trainers" sell clients on the notion of spot-reduction, quick weight-loss diets or aggressive anaerobic cardio training, they are not doing the fitness industry or their clients any justice. This makes it more difficult for the truly qualified trainers to convince people of the correct, educated approach.

Primarily, clients want to see that the time, money and work that they are devoting to their bodies is giving them what they want: results. However, they also need education. It isn't about taking them through another circuit training program; it's about teaching the safest, fastest and smartest way to get clients where they want to go through an educated approach. By applying education, paying attention to research and tracking client progress, personal trainers can help clients achieve results.

Even if you require your personal trainers to have a degree, you still have to make sure that they haven't forgotten what they learned in school, and that they know their field in a practical sense. Many school systems teach students to memorize for an exam, but do not instill the importance of the application of the material, or teach them how the material can be used to dispel myths about diet and exercise. Some "degreed" trainers simply teach what they learned in gyms, from coaches and in magazines. This information can consist of old methods of exercises that include high-risk moves.

The problems

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My suggestion to certification programs and colleges is to start teaching practical training classes that show how to apply the information they are teaching. Otherwise, trainers will only memorize information for testing and then teach their clients what they learned in the gym and magazines, using their degree or certification as a way to justify what they teach. Trainers need to keep rereading their textbooks until it dawns on them that there is useful information in them. And, they need to keep up on new studies through non-biased, credible, training/education companies.

A solution: Pre-employment assessment

To avoid hiring personal trainers who don't really know the science of exercise or how to apply it, I created a pre-employment questionnaire that asks basic questions necessary for a fundamental understanding of exercise (see Pre-Employment Questionnaire Results). The form includes questions that an educated trainer should know and use on a regular basis.

I used my questionnaire when screening personal training applicants, including those who are degreed and certified, and those who have never worked as a trainer. When the results were compiled, only one person passed (received a 70 percent or better) from the no-degree/no-certification category, and only two passed from the degree/certification category. In this case, degreed and certified trainers scored almost as low as the other applicants. Based on this information, would you hire trainers simply because of their certification, degree or experience? Just to see what would happen, I decided to hire the

Pre-Employment Questionnaire Results

This questionnaire was given to trainers who were both non-degreed and/or non-certified and degreed and/or certified to find out if their training or lack thereof resulted in a basic understanding of exercise fundamentals. The numbers represent how many trainers (out of 16) in both categories answered the following questions correctly.

1. Which method of exercise is the best for fat loss?
Non-degreed/non-certified 4
Degreed/certified 3
2. State the effect of the medication on Cathy, and then state how you would monitor her. (Question is based on parameters of a client example.)
Non-degreed/non-certified 4
Degreed/certified 4
3. What method of stretching do you think is best for increased flexibility?
Non-degreed/non-certified 2
Degreed/certified 9
4. How many types of muscle fibers are there?
Non-degreed/non-certified 8
Degreed/certified 3
5. What training program would you recommend to help Cathy reach her personal goals safely and quickly? (Question is based on parameters of a client example.)
Non-degreed/non-certified 2
Degreed/certified 7
6. Name the joint(s) that the following muscle crosses:
Rectus Abdominis
Non-degreed/non-certified 0.5
Degreed/certified 0.5

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person who got the highest test score. He was a self-educated young man who had no certification and no degree in a related field; he just studied and remembered the right information. This made training him for the job easier, and it also lessened

the chance that he would give advice to clients on subjects that were not covered in job training.

To assess a trainer's moral and ethical mindset, I asked small essay questions to get a feel for the applicants' emotional motivation. Questions such as, "What kind of clients would you like to train?" "Why do you want to be a personal trainer?" and "What makes a great trainer?" helped to determine if this person would fit in with the other staff, the clientele and me. In another part of the application phase, they had to read, sign and date a formal mission statement to help create an active awareness of their moral obligation to clients to not mislead or injure them.

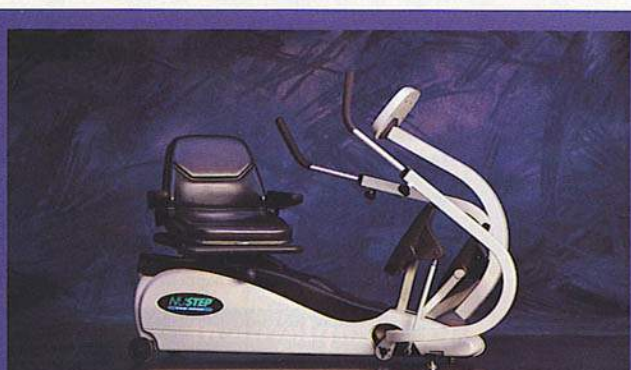
Creating challenges

Clients. For clients to improve their health, state of mind or basic function, or to maintain their physique, their programs can be less demanding, even more fun than work, and can be performed fewer days of the week. But don't expect this approach to give your clients any dramatic physical changes.

Trainers. You can also create challenges for your trainers. You can test your trainers and make them follow the standards and guidelines that are taught through some of the more indepth certification programs. Make sure your trainers do not teach exercises that are known to be predictable risk factors for injuries. Create formats and guidelines in writing that all of the trainers in your facility follow, including instructions on proper exercise form, creating workout goals and strategies, and supervising clients. If each trainer in your club trains clients differently, yet each client wants the same thing (the safest, fastest and smartest way to reach their goals), doesn't this sound like confusion?

For example, if you know from scientific research and experience the best way for a particular client to lose weight, or for another to gain strength, would you stand back and let your trainers teach them something that will almost ensure client dissatisfaction? I have actually seen trainers work out the way they need to for results, following detailed well-thought-out, structured routines, but teach their clients nothing close to that. I've also seen trainers who demonstrate exercises correctly for clients, then allow them to perform the exercise nothing like how it was just shown.

Personal trainers need guidelines like any other successful employee. Demand from your trainers the best, and expect them to know and teach the correct way to exercise. Based on the results of my test, I can see why the nation's fat percent continues to rise: Too few people know what to do to achieve results. Your trainers should not be those people.



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Trainer Compensation

Once you've decided on a trainer or two to hire (using a pre-employment questionnaire or not), how do you pay them? Do you pay some trainers more than others because they have a degree or because they scored higher on the pre-employment questionnaire? I have found that, if everyone starts at the same pay, there are no hard feelings between the staff; it's as simple as that.

Raises. When figuring out pay increases, you first have to know what makes a good, better or best trainer and, of course, a bad one. A system that I use is based on four pillars for recognizing success: 1) Seeing a predictable amount of progress in a predictable amount of time; 2) Teaching correct form and continually correcting and perfecting clients' techniques, rather than letting them gradually become sloppy; 3) Keeping injuries of clients to almost none; and 4) Ensuring that clients enjoy the company of their trainer, have a friendship with them (where clients look forward to coming not only for the workout but for the camaraderie), stay for at least the average length of stay determined by company history, and respect the trainer.

Bonuses. If your trainers can master all of the above, they deserve a bonus. Why? Because a bonus can be taken away, and can be a way to remind trainers that each new client should be given the same information and treatment that their first clients received. This is important because, when trainers first begin, they are often inspired, but after being on the job awhile, they often begin to slack or stray from their responsibilities.

Promoting the truth

Employers of personal fitness trainers are working against a commercialized industry of myths, lies, tricks, gimmicks and magic potions, with hopes of miracles attached. It's up to you to educate your trainers and clients on what it really takes to get in shape, and what it really means to be healthy. (And within the law: Believe it or not, many trainers don't know that they can be sued for injuring their clients.)

For a person to reach a goal of physical change, it takes correct information and hard work (with consistency and persistence). Another important part of physical change is staying focused on the end result, which is not the daily grind it takes to get there. Most important, clients can't quit before they reach their goals, or after. Trainers need to teach their clients that if exercise is too easy or too infrequent, they won't see physical change. If body weight is dropped too fast, they are probably losing muscle and fat at the same time, and there is something wrong with the program. Trainers should monitor clients' lean-to-fat ratio instead of using a scale. This way, clients who lose weight incorrectly can see the loss of muscle, and may realize that they are only seeing the illusion of successful weight loss.

I am merely suggesting that personal trainers take pride in what they do by teaching a safer, faster, smarter way to help clients reach their goals. Make sure you supervise your trainers and have them instruct clients based on education, not what everyone else is doing. **FM**

Mark Jagulli is the owner and operator of PowerLine Personal Fitness Trainers Inc., Toledo, Ohio and holds numerous certifications, including ACE, NHCA, ESA and NASM.



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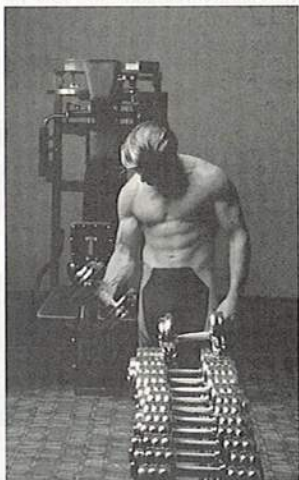


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