

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Becoming a Personal Trainer

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Start your dream job
in the fitness industry

Provide safe and adaptive
training programs

Grow your business and keep
your clients motivated

Shannon Austin, M.S.
Certified Personal Trainer



Becoming a Personal Trainer

2nd Edition

by Shannon Austin, M.S.

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies®

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Introduction

Maybe you're a fitness buff who would like to help people get healthy for a living. Or maybe you're already a professional personal trainer, and you want to boost your business or update your skills. Either way, *Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies* is for you.

You're in the right place at the right time. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job market for personal trainers is expected to grow by 39 percent between 2020 and 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic shook up the fitness industry when 19 percent of boutique fitness studios and 14 percent of traditional gyms shut their doors for good, forcing all of us to rethink how we exercise. Working remotely made it easier for people to exercise at home, and according to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), 68 percent of Americans plan to continue using online fitness services. This is great news for personal trainers! More people than ever are prioritizing exercise, and the sky's the limit for personal trainers looking to start or expand their businesses.

About This Book

Personal training requires more than the ability to bench-press your own body-weight or sprint without breaking a sweat. Personal training is a business, just like, say, a coffee shop, a doctor's office, or a grocery store. You need to have a solid grasp not only of exercise, but also of marketing, business structures, legal issues, accounting, customer service, certification, and more.

Not to worry! I know that's a lot to think about and I'm here to help. In *Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies*, I give you the scoop on everything you need to know to start, run, and even expand your personal training business.

This book tells you all the stuff you really want to know, such as:

- » How do I know if personal training is for me?
- » How do I become certified?
- » How do I write a business plan?

- » Should I go solo or work for someone else?
- » How do I get clients?
- » Do I need an accountant, lawyer, and insurance broker?
- » How do I perform an initial consultation and fitness assessment?
- » How do I create exercise plans that will get results for my clients?
- » How do I keep my clients motivated?
- » What are some ways to expand my business?

Foolish Assumptions

They say that to assume makes an ass out of you and me, but I'm going to take that risk — because I assume certain things about you, dear reader. I assume that you're interested in personal training. I also assume that you have some basic knowledge of anatomy and physiology, cardiovascular exercise, and weight training. You may already be certified, or you may be studying for your certification. Or you may even be a full-fledged professional personal trainer who wants to build your clientele or motivate your clients. Whether you're thinking about becoming a personal trainer or you're already training clients, there's something for everyone in this book.

How This Book Is Organized

Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies is divided into five parts. The chapters within each part give you more detailed information on each topic within that part. Here's an overview:

Part 1: Shaping Up to Be a Personal Trainer

So you want to be a personal trainer. What type of trainer do you want to be? What kinds of clients do you want to work with? And most important, how do you get started? If you don't know the answers to these common questions, this part is for you. I give an overview of the personal training business and tell you how you can get a piece of the action, including tips on developing your personal training identity, finding your niche, getting certified, interning and apprenticing, and weighing the pros and cons of going into business for yourself.

Part 2: Becoming a Successful Personal Trainer

Before you start training clients, you need to have all of your business ducks in a row — like a business plan, a business name, a record-keeping system, a marketing plan, and a support system of professionals, such as a lawyer and an accountant. If you jump into training without these basics, you can land in trouble when, say, the taxes are due, you want a business loan, or you have so many clients that you can't keep track of them (because you don't have a record-keeping system!). That's what this part is all about. I also tell you not only how to bring in clients, but how to keep them coming back with tips and tricks that will help keep them happy and motivated.

Part 3: Putting the Personal into Personal Training

Clients — they're the people who make your business a business. Without them, you'd be doing deadlifts all by your lonesome. That's why in this part, I tell you all about how to understand, work with, and advance your clients. You'll find out how to perform an initial consultation and a fitness assessment, plus how to create individualized exercise programs and how to advance your clients to the next level.

Part 4: Growing Your Personal Training Business

When you're ready to get big — and we're not talking about your muscles — this part is for you. To expand your business, you may need to hire employees — and in this part, I tell you how to hire, motivate, and alas, fire workers. You can also expand by offering additional services like online training, workshops, and nutrition coaching services, or by selling products like exercise equipment. In this part, I show you how.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

You may notice that *Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies* is chock-full of valuable information. In this part, I put that information into easy-to-read lists for your convenience. I offer ideas to expand your services, highlight equipment that will help your clients reach their goals, and outline ways to be the best personal trainer you can be.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are those little pictures you see in the margins of this book, and they're meant to grab your attention and steer you toward particular types of information. Here's what they mean:



TIP

The Tip icon points you to great strategies for running your personal training business.



REMEMBER

I use this icon to give you helpful reminders. This is information that you may already know but that's easy to forget.



WARNING

This icon flags information about potential pitfalls to your business, from business snafus to common exercise mistakes to client-relations gaffes.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon flags information that's great to know but isn't mandatory for your success as a personal trainer. You can use this information to impress your buddies in the gym, but if you're short on time, you can skip this material without missing anything critical.



TRUE
STORY

I use this icon to tell a story about my adventures in personal training. You can discover a lot from these stories!

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to starting your career as a personal trainer that I provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

Where to Go from Here

If you want to know everything there is to know about becoming a personal trainer, read this book from cover to cover. You'll get a thorough overview of what it takes to start and run a successful business, and you'll even find out about

things you may not have thought of, such as how to write a marketing plan, how to name your business, and where to find a mentor who can guide you to success. You'll also find out what training clients actually entails, from taking a brand new client through an initial assessment to advanced program design for your experienced clients.

If you want to find out about a specific topic, flip to that page and start reading. For example, if you plan to take your certification test, you can turn to Chapter 2 to get study tips. You can read any section in the book without reading what comes before or after — though I may refer you to other parts of the book for related information.

And with that, it's time to dig into what it takes to become a personal trainer!

1

Shaping Up to Be a Personal Trainer

IN THIS PART . . .

So you've decided to become a personal trainer. Congratulations! This part is for you.

First, I give you all the basics you need to get started. I tell you what it takes to be a personal trainer — and I don't mean muscles. Mental agility, listening skills, and professionalism are all important traits. I also give an overview of personal training, information on how to get certified, and details on how to find out more by interning or apprenticing.

Do you want to work with the general population? Pregnant women? Seniors? Kids? In this part, I help you decide what kind of personal trainer you want to be and whom you want to work for. I also help you answer that most important of questions: Do you want to work as an employee or as an independent contractor?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what personal trainers do
- » Assessing your strengths and limitations
- » Learning what's involved with getting certified
- » Helping your clients reach their goals
- » Planning to start and build your business

Chapter **1**

Introducing the World of Personal Training

When it comes to choosing or changing your career, you probably want to do something you enjoy, right? Well, here's news that should interest you: Most personal trainers love their jobs. According to a 2021 survey of 837 personal trainers by the Personal Trainer Development Center (an online fitness business education company), respondents were asked to rate their job satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5. The average response was 3.7 — good news considering that in 2021, two-thirds of personal trainers were laid off, furloughed, or otherwise lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Numbers don't lie — personal training is indeed a fulfilling and rewarding profession. Helping your clients improve their health and fitness as a result of your guidance is an incredible experience.

To an outsider, personal training may look pretty easy — you just stick your client on a piece of equipment, throw some weight on the stack, and count reps for an hour, right? Not exactly. This chapter gives you the scoop on what it takes to become a personal trainer and how you can get started in this challenging and rewarding field.

Determining Whether You and Personal Training Are a Good Fit

If I asked you what a successful personal trainer looks like, what would you envision? Someone in great shape, with California good looks, a bright white perma-smile, and an everlasting bronze tan? Now what if I asked you what an unsuccessful personal trainer looks like? Maybe you'd think of your local gym rat, perched on top of the piece of gym equipment you want to use, glorifying the benefits of the latest fad supplement.

Truth be told, you can't tell a "good" trainer from a "bad" trainer based on looks alone. No matter how much a person looks the part on the outside, what makes trainers good is what they have on the inside — solid skills, knowledge, experience, intuitiveness, dedication, professionalism, and understanding. Take all those attributes, roll them up with the ability to teach, and — voilà! — you have the stuff great trainers are made of.

The question is, do *you* have that stuff?

Defining the role of a personal trainer

By definition, a *personal trainer* is a fitness professional who uses the body's response to exercise to improve clients' overall physical health. Trainers do all the following:

- » Perform in-depth evaluations of their clients' base fitness levels.
- » Prescribe exercises appropriate for their clients' level of conditioning and specific fitness goals.
- » Show clients how to properly implement the prescribed exercises.
- » Monitor and record clients' progress, making adjustments as necessary to ensure clients reach their goals in a safe and healthy manner.



REMEMBER

Think that's the whole shebang? Not quite. Personal trainers wear many hats! When working with clients, personal trainers act as friend, teacher, motivator, accountability partner, troubleshooter, therapist, equipment rep, and wellness advisor, all wrapped up in one. When working alone, personal trainers take on the roles of secretary, salesperson, student, accountant, business owner, and customer-service rep.

Knowing what skills you need

Being a personal trainer requires more than knowing exactly where your gluteus maximus is, or what the best exercise is to keep it from drooping. As a trainer, you need many skills to match the many roles you play for your clients. Here are some of the skills you need to hone before putting up your shingle.

You need to be accountable

You alone — not your clients, not your mother, not your annoying neighbor with the yappy dog — are responsible for yourself and your actions. If you're continually coming up with reasons (read "excuses") as to why you were late, why you didn't write out the new travel program, or why you had to cancel, clients and employers will lose trust in you. Being able to own up to the truth of your actions and working to prevent those snafus from happening in the future gains you trust and credibility in the eyes of your peers.



REMEMBER

When you're a trainer, your credibility and reputation will make or break you.

You need to be agile

No, I don't mean physically agile! (*I know* you can touch your toes!) In this case, I mean *mentally* agile — as in, able to come up with a completely different course of action on the fly if the original plan isn't working out. Working with people's bodies requires insight and the ability to identify problems and come up with solutions. Each client is unique, and what works for one client may not work for another.



TRUE
STORY

These days, many of my clients are cancer survivors and still have lingering side effects from treatment. Even when they are physically able to exercise, some days they're just too tired. It's hard to know ahead of time if a client isn't going to feel up to exercising, so I always have a backup plan for low-energy days. We work hard when energy is high, and when it's not, maybe we spend time walking and stretching instead. This might seem like a waste of time, but meeting clients where they're at and adjusting to their needs helps me earn their trust and encourages them to keep showing up, even when the going gets tough.

You need to be a good teacher

Good teachers understand that not all students learn the same way. Some are visual learners, some do better with verbal instructions, and others need a hands-on approach. They watch their students carefully to discover how they learn and match their teaching methods to their students' learning needs.



TIP

As a personal trainer, you need to understand each client's learning style if you expect them to retain what you teach. Getting to know people is a process and it takes some time to figure out how to make information stick. That's okay.

You need to be a good leader

Good leaders inspire people to do their best by walking the talk, and a good personal trainer should be a positive role model for their clients. The old “do as I say, not as I do” adage doesn't cut it in this biz. You won't be getting any repeat business if you expect your clients to show up when they're busy and stressed out if you're constantly bailing on your workouts when life gets in the way. People naturally want to follow someone who is confident and relatable. In this profession, that means supporting your clients, even when they have setbacks, and they inevitably will. Life happens. We're all human (yes, even you) and your clients will appreciate that you know that.

You need to be a good listener

Sometimes, being a personal trainer feels like being a therapist — the closer you get to your clients, the more they open up about themselves. By listening more than talking, you'll find out a lot about who your clients really are. That can help you understand where they're coming from, why they're really working with you, and what some of their challenges might be.

You need to be a good observer

In addition to being a good listener, you need to be a good observer. Sometimes, your clients will tell you something different from what they're *really* thinking or feeling. Figuring out how to read your clients' body language, tone of voice, and physical cueing will help to improve your communication with your clients and the exercise programs you create for them.

You need to be knowledgeable

These days, trainers are expected to know the answers to just about everything related to health and wellness. Should I try the (fill-in-the blank diet)? What's cryotherapy? Why do I need to stretch? Of course you have to master the technical aspects of training, but you should know what science is saying about the latest trends. Being able to separate fact from fiction — and explain the difference — helps you help your clients. And by the way, it's okay to say “I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you.”

You need to be likeable

Have you ever met someone who rubbed you the wrong way from the start? You can't quite put your finger on what it is about them that bugs you, but for some reason you two simply don't hit it off. For one reason or another, not every client is going to like you — and you aren't going to love every client. It's okay not to like a client; just remember that you are a professional and this person deserves the same high level of service all your clients expect from you.



TIP

Being likeable doesn't mean everyone will like you. Developing rapport with clients is easier if they like you, and sometimes helping them feel more comfortable with you is all it takes to create a smooth start to the relationship. Gauging their personality type and communication style helps. If your client is the strong-but-silent type, recognize this, and don't blab away about the latest strongman competition on ESPN. See Chapter 9 for information about assessing clients' personality types and learning styles to help you provide the best program for them.

You need to be passionate

Caring about what you do and the people you do it for is essential to being a good trainer. That means being present with your client, with every ounce of your attention focused on them. It means always giving 100 percent. It means being upbeat and positive, and showing your clients how enthusiastic you are about helping them achieve success.

Have you ever been in a gym and witnessed a trainer sitting down on the floor or on a piece of equipment, staring off into space while their client struggles through an exercise? Have you also watched a trainer taking a client through what looks to be a pretty challenging workout, all the while smiling and offering encouragement? Which trainer would you want to work with?

You need to be professional

Being professional in a plush corner office with a view looks easy. It's not so easy when you're a personal trainer on your tenth client of the day, completely exhausted, and running late because of a traffic accident. Your client yells at you (even though it wasn't your fault) and now you're boiling mad. No matter how badly you want to walk out, professionalism means you apologize for the inconvenience and get on with the session.

You need to be positive

Much like that nasty strain of the flu that goes around every year (but without the nausea), enthusiasm is contagious. If you maintain an upbeat outlook, you'll be able to keep yourself and those around you motivated. Working out is hard enough

for your client without having to deal with a grumpy trainer on top of it. Your clients aren't paying you to lament about your woes of the day. They hired you to help them, not be a sounding board for your current woes.

You need to be understanding

Sometimes your clients are at the top of their game, they are consistently making time for exercise, they follow your programs to a t . . . and sometimes life happens. You wanted to be a personal trainer so you could help people, right? Being understanding means recognizing when your clients are struggling and offering support instead of lecturing them when they are already stressed out. Your job is to help your clients fit fitness into their lives. Not the other way around.



REMEMBER

When your clients don't follow your plan, it's probably not about you. More likely, what you suggested doesn't work for them for whatever reason. You need to understand what went wrong — why they didn't/wouldn't/couldn't stick with the program. When you understand why the plan isn't working, you'll be able to adjust it so your client can be successful.

Assessing your skills

No matter how much you know about adenosine triphosphate or how well you can demonstrate the clean and jerk (if you think that's a system for getting your significant other to pick up their dirty socks, you're in trouble), knowledge and technique are only a small part of what makes a successful personal trainer. How you do your job on a day-to-day basis and doing the right things consistently will make you successful and your work enjoyable.

For all the aspects of personal training that you can control — like your attitude and your knowledge — there are twice as many intangible things that you can't — like your schedule, your work location, the type of people you work with, your management, and so on. These are the little things that you can't plan for and that make any job loveable or leave-able. The personal training industry has quite a few intangibles that have been known to break a trainer or two. So before you sign up for the job, take an honest look at yourself and decide whether you have what it takes.

Answer *true* or *false* to the following statements to determine whether you've got the goods for personal training:

- » I am at my best any time of the day.
- » I get along with most people, and I can treat the others with respect and professional courtesy.

- » I can do several things well at once. (Walking and chewing gum doesn't count.)
- » I have a flexible schedule.
- » I enjoy working with different types of people.
- » I enjoy a fast-paced life.
- » I perform well under stress.
- » I am organized.
- » I am good at planning.
- » I am a self-starter.
- » I am detail-oriented.
- » I can communicate my thoughts clearly and concisely.
- » I enjoy explaining "why."
- » I enjoy being challenged.
- » I enjoy helping others.
- » I have a thirst for learning.
- » I enjoy being mobile.

If you answered false to five or more of these statements, you may find the demands of being a personal trainer challenging. These statements represent typical, day-to-day life for a trainer — and I'd hate to see you invest all your time, energy, and effort breaking into the field, only to find out that it's not what you thought it would be.

Hitting the Books: Getting Certified

So you know how to perform a perfect squat? That's great, but knowing how to do a squat doesn't mean squat when it comes to being a good personal trainer. Before you jump into the job, you'll need to practice, study, cram for exams, rehearse, train, and drill. (Okay, I'll back slowly away from the thesaurus now and keep my hands where you can see them.) You'll also need a sheet of paper from an accrediting agency proving that you did all the above.

These days, personal trainers are looked to as experts in the field of fitness — not just gym rats who can bench-press their own bodyweight and yell, "No pain, no gain!" Apply for the position of personal trainer at any gym, and the first thing they'll ask is, "Are you certified?" Certification is a badge of honor — it tells

prospective employers or clients that you know what you're doing. Being certified also builds your credibility — and credibility attracts clients.



TIP

Finding the right certification for you is important — you don't want to pay for a test that's geared toward athletic training when you're looking to work with seniors, or one that requires a four-year degree in kinesiology if you don't have one. In Chapter 2, I provide all the information about certification that you need.

Getting Started

Are you ready to get out there and train the heck out of those people who need your services so badly? Great! So what's stopping you? Time's a-wastin'! Go on, get to it!

"Wait just a second," you say. "How can I get started if I don't have anyone to start with?" All dressed up but no place to go? Don't quite know where to find those people who need your services so badly? Never fear. Keep reading, and that little obstacle will soon be but a fading memory.

Creating your plan of attack

All the training, reading, studying, and practicing you do to hone your personal training skills to perfection won't make a darn bit of difference if you don't have any clients to use them on.



TIP

Lay out your goal in advance, then work backward from there. For example, if you want to train clients at a gym, your plan of attack may look like this:

- 1. Contact a few area gyms and ask what certifications and experience they require.**
- 2. Decide which certification you are getting and sign up for the exam. (See Chapter 2 for more details.)**
- 3. Study for and take the exam.**
- 4. Fulfill any other job prerequisites (CPR training, for example).**
- 5. Apply for the position you want. (See Chapter 4 for the scoop on résumés and interviewing.)**
- 6. Intern or get the job. (Chapter 3 tells you all about apprenticing.)**
- 7. Train clients! (See Part 3 for the scoop on training clients.)**

PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

The power of the mind is an awesome thing. Stepping into a new career or taking on new responsibilities can be scary, and maybe you're a little doubtful that you'll succeed. We've all been there before — we look over what's involved, shake our heads, and ask, "Can I do it?" If you feel that kind of doubt creeping up on you, shake it off and set your mind straight. Even though you may need to step back and reevaluate what you're doing once in a while, don't let the little voices in your head convince you that you won't be successful.

Having a positive mindset and the core belief that you *can* succeed and *will* succeed keeps you going on the tough days, energizing you to push on toward your goal.

Remember: What the mind can conceive the body will achieve!

When you lay out your plan step-by-step, staying on track and identifying any potential pitfalls before they occur is much easier. This habit is a good one to get into, because you'll be using this method frequently with clients, outlining step-by-step how they can reach their goals.



REMEMBER

Right now you're probably champing at the bit to get your hands on some "body" to work on! But personal training is definitely an art — and one that has to be practiced to get it right. Taking bodyfat measurements, spotting an exercise, and estimating VO_2max are not skills that anyone is born with. Don't be shy about asking friends and family if you can practice on them while you are honing your skills, creating your plan of attack, and building your base.

Personal trainer for hire: Getting work



TRUE
STORY

Getting your first client is a momentous occasion. I can still remember how I got mine over 20 years ago. At the time I was teaching group fitness classes at the YMCA and a student from one of my classes asked if I was also a personal trainer. I told her that I had just passed my personal trainer certification exam and hadn't yet worked with any personal training clients. She was happy to be my first client and I worked out a deal with the Y where I was able to offer personal training to members and the Y received a percentage of my fee.

No matter how it happens for you, getting hired for the first time is exciting. All you need to start is one client — one single, solitary person who wants to get healthy through exercise. People will see you working with your client and approach you, or, if you're training in a private setting, your client will tell their friends about how wonderful you are (and you *are* wonderful!). Trust me — referrals are the best clients (more about that in Chapter 8) and nothing boosts your business faster than psyched clients pumping you up to their friends.



If your services aren't stellar or if a client is dissatisfied, word-of-mouth or a negative online review can damage your business way more than a positive review will help it.

Building your base

After you have a few clients on board, you'll be a bona fide personal trainer, managing multiple exercise programs for multiple clients. Thinking about your time constraints (How many people can you train in a day?), examining your career goals (Do you want to make lots of moolah? Work part-time? Hobnob with celebrity clients?), and choosing how you work with clients will help you lay the foundation for a viable personal training business. For instance, if you're going to make this a full-time deal, do you want to keep your client base small and concentrate on long-term clients? Or do you want to work with people short-term so that you can continually work with new clientele? After gaining experience with in-person clients, maybe you will find that online personal training is the best fit for you. There are so many options and no right or wrong way to do it — you get to decide what's best for you and your clients. When you know what that is, you can gear your service offerings and build your client base accordingly.

Performing Your Art

As I've said, personal training involves much more than knowing one muscle from another. Customer service, planning client programs, following up, and everything in between are the elements that will take your personal training from so-so to so great!

Making a great first impression

Did you know that most people have a solid impression of who you are within the first seven seconds of meeting you? That means your first client meeting is *the* most important meeting in your client relationship. You want to start out on the right foot, because you are — hopefully — going to be working very closely with this person for a long time. No matter what happened that day, even if your cat ate your goldfish and you got a speeding ticket, leave it at the door. It's time to take a deep breath, smile, and introduce your best self to your new client.

THE MIDAS TOUCH

Clients might choose you for your knowledge and enthusiasm, but it's the little touches — and consistent attention to those touches — that will keep them coming back. When I opened my first studio, the space was small and I didn't have much equipment. I worried that my clients would miss the amenities from the big health club that I left. To my pleasant surprise, they were happier in my little 800-square-foot studio that I started on a shoestring budget. Why? Because my attention to details made their experience great. It was easier for me to give each client my full attention without the crowded gym scene. It was also possible to keep my equipment clean and organized when nobody else was using it. We didn't have to wait in line to use machines. I could stop to fill their water bottles mid-session without losing valuable training time running across the big gym to the water fountain. I put a couch and coffee table by the front door so they could unwind for a few minutes when they arrived after a busy day at work. These are a few of the small things that made a big difference and made my clients feel at home in my business.



REMEMBER

If you're happy, you exude confidence and excitement, and your client will pick up on your positive outlook. If you're blue, getting your client excited about doing crunches and lat pulldowns will be difficult.

I delve deeper into the topic of making a good first impression in Chapter 10.

Evaluating your client

Before you start your client on a program, you need to evaluate their medical history, current fitness level, and lifestyle habits. Knowing as much about your client as possible is important — after all, their health is in your hands. If you prescribe an exercise program that doesn't account for your client's schedule or their *current* fitness level, they'll probably feel discouraged when it doesn't work. You can't expect a woman with three young kids to succeed with a two-hour-per-day routine, or a client who's mainly concerned with heart health to get excited about doing exercises to build bigger biceps.



TIP

Put on your investigator hat and ask your clients as many questions as you can think of. For example, you can query them about their:

- » Exercise habits (past and current)
- » Medical history
- » Lifestyle
- » Health goals

A lot of trainers skip this step. I can't overemphasize the importance — from both a professional and liability standpoint — of evaluating your clients. For more information on client evaluations, see Chapter 10.

Establishing a program for your client

If you liked science in school, you're going to love this — creating programs is like coming up with a new hypothesis for each client you work with. You come up with a theoretical program based on your assessment of the client, and then you get to test your theory and see if it holds up. You need to take into account your client's time availability, equipment availability, strengths, weaknesses, and goals to create a program that they'll not only find doable, but also enjoy. Here is where you, the trainer, get to shine as you take your client from where they are to where they want to be. (And if you didn't like science, don't worry — I make it easy for you in Chapter 12.)

Conducting a training session

If you ask any trainer what the best part of their job is, you'll most likely hear "training clients." Taking clients through training sessions is fun! After all, that's why you got into personal training in the first place — to work with clients hands-on, showing them the proper way to exercise, encouraging and supporting them, and helping them achieve their fitness goals. And now that the hard work — finding your client, assessing their needs, planning the program — is behind you, you can actually put your plan into motion and see how it works!



REMEMBER

The only trick is, you'll need to create plans for your clients that break their goals into manageable steps, that keep them motivated, and that get results. More on how to do this in Part 3.

Staying in touch

Every good salesperson knows that the follow-up is crucial to making sales and keeping customers happy — and so should you.



TIP

Call or text your clients, whether they're active with you or not. Follow-up calls or texts to active clients can help you determine the effectiveness of your previous training sessions, or provide an opportunity to answer questions about a new workout routine. Follow-up calls or texts to inactive clients can bring them back to you for more training. However you decide to handle following up, remember that it's a key to maintaining healthy client relations. The personal training industry is based on relationships, and nurturing your client relationships is vital to the success of your business.

Meeting your clients, evaluating them, planning programs, conducting training sessions, and following up — these are the basics of performing your art, and I delve into these topics more in Parts 2 and 3.

Our Little Trainer's All Grown Up! Growing Your Business

Eventually, you may want to kick your personal training business up a notch. Growing your personal training business means different things to different people. It could mean accepting a management position at a gym, or leaving a gym to start your own studio. However and whenever the bug bites, you need to plan, plan, and plan some more in order to be successful.

Preparing for growth

Getting ready to grow is exciting and invigorating. The prospect of tackling new business and career challenges excites a lot of trainers. But before you jump into anything, do your homework to make sure your vision is viable. Your future is at stake here, and a mistake at this point in the game can be costly.



TIP

List the pros and cons of making your change. Talk with people who have been in your shoes and ask how they handled the decision. Make sure you have everything you need — financial support, skills, knowledge, and the right tools — should you decide to make the change. Involve those close to you so they can give you the emotional support you need.

For more information on determining your career path, check out Chapter 4.

Adding additional income streams

If you're looking to increase your income — and who isn't? — you don't necessarily have to increase your working hours. Trainers have plenty of ways to add dollars to their bottom line without spending more time. Selling fitness-related products that clients can use on their own, such as heart-rate monitors or foam rollers, is a great way to make extra cash while helping your clients. Offering online training is another option and one that became very popular during the pandemic.

I'll give you the 411 on adding profit centers in Chapter 16.

Duplicating yourself

Another way to grow is to bring on trainers who can handle additional clients. Because no one will be an exact duplicate of you (and if someone is, be afraid, be very afraid), before hiring, you need to create a list of attributes and qualities you feel the candidate should possess. Check with your lawyer and accountant to understand your state's laws regarding employment. Create a job description for the position so your new hires will have a clear understanding of what is expected from them.

You can find more information on hiring staff in Chapter 17.

Maintaining consistency within your business

A successful business provides its customers with consistent quality and service. (And I probably don't need to say this, but the quality and service must be consistently *good*.) Have you ever noticed how you can order your favorite drink at any Starbucks location and it's always the same? That's because there are systems in place that are consistent no matter which location you visit. You can expect the same experience every time.



REMEMBER

If you can't give dependable service, your clients won't be around for long. You need to strive to create a great experience for your clients each time they work with you. That means you must provide the same training to all your staff members; document your rules and policies; make sure everyone on board understands your company's vision, mission, and objectives; and most important, make sure that that you are the embodiment of what you preach — that you lead by example. You have to walk the talk.

- » Finding your people
- » Understanding the acronyms
- » Choosing the right certification for you
- » Studying for the certification exam

Chapter 2

Getting Certified

Lots of people dream of becoming a personal trainer so that they can help other people. Some are former athletes and others changed their own lives by getting fit and want to help people like them do the same. Whatever your reason is, the fact that you've picked up this book shows you know that there's more to personal training than just enjoying your daily workouts. Success is in the details. What kind of a trainer do you want to be? Who is it you want to train — kids, seniors, elite athletes? Do you want to train your clients in groups or one-on-one? And, most important, why do you want to train them?

Once you have an idea of what kind of personal training you want to do, you'll need to decide which letters you want after your name — that is, what kind of certification you should get. No two certifications are exactly alike, and clients and employers take some more seriously than others.

In this chapter, I help you figure out which clients you'd like to work with, consider whether you want to train individuals or groups (or both), choose the best certification for you, study for (and pass) the test, and keep your credentials up to date. Think of the information in this chapter as the foundation for your career as a personal trainer — if you cut corners where these decisions are concerned, your house might fall down around you. But if you give these decisions the attention they require, your strong foundation will last you for many years to come.

IT'S A GOAL!

A goal is more than a point in hockey — it's something that will help you decide who to work with, where to work (at a health club, say, or a corporate facility), and whether to work for yourself or for someone else. Do you dream of training athletes someday? Then you probably should focus on learning as much as you can about training active people. If your goal is to help kids become healthy adults, then becoming certified to work with children is a smart choice. And if the thought of being your own boss makes your heart go bang-shang-a-lang, you'll probably take a different path from someone whose goal is to work at a posh health club.

Take a minute to write down your goals — the reasons you want to become a personal trainer — and keep them in mind as you read the rest of this chapter. They'll help you decide which certification is best for you and what type of personal trainer you want to be.

Finding Your Niche

The type of certification you seek is directly tied to the kinds of clients you hope to work with. In this section, I help you find the place where you can best put your skills and talents to use.

Considering the possibilities

When personal trainers talk about their businesses, they often use the term *client population*, which is just a fancy name for the type of people they work with. Each client population has its own needs, advantages, and disadvantages. In the following sections, I cover some of the most common types of client populations. As you read these descriptions, make a mental note of the groups that most appeal to you.

Apparently healthy adults

This population is the one you'll probably encounter the most — adults who want to lose a few pounds or get into a regular exercise routine to improve their overall health. These clients might have a few aches or pains; for the most part though, they have a clean bill of health. That's why I'm referring to them as apparently healthy — you'll still need to do a complete assessment to find out exactly what you're working with. Generally, your primary personal training certification covers everything you'll encounter in training this population, including when you need to ask for a physician's clearance.



TIP

Apparently healthy adults are a great group to get your feet wet with, even if your goal is to eventually work with one specific client population. After you're comfortable working with these clients, you might decide to study for a specialty certification and focus on training one specialized group, like some in the following sections.

Seniors

Working with seniors is a lot of fun and so rewarding. Older adults don't require a completely different set of skills from you as a trainer, but you do need to understand how aging affects the body. Have you ever noticed an older person dragging their feet or "shuffling" when they walk? Shuffling is a common cause for falls because dragging feet tend to catch and trip on stuff. That's just one example; there's a lot more to keep in mind if you're training older adults, and a certification specific to this group will teach you what you need to know.



WARNING

It's common for older people to have chronic medical issues that can become worse if you don't know what you're doing. And with seniors having less range of motion and strength than they did when they were younger, they can easily injure themselves without proper exercise instruction. *Remember:* This shouldn't discourage you from working with seniors — it just means that, before you start working with them, you need to understand their unique needs.

Check out the Appendix for a list of recommended senior fitness specialty certifications.

Kids and teens

If you like spending time with kids, training young clients could be a great option for you. Kids and teens need an hour of physical activity every day to be at their best, and teaching them early that being active is fun will set them up for a lifetime of healthy exercise habits. You should focus first on making physical activity fun and then getting creative when you include structured exercise (think teaching them how to start lifting weights safely). Learning what they like to do is the key to making exercise something that they will actually want to do.



WARNING

Unlike adults, children have underdeveloped thermoregulatory systems, which is just a fancy way of saying they're more prone to overheating. Pay extra attention if you're training kids when it's hot out and always make sure they're staying hydrated.

There are specific guidelines for training kids and teens; see the Appendix to learn more.

Pregnant women

Don't assume that pregnant women can't or shouldn't exercise. That used to be common advice, but we know now that being physically active is beneficial for all women with healthy and uncomplicated pregnancies. If you're going to train pregnant or postpartum women, make sure you're familiar with the guidelines (yes there are specific exercise guidelines for pregnant women) and understand how to structure their exercise programs to match their individual goals and needs.



WARNING

Like kids, pregnant women are more prone to overheating when they exercise and it's important for them to stay hydrated. It's also not uncommon for fatigue and nausea to limit exercise options, especially during the first trimester. Pregnancy isn't the best time to expect major fitness gains, and a good rule of thumb is to encourage pregnant women to avoid contact sports or activities where they could fall.

Specializing in pre- and postnatal fitness requires mom-savvy knowledge and skills gained from a specialty certification. The Girls Gone Strong prenatal and postnatal coaching certification is the most comprehensive one I've seen.

Athletes

If your clients are weekend warriors with weekday desk jobs, they'll need exercise programs to keep them fit while also improving their golf swing or running a faster 10K race (for example). These clients are usually already in decent shape and need your help to get better without getting hurt. It's also not uncommon for elite athletes to work with a team trainer and then hire a personal trainer to help them individually in their off-season. You don't have to be an expert in the sport to train these athletes, but you do need to understand their unique needs. This involves more than knowing which muscles do what — training athletes is challenging because they won't see the same dramatic improvements that your beginning clients achieve. A beginning client may go from walking a mile in 15 minutes to jogging a mile in 10 minutes in just a few months. For your elite athlete, shaving a second off their 40-yard dash time in a year can be the difference between another year of college football and being picked in the NFL draft. You'll need to get creative with advanced training programs and techniques if you're working with elite athletes.

Your basic certification will teach you a lot about training general population adults, but if you're serious about specializing in training elite athletes, I recommend finding a mentorship where you can get hands-on experience. I cover this more in Chapter 21.

Deciding which client group you're best suited for



TIP

Even if you eventually want to specialize in a client population like athletes or kids, you should probably start out working with healthy adults. Not only will you build a bigger client base to help get your business off the ground, but many certifying bodies also recommend earning a primary certification in personal training before testing for a specialized certification. For example, to be certified as a Performance Enhancement Specialist (PES) through the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), you don't have to be certified as a personal trainer first, but it'll be tough to get through the exam without at least the baseline knowledge that a personal training certification provides. Skipping these basics would be kind of like trying to learn a new subject in a language that you don't speak. Sounds frustrating, right?

After you have your personal trainer certification and you're finding out who you enjoy working with from training a broad client base, you can zero in on training one client population and then focus on getting really good at it.



TIP

Still not sure which client population is right for you? Here's a quick quiz that may help:

1. Which of these adjectives defines you best?
 - a. Patient
 - b. Careful
 - c. Gung-ho
 - d. Enthusiastic
 - e. Slow and sure
2. If you weren't a personal trainer, you would be a:
 - a. Teacher
 - b. Doctor
 - c. Drill sergeant
 - d. Customer-service manager
 - e. Eldercare nurse

3. Your favorite exercise style is:

- a. Hula hoop!
- b. Pilates
- c. CrossFit
- d. Endurance training
- e. Gentle yoga

If you answered mostly As, consider training kids; mostly Bs, try prenatal and postnatal women; mostly Cs, train athletes; mostly Ds, go for healthy adults; and mostly Es, seniors may be your client population.



TIP

Specializing in one client population isn't required and being a "generalist" could actually be your specialty. Even if training one type of client is your goal, you'll still be expected to have at least some knowledge about things like nutrition, sleep, managing stress — basically understanding how to help your clients to become overall healthy people no matter what their fitness goals are.

Becoming Certified

Watch out! It's the attack of the acronyms! ACE, ACSM, NASM — the choices in certifications are enough to make any aspiring personal trainer's head spin. In this section, I cover the various certifications available and help you decide which one is best for you.

Knowing your ABCs: The personal training alphabet

You're probably wondering which certification is the best one, right? Ask ten personal trainers this question and you're likely to get ten different answers! Do a Google search for "personal trainer certifications" and you'll find a million (yep, I counted) different certificates, programs, books, courses . . . you get the idea. Fitness is a multi-billion-dollar industry so naturally there's going to be some serious competition for your money. Sifting through the giant sea of information online when you're just getting started feels overwhelming if you don't know what to look for — knowing when it's best to just keep scrolling helps too.

THREE'S A CROWD: CHOOSING PERSONAL OR GROUP CERTIFICATION

Personal trainers can choose to work with individuals, groups, or both, and many organizations offer certifications in both of these options. If playing to a crowd gets your motor running, becoming a group fitness instructor may be for you. Teaching group fitness classes means leading different groups of people through pre-planned workouts. That's not a bad thing and it works well for lots of people, but it's not the same as working with individual clients and giving them your full attention. You can also offer small group personal training sessions where each client is following their own program and your attention is shared equally among the group. You can earn more money per hour by training several people at once while charging your clients less per session than you would for an individual session. Some clients love group personal training and others prefer individual sessions. It's up to you to decide what works best for you and your clients.

My introduction to group personal training happened on a Monday night in 2006 when I accidentally double-booked myself during primetime (those are the busiest hours at the gym). Yes, I'm human too. Luckily both of my clients were understanding and one of them asked if I could just work with both of them since they were already there. That's exactly what we did, and to my surprise, they wanted to keep training together. They were each following their own program and I was easily able to coach one while the other was resting between sets. And there was some friendly competition that pushed them to work a little harder. When I opened my first personal training studio the following year, I only offered semi-private training with groups of two to four clients. There's nothing wrong with training clients individually, but I have found that most of my clients enjoy the camaraderie that group training provides without losing the individual attention they expect from me. It's also great for me because I can schedule more clients in fewer hours, which helps me to manage my time and energy. Again, it's up to you to decide what's best for you and for your clients.

It's also an option to be a group fitness instructor and a personal trainer if you like doing both. Teaching group fitness classes is fun and it's a great way to meet people who might also be looking for a personal trainer. Inviting personal training clients to try your group fitness classes is a great way to encourage them to exercise more often too.

One of the best places to start your search is the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) website. The NCCA is an independent, non-governmental organization whose role is to develop standards of excellence for voluntary health-care certification programs. Simply put, they set the bar for certifying agencies and only recognize those who meet or exceed industry standards. The NCCA accreditation is the gold standard for personal trainer certifications and many employers

require you to have a certification with the NCCA stamp of approval before they will hire you. Check out the NCAA–accredited program search feature at <https://ice.learningbuilder.com/Public/MemberSearch/ProgramVerification>.



REMEMBER

The best certification is the one that's best for you and your career goals.

Choosing a certification

Now comes the important part: choosing which certification you want to pursue. The tips in the following sections will help you make the decision that's right for you.

Ask for advice from personal trainers you respect

If you're looking for a good restaurant, chances are you'll ask for recommendations. Do this when you're comparing personal trainer certifications too.



TIP

Start by talking to personal trainers in your area. Ask them about their certification experiences. Don't be shy — most personal trainers love talking about their work!



TIP

Have you ever noticed how online reviews tend to be really great or really terrible? Most people won't take time to write neutral reviews, so you can bet that reading online reviews of the certifying organizations you're interested in will tell you a lot about why people love them or why they loathe them. Just keep in mind that online reviews aren't always objective and shouldn't be your only resource. Asking personal trainers who have gone through the certification process about their experience is helpful too. Ask them if they would recommend their certification to others. Why or why not?

Find out which certification is required at the places where you'd like to work

Dropping hundreds of dollars and spending lots of time getting a certification only to find out that the certification you received doesn't help you get a job would be more than annoying.



TIP

If you're planning to work in a health club or other business (as opposed to working for yourself), contact potential employers in your area or check their websites to find out which certifications they require or accept.

Find out what additional requirements the organizations have

You'd think that after you paid the fee, crammed your head full of facts, and passed the exam, you'd be all set. But most certifying bodies require that you be certified in CPR and/or Advanced First Aid, and some require having a college degree, or even having work experience in addition to passing their exam before you can be fully credentialed by their organization.



TIP

Check out the organizations' websites for specific information, and make sure you'll be able to meet their additional requirements before getting started.

Preparing for the Test

No matter which certification you choose, you'll need to pass an exam that shows you have what it takes to be a personal trainer. Organizations that require in-person (as opposed to online) testing offer exams on different dates in different testing centers around the country. Check out the organizations' websites for information on test dates and locations.



REMEMBER

If a certifying organization doesn't require you to take an exam, run — don't walk — in the other direction. The purpose of the exam is to weed out those people who give personal trainers a bad name. Your certification won't mean anything — to you or anyone else — if you don't have to pass an exam in order to get it.

Understanding the exams

To give you an idea of what you will need to know on test day, the following sections include a brief description of the content you can expect to see on five different NCCA-accredited personal trainer certification exams.

American Council on Exercise

The ACE personal trainer exam has 150 multiple-choice questions, and you have three hours to complete the in-person exam. The four types of questions you have to answer are "interview and assessment," "program design and implementation," "program modification and progression," and "professional conduct, safety, and risk management."

American College of Sports Medicine

The ACSM exam is also taken in person and you have two and a half hours to answer 135 multiple-choice questions (120 scored questions and 15 unscored questions). Questions are in the areas of “initial client consultation and assessment,” “exercise programming and implementation,” exercise leadership and client education,” and “legal and professional responsibilities.”

National Strength and Conditioning Association

To earn certification as an NSCA-CPT (Certified Personal Trainer), you have to pass a three-hour in-person examination that includes 140 scored multiple-choice questions and 14 non-scored multiple-choice questions focusing on client consultation/assessment, program planning, exercise techniques, safety/emergency procedures, and legal issues. Between 24 and 35 questions will be presented in a video or image, which assesses knowledge in the areas of exercise techniques, functional anatomy, and fitness testing protocols.

National Academy of Sports Medicine

The NASM exam has 120 multiple-choice questions (20 are research questions and aren't counted toward or against your total exam score) and covers these six domains: basic and applied sciences and nutritional concepts, client relations and behavioral coaching, assessment, program design, exercise technique and training instruction, and professional development and responsibility. You can take the exam online with a proctor (someone who will monitor you remotely while you are testing) or in person at an approved testing site, and either way you have two hours to finish.

International Sports Sciences Association

The ISSA's exam for their NCPT-CPT (that's short for National Council for Certified Personal Trainers–Certified Personal Trainer) certification consists of 140 multiple-choice questions (125 questions are scored and 15 questions aren't scored). Topics you'll need to understand for this exam include applied science (anatomy, kinesiology, physiology), nutrition, intake and ongoing evaluation, program design and implementation, exercise selection, technique and training instruction, and professional practice and responsibility. You'll need to find a Prometric testing center if you're taking this exam.

Making the grade

Unless you were born with expert knowledge of exercise science, fitness assessments, and human behavior, you'll need to study for the certifying examination.

Cramming the night before a test may have worked in high school, but this technique probably won't cut it for the personal training exam. Starting a few months before the exam, set aside an hour or two every day to study.

Getting ready to study

Make sure you have a quiet place — whether that's your kitchen or maybe a coffee shop with your noise-cancelling headphones turned on — where you can concentrate on the course materials. Turn off the TV, your music (unless listening to classical music or white noise helps you focus), and your internet connection (unless you're using online course materials). Silence your phone and make sure your study area is equipped with pencils, paper, and plenty of light.



REMEMBER

If your house resembles Grand Central Station, consider going to the library or a quiet cafe to do your studying — find a place where you can concentrate without distraction.

Finding course materials

Each certifying organization offers its own course materials to help you study for the exam. When you sign up to take the test, you may receive (or be able to purchase) textbooks, online study guides, sample tests, and access to live seminars and courses. Check out the certifying organizations' websites for information on the course materials that are available.

Take a look at — and practice taking — sample tests

Many of the certifying bodies have sample tests available on their websites. Check them out and ask yourself the following questions:

- » **Do I understand the language?** For example, do you know what a quadratus lumborum is, if that's mentioned on the test?
- » **Am I capable of performing everything that is required in the test?** For example, can you demonstrate the proper spotting technique for a flat dumbbell bench press, if that's a requirement on the test?
- » **Can I recite the Karvonen formula while hopping up and down on one foot?** Okay, just kidding about that one.
- » **Is the exam challenging enough to weed out those who would be better off simply working out in the gym versus teaching other people how to work out in the gym?**

NOT YOUR MAMA'S STUDYING TIPS

When I was studying for my certification exam, I didn't just bury my nose in a book. Boring! There's a ton of material to cover and I needed to find lots of different studying techniques to help me remember it all. Here are some of the tricks I used to ace the exam:

- **Learn by doing.** Studying anatomy is an active process — getting up and moving your body helps to understand how it works. Performing movements and feeling the muscles involved will help you remember where they are and what they do. Which muscles do you use when you kick? How about when you're doing a bench press or a biceps curl?
- **Rest.** Just like during a workout, take short rest breaks. Taking a five-minute rest break every hour to move your body and rest your mind can increase information retention (meaning you'll actually remember more of what you study).
- **Use flash cards.** Making flash cards with definitions and formulas is great because you can test yourself whenever you have a free minute — in line at the grocery store, in the waiting room at the dentist's office, while you're stuck in traffic. Or have a friend flash you (the cards, that is).
- **Pick up a copy of the Anatomy Coloring Workbook.** Using the Anatomy Coloring Workbook to memorize body parts and systems is really helpful — I've had mine for over 20 years and still refer to it! Be sure to get a box of colored pencils with as many different colors as you can find too.

After you've examined the contents of the test and what's involved, try taking a practice test. The answers are usually provided so you can see how well you do. Taking a practice test is a good way to see exactly what you do — and don't — know.

Maintaining Your Certification

Most certifying organizations will require you to keep your credentials up to date by earning Continuing Education Credits (CECs). For example, to renew and maintain your ACE personal training certification, you must earn 1.5 CECs every two years through ACE-approved courses or professional activities. You can generally earn CECs through correspondence courses, online courses, practical and comprehensive training, and live classes. Most certifying organizations also require you to keep your CPR or Advanced First Aid training current — this is a good idea even

if it isn't required to maintain your certification. Check out the website of your certifying organization for detailed information about how to maintain your certification.



Taking more courses after you earn your certification can feel like a waste of time, especially as your business grows and you're busy training clients, but I can tell you from experience that keeping your skills updated and your memory sharp matters — it can even save lives. I've had clients pass out due to low blood sugar; one time I helped a gym member going through a grand mal seizure (I knew what to do because I had learned about it from continuing education course); and because I recognized the signs of a possible eating disorder, I found a gym member alone and unconscious in the hot tub one night because she had been gone for a long time and I knew to keep an eye on her. Fortunately the member was okay and I don't like to think about what could have happened. These are just a few examples of what I have seen over the past 20-plus years and I guarantee that you too will eventually find yourself in a situation where you're really glad that you remember what to do.

- » Interning and apprenticing
- » Finding a good place to start
- » Working with friends and family
- » Practicing what you preach

Chapter 3

Building Your Skills

The only way to become a stellar personal trainer is to get out there and train. But if you're not employed yet and you don't have any clients, exactly how do you go about doing that? It's the old catch-22 — you can't get clients until you have experience, but you can't get experience without clients.

Except that you *can*. In this chapter, I give you the lowdown on interning, apprenticing, and practicing on your friends (and how to do it so that they *remain* your friends).

Getting the Scoop from Those in the Know

A great way to get real-world experience before hanging your personal-trainer shingle is to be an intern or an apprentice first. Internships and apprenticeships allow you to learn the technical aspects of the job by working with people who have been there and are still doing it — and who can show you how to do it. It's your opportunity to experience firsthand what you want to be doing — you'll probably find out what you don't want to do too.

Interning

When you think of interns, do you imagine someone running around serving coffee to spoiled executives as a low-paid gofer yearning to climb the corporate ladder? As an intern in the personal training industry, you'll do your fair share of filling water bottles for clients and wiping down sweaty gym equipment, and that's part of the job, but you'll also get to experience firsthand what personal training is really like.

A personal training internship is a temporary work experience where you receive training and gain experience in your field. If you have no practical experience under your belt, interning will:

- » Give you in-the-field experience that you can't get in a classroom or a book
- » Allow you the opportunity to explore and understand the industry before committing to it full-time
- » Let you create relationships with potential employers
- » Help you earn credit toward your certification or degree
- » Help you acquire the skills necessary to perform your job well
- » Teach you valuable new skills with which to build your résumé
- » Establish vital career networks and mentors
- » Enable you to collect references for future employment

Many internships provide compensation through stipends or hourly wages. Others are unpaid but do provide perks and invaluable experience. Internships vary in duration and sometimes lead to employment. I know of some fitness business owners who will only hire interns and then they'll either bring them on permanently or part ways after the internship ends depending on how things go.



TIP

The best places to start looking for an internship are local gyms and boutique fitness businesses (personal training studios, bootcamps, and so on). Ask the owner or manager if you can shadow one of their trainers or maybe start working the front desk to learn the business. Also, don't hesitate to contact independent personal trainers to see if they would be open to taking you on as an intern. It's a great way for a busy personal trainer to get some help while training another person in the way they want things to be done — and it works for you too, because you get to learn the ropes and you could end up landing a permanent gig!

INTERNING RESOURCES

If you'd like to learn more in general about interning or finding your first job, check out these articles:

- <https://www.dummies.com/article/business-careers-money/careers/job-searches/importance-securing-internships-251880>
- <https://www.dummies.com/article/business-careers-money/careers/job-searches/leverage-facebook-first-job-search-252056>
- <https://www.dummies.com/article/business-careers-money/careers/job-searches/networking-linkedin-first-job-search-252051>

Ready to start looking for an internship or a job? Try these:

- **FitnessJobs.com:** Here you can post your own ad looking for internships and search for job openings. If you're posting an ad seeking an internship, be sure to include your contact information, the region you're looking to work in (so you don't get calls from people in Peoria when you live in Seattle), and a description of your experience or education.
- **LinkedIn:** If you don't have a LinkedIn profile yet, now's the time to set it up. LinkedIn is *the* social media platform for professional networking. You can search for jobs and share that you're looking. Check out this article for tips on using LinkedIn effectively: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/linkedin-profile-tips>.
- **Online job boards:** These are websites where you can find a list of open job positions and apply to them directly from the site. Some popular ones are www.indeed.com and www.ziprecruiter.com. You can find salary information and actual (anonymous) employee reviews at www.glassdoor.com.

Apprenticing

Apprenticing provides education and on-the-job training. Typically, you work in a structured apprentice program for a company under the watchful eye of one of their veteran staffers. Unlike internships, apprenticeships are *always* paid positions. The benefits of apprenticing include the following:

- » Paid on-the-job training, under the guidance of a skilled employee
- » Additional instruction, classroom theory, and hands-on training
- » Progressive, increasing wages as your skill level increases



TIP

If you're interested in finding an apprenticeship and don't know where to look, try contacting community colleges or universities in your area with Exercise Science degrees. Students in these programs are typically expected to complete an internship or an apprenticeship before graduating and for this reason, most schools have relationships with local businesses and can point you in the right direction.

Shadowing other trainers

Another option is finding a job at a small personal training facility where you'll learn by working closely with an experienced trainer.



TRUE
STORY

Before opening my own personal training facility, I learned a lot from working for eight years in several different health clubs. I was really lucky that I got to watch and learn from some excellent personal trainers, especially at my first job where I shadowed a trainer who had been at the gym for ten years. She took me under her wing and showed me how to be successful when I was brand new and had more enthusiasm than knowledge. To this day I credit her for showing me how to take good care of my clients.

Even before going out on my own I learned a lot by shadowing other professionals. If I didn't completely understand some aspect of training, especially how to work around an injury, I would go with my clients to their physical therapy appointments whenever I could. This strategy helped me develop a network of advisors who had more experience, knowledge, and education than me. I still go back to these people all the time with questions.



TIP

Be a lifelong learner. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know, especially when you're learning something new. Even after 20-plus years in the fitness industry I learn something new every day.

Training to train



TIP

If you haven't done it yet, you might want to think about coughing up a few bucks to work with a personal trainer yourself. Although you want to be training other people — not be trained yourself — spending time with someone who's been doing it for a while and is successful at it can be worth way more than the money you shell out for the session. Trust me, if you tell your trainer that you're interested in being a personal trainer, too, and you'd like to work with them for a couple of sessions to get a feel for it, they'll be flattered. For the most part, trainers are very supportive of one another — a good personal trainer will want to see you succeed.

A bonus to working with another trainer is that, when you do get certified and start training clients, you have a colleague whom you can call when you need help troubleshooting or you just need a quick answer to a question.



TRUE
STORY

To this day, I still hire other trainers for myself. Sometimes the trainers I work with are more experienced than I am, and sometimes they're not, but either way, other trainers always know something I don't.

Taking advantage of other learning opportunities



TIP

If you belong to a gym, work out with a friend with less knowledge and experience than you. While you're working out, practice your training and spotting skills. I guarantee your partner won't mind getting some free advice!

If you can't find anyone to work out with, try role-playing. (And no, that doesn't mean meeting your significant other at the local watering hole wearing a wig and dark glasses.) While you're working out, run through a mental dialogue of what you would say to yourself if you were the client. Practice explaining what the exercises do and which muscle groups are involved in the exercise. Just be sure to do this in your head, not out loud — unless you want to gain a rep as “the crazy person on the treadmill.” Practicing your dialogue prevents you from being tongue-tied when you're working with a live, flesh-and-blood client. The last thing you want when you're on the job is to draw a blank and forget the names of the body parts you're training!



TIP

Attending conferences is a great way to meet people and learn from industry leaders. You can check out the annual events put on by different certifying bodies or groups such as the IDEA Health and Fitness Association or the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), but I recommend starting with regional and local events before heading to a national convention as these events can be overwhelming even for seasoned professionals. Attending regional and local events is much more affordable and you'll have more opportunities to meet local people who you can follow up with in person.



REMEMBER

Study or practice at least one of your training skills every day. Read up on medical literature, listen to a lecture at the hospital on relieving back pain, practice stretching a friend. However, whatever, and whenever you decide to practice, when the time comes that you actually need that skill or tidbit of knowledge, you'll be glad you did!

Finding Folks to Practice On (Or, Getting Your Family and Friends to Jump When You Say Jump)

Who knows you better or loves you more than your friends and family? (If you said “the pizza delivery guy,” you’re in trouble.) You can bounce your business ideas off of them and practice your techniques on them when they’re willing.



WARNING

Because your friends and family members have no problem with telling you that your teaching skills stink or that you don’t know your gluteus maximus from your elbow, they can be tough to work with. Don’t take their “feedback” too seriously, and remember that their suggestions will get you used to dealing with straight-talking clients! Your friends and family are also the same people who care about you and might say you’re awesome to avoid hurting your feelings. It’s a nice gesture, but it won’t help you to identify your blind spots or improve your skills.



TIP

There’s more to training than, well, training. You need to pinpoint all the other areas where you may need improvement. Ask the people you’ve been practicing with to give you feedback on things like:

- » **Your professional demeanor.** Do you seem like a professional, or like their goofy sibling/spouse/friend?
- » **Your ability to explain the exercises.** Do they understand what the exercises are for and how to do them correctly?
- » **Your ability to demonstrate the exercises.** Do your demonstrations help them understand the proper form?
- » **Your spotting technique.** Do they feel like they’re in good hands, or are they afraid that they’re going to wind up dropping a barbell on their heads?
- » **The overall quality of the session.** Was your session something they’d shell out money for, or do they feel like they’d get the same value for free from a trainer on YouTube?
- » **Your overall knowledge and ability to communicate what you know.** Do you seem like someone in the know or someone who needs to go to the back of the class?

Make a list of the skills you need to brush up on, and build time into your schedule to devote time in your schedule to strengthening those skills. With practice and good feedback from your clients, you’ll have this personal training thing down in no time!

Training Yourself

Have you ever noticed how people naturally gravitate toward the buff trainer in the gym? That's because the trainers with washboard abs *look* like they know what they're doing, even though that may be the farthest thing from the truth. People typically want to get fit and look lean — so they figure, “Well, if that person knows how to look like that, then they'll know how to make *me* look like that too.”

Now, the reality is that this is not reality. What you look like doesn't really have any correlation with your skill as a personal trainer. You need to be able to prescribe different exercise programs for different people, based on their unique needs and abilities. Looking the part does help; your own health and fitness are a great advertisement. But more important than talking the talk, you have to be able to walk the walk. You also have to be able to help other people who might need to crawl before they can walk.



TIP

Guess what? Lots of people don't like to exercise. And you know what else? Many of these folks aren't working out to get flat abs. They just want to feel good and stay healthy. They aren't interested in living a life that revolves around the gym or their bodyfat percentage. Keeping this in mind is helpful, especially if you're someone whose life does revolve around the gym or your bodyfat percentage. There's nothing wrong with that either, but always remember that your clients will have different goals and reasons for exercising. And they won't stick around long with a trainer who doesn't understand that.

Practicing what you preach

You don't necessarily need to have the physical strength to demonstrate any type of exercise to any type of client you take on, but you shouldn't expect them to do things that you *wouldn't* do yourself, even if you could. That means you need to learn and practice every exercise that you plan on being able to teach, and if there's an exercise you can't demonstrate for whatever reason, you better be able to explain exactly how to do it correctly and safely.

Reading up on it

Check out your library's fitness section for exercise and weight-lifting books. Your certifying body will have publications along those lines as well. After sifting through them, pick out the exercises you're going to master first, write them out in your workout log, and practice them until you're confident that you're able to properly demonstrate and teach them to someone else. Keep incorporating a few new exercises at a time into your own routine and soon you'll have an enviable exercise repertoire to choose from.

Getting moving

Despite popular opinion, personal training entails more than pumping iron. Start getting to know the cardio equipment in your gym. Knowing how to set the programs is helpful if you're looking to change up a client's workout with a little interval training. Trust me, this recommendation comes from personal experience — throwing a client on a piece of cardio equipment that's unfamiliar to you and then not being able to get the darn thing to work won't impress anyone (at least not in the way you *want* them to be impressed).

Dear diary . . . Keeping a workout log

Keeping a workout log while you're in your experimental phase and you're discovering new exercises and training styles is extremely helpful. You can record the elements that got you the results you were looking for and keep notes about those that didn't. Make notes about how you felt and how quickly you recovered. Record how many reps and sets you completed so you know where to start next time and always remember that what you measure you can improve. You'll need to teach your clients how to document their workouts when they're not with you, and using your workout log as a teaching tool is a great way to lead by example.

Being a not-so-mad scientist: Experimenting on yourself

Every person's body is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. When you train clients, think like a scientist. You have to step outside of your normal thought process and ask "What if?" (What if I increased the pace? What if I slowed down this movement? What if I had the client start with that exercise first?)

On top of knowing every exercise there is to know, being well versed in a variety of training styles is a good rule of thumb, especially before trying them with your clients. You should know how different tempos feel, how increased weights and/or reps affect the sensation of your workout, how changing your recovery time affects your performance. These are all things you can experiment with personally so that one day you'll be able to say to your client, "Let's try this instead," and you'll be able to describe what you're doing from personal experience.

Demonstrating your professional skills

According to some guy named Webster, a *professional* is somebody who shows a high degree of skill or competence. Becoming a professional doesn't occur overnight. Professionalism is a combination of your technical skills, practical skills, people skills, business skills, and that little indefinable something called *finesse*.

It's the ability to perform your job as a trainer in a proficient and skilled manner. To do that — and to do it well — takes time and practice. And the good news is these are all things you can learn and get better at with practice.



REMEMBER

Your speaking style and manner are extremely important when working with clientele, both paying and nonpaying; they indicate how well versed you are in your technique, how comfortable you are in your role as a trainer, and how disciplined you are as a professional.

Here's a list of traits that demonstrate professionalism.

A professional trainer:

- » Is responsible and reliable
- » Has exercise programs written out for clients ahead of time
- » Stays knowledgeable and current
- » Is focused on the client 100 percent of the time
- » Admits to not knowing the answer to a client question
- » Is early or on time for training sessions and meetings
- » Keeps clients on task without too much talking
- » Performs all requirements of the job
- » Completes duties fully and in a timely manner
- » Offers to help out other staff members
- » Doesn't gossip about others, with clients *or* staff
- » Is respectful of coworkers
- » Takes responsibility for their own actions
- » Maintains appropriate boundaries with clients
- » Doesn't blame others for problems or shortcomings
- » Takes up any problems or issues with the appropriate person — and nobody else
- » Takes clients and staff out for ice cream on a regular basis (Okay, I made that one up.)

I could probably come up with 20 more ways to be professional. These are the ones that come to mind first and that I deal with most often.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Here's a story from a trainer I know (we'll call her Angie) that underscores the importance of being professional.

Shortly after Angie expanded her service offerings to include massage therapy, her masseuse called in sick 30 minutes before she was to meet one of Angie's first — and best — clients. Not wanting to cancel and disappoint her client, Angie thought, "I'll go myself!" With that, she grabbed the portable massage table and massage cream and loaded up her car.

The client met Angie at the front door. She looked behind Angie. "Where's your masseuse?" she asked. "Well, she's sick, so I'm going to give you your massage," Angie answered. The client looked surprised. "Have you ever given a massage before?" "No," Angie replied. "Have you ever *gotten* a massage?" the client asked, her eyes even wider. "Well, no," Angie replied. Looking doubtful, the client led the way to her bedroom, where Angie proceeded to set up the table without sheets (the client brought out her own towels and placed them on the table so she could cover herself).

To make a long story short, the client knew that Angie didn't know what she was doing, and even though Angie thought the session went fine, it wasn't until three years later, when she got her first massage, that she realized the errors she had made with her client. Boy, was her face red! Angie realized that she had compromised her relationship and her professionalism by trying to do something she wasn't qualified to do.

Make sure when you're meeting with a client — whether for the first time or the fiftieth — you're prepared and know what you're doing.



REMEMBER

No matter who you are practicing on or working with, take it seriously. If you don't, no one else will. If you're practicing with friends and family, stay in character. As easy as it is to joke around and gab about the latest reality show, keep in mind that you need to develop two skills: how to keep your client moving through a session, and how to keep yourself focused and on track while you direct your client. The whole purpose of practicing with friends and family is to find your *training rhythm* (the manner in which you'll be most comfortable working with clients).

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring your personal training options
- » Deciding if business ownership is for you
- » Choosing whether to work for someone else
- » Discovering the types of facilities where you can work
- » Applying for a personal training job

Chapter 4

Planning Your Start

You're certified, your skills are up to game speed, and you're raring to go. Go where? Some personal trainers work as employees at health clubs and other facilities, while others work for themselves.

Being your own boss may sound like a dream come true. But if you're not prepared, it can be a nightmare. In this chapter, I help you decide whether to work for yourself or for someone else, figure out what kind of facility you'd like to work at, find your dream job, or figure out where to train your clients if you're a lone ranger.

Assessing Your Lifestyle Needs

If you're like most people, you just want to dive right in and get working. But taking some time up front to really think about what you want from your life and your career is helpful when you're planning your start. So, grab a pen and paper, and write down your answers to the following questions:

- » Are you a night person or a morning person?
- » How many hours per week can you work?

- » How much money do you need to earn to support the lifestyle you want?
- » How often would you like to go on vacation, and for how long?
- » How much time do you like to spend with family and friends?
- » What are your hobbies? What hobbies would you like to have?



REMEMBER

These questions don't have right or wrong answers. They're just supposed to get you to think about your priorities.



TIP

Refer back to your answers as you read about the realities of starting your own business and working for someone else. You'll find that, for example, if you like to take two months of vacation time every year, you can do that more easily as an independent personal trainer. But owning your own business can be time-consuming, so if spending lots of time with your family and friends is important to you, owning your own business may not leave much time for anything else, at least not when you're getting started.

Being Your Own Boss

Who doesn't sometimes dream of telling their boss to "take this job and shove it," and forging their own path as a freelancer or business owner? No more getting up at 5 a.m., no more fighting traffic, no more surly bosses, no more tiny paychecks.



WARNING

Hold on a second . . . before you decide that you want to go it alone, you need to be aware of the pros and cons. Running your own business isn't a surefire way to wealth or free time — if it were, everyone would be doing it.

Keep reading to find out the truth about going it alone. Being a successful business owner takes a certain kind of personality, and sometimes the disadvantages can outweigh the advantages. And I can tell you from personal experience that owning a business is not even kind-of the same thing as being a personal trainer. At all.

Figuring out if you have what it takes

You need more than an independent spirit to make it on your own. To find out if you have what it takes, answer the questions in the following sections. If you answer "no" to any of them, think long and hard about how you can change the answer to "yes" — or whether you should maybe rethink your plans.

Are you a self-starter?

When you work for yourself, you don't have a boss breathing down your neck (or docking your pay) when you punch in late. The only thing that makes you get out of bed on time, focus on your work, balance your books, and create new client programs is — wait for it — you. Be truthful: Are you motivated enough to do your own marketing, programming, accounting, and everything else you need to do to keep a business running (at least until you start making enough money to hire other people to do some of it for you)?

Do you get along well with different personalities?

As a business owner, you'll deal with insurance agents, journalists (who can give you good PR), doctors (who can give you referrals), accountants (when you can afford one), landlords or health-club owners (you need *somewhere* to work!), and — don't forget — clients. You need to be able to communicate and get along with a wide variety of people.

Are you good at making decisions?

If the idea of choosing between PB&J and chicken noodle soup for lunch sends you into a tailspin, you're in trouble. You'll need to make decisions galore, from what to name your business and what color your logo should be, to whether you should take on a new client. And sometimes you'll need to make snap decisions, such as when a client has a complaint or how to respond when a reporter from a local news station emails asking you for the ten best pieces of equipment for a home gym — and it's due by 5 p.m. tomorrow. (Don't think this will happen to you? Check out the information about appearing in the press in Chapter 8.)

Do you have money in the bank?

Unless you find some magic formula for getting clients to pound down your door, your business will probably start out slowly as you gain a reputation and get referrals. This isn't bad — it's just par for the course. But in the meantime, you'll need money to live on.



TIP

Most experts suggest that you have at least six months' worth of living expenses socked away before making the leap.

Are you good at organizing?

When you work for an employer, somebody else sets your schedule, supplies client forms, provides exercise equipment for you to use, and so on. When you work for yourself, you need to be able to create, use, file, and find all sorts of documents.

You'll probably have a list of contacts on your phone, as well as contact-organizer software — and you'll use them to keep track of clients, doctors, and other contacts. You'll also need to keep track of how much money you're making, who owes you money, and how much you owe. All of this requires you to be more organized than Martha Stewart's fruit preserving calendar.

Are you a leader?

If your business takes off, you may want to hire other trainers to boost your income and to be able to serve more customers. Now *you'll* be the boss whom everyone wants to tell to “take this job and shove it.” Can you give orders without creating a mutiny? Can you inspire people to give 100 percent?



REMEMBER

In addition to potentially leading a staff, you'll need to be a leader to your clients. They look to you for instruction and advice, and you need to be able to lead them to better health.

Do you have management skills?

If you own a company with employees, you may find yourself doing more managing than training. Can you deal with constantly keeping an eye on your employees — and cutting down on your training hours to do so? Can you discipline an underperforming employee?

Do you have a supportive family and understanding friends?

When you start your own business, at first you'll be working overtime to lay the foundation and get the business off the ground. Will your family and friends understand that your schedule will be different; that you'll need privacy during certain hours while you work on marketing, creating client programs, and other tasks; and that you may not be able to handle all the household chores on your own? If your family and friends aren't already on board with your new business venture, you'll want to get them there — and fast.

Understanding the pros and cons of going it alone

Think you have what it takes? If you read the questions in the last section and answered yes to all of them, read on about the pros and cons of owning your own business to find out whether you really want to make the leap into entrepreneurship.

The pros:

- » **Unlimited income potential.** When you work for yourself, you set the rates and you work as much as you want to. If you can charge \$100+ per session and you can handle training ten or more clients per day, that's nobody's business but your own. If you work for a health club, you'll probably be paid an hourly wage for working the floor, plus a commission for bringing in new clients and re-signing existing clients, and a set fee for personal training sessions serviced. Your employer decides how much you get paid, when you work, and how many sessions you can conduct in a day.
- » **You choose your clients.** If someone rubs you the wrong way, you don't have to take them on as a client. If you work for an employer, sometimes you'll have to grit your teeth and deal with — and even be nice to — rude or annoying clients.
- » **You choose your hours.** No 9 to 5 for you! If you want to be there to walk your kid home from the bus stop, that's your choice — as long as you can schedule your clients around it. And if you want to take off to Tahiti for a week, you can do it (as long as you don't mind not getting paid for that week).
- » **Your income lines your own pockets.** Your hard work and long hours directly benefit you, as opposed to increasing profits for some CEO in an ivory tower. Many successful business owners are people who had a “bad attitude” at work because they resented busting their buns to support someone else's dreams.
- » **Going it alone is exciting.** Nothing makes your heart go pitter-patter like signing on a new client, scoring a public-relations coup, or finding a new way to help a client beat back pain through exercise. Every day is a new learning experience as you figure out how to best serve your clients while boosting your bottom line.
- » **You can work where you like.** Instead of getting paid to “walk the floor,” you can walk wherever you like! Design T-shirts with a snazzy logo and your business name and go to the beach — you're advertising, not slacking. Work at different gyms that allow independent trainers. Travel to out-of-town fitness-industry conferences. The *world* is your floor to walk!
- » **You get to keep (almost) every penny you earn.** When you work for someone else, in many cases the business owner pockets up to 50 percent of what you earn. When you work for yourself, you get to keep everything you earn (minus taxes, of course). No middlemen need to be paid, but you'll have more expenses to cover, like keeping the lights on and toilet paper in stock.

- » **You get to deduct your expenses.** As a business owner, you can deduct expenses related to your business from your taxes, such as exercise equipment, office supplies, computer equipment, and more. Consult your accountant for more information.

The cons:



TRUE
STORY

- » **No company health-insurance plan.** Most working people take health insurance for granted — but not those who work for themselves.

When I was a young and single new business owner, I didn't want to be without health insurance, so I paid a few hundred dollars per month for COBRA coverage from my last employer until I could find a private plan for myself — which was about \$500 per month for very limited coverage. Some industry associations offer health insurance to members, but it usually isn't cheap.

- » **No company-sponsored retirement plan.** Traditional retirement plans such as 401(k) plans, where employers often match your retirement contributions, are for employees. If you want to put aside money for retirement, you'll have to set up an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) and remember to contribute to it regularly. No employee match for you!

- » **Higher taxes.** When you're an employee, your employer pays half of your Social Security tax. If you're self-employed, you have to cough up the entire 15 percent on your own.

- » **Feast or famine lifestyle.** If you work for yourself, you can kiss your regular paychecks goodbye. Being self-employed means when you don't work, you don't get paid. You don't get paid to walk the floor, you don't get paid when you're sick, you don't get paid when you take a break.



REMEMBER

When you have a lot of clients — like in January, when people are trying to stick to their New Year's resolutions — you work like a dog but get paid like a prince. When times are lean, so is your paycheck. Most of your clients will vacation in the summer and many will spend less time with you when the sunshine calls their names. You need to be able to put aside money when you're flush to tide you over when clients are scarce.

- » **No paid vacation or sick days.** Can't work because you're laid low with the flu? Too bad, you don't get paid. Want to go on vacation for a week or two? Hope you don't mind taking a pay cut, because you don't get those two weeks per year of paid vacation time like your 9-to-5 brethren. (Of course, you can vacation as long as you like — as long as you can afford it — a definite advantage.)

- » **No equipment and supplies.** When you work for someone else, all the equipment and all those pencils and paper clips are provided by the Business Supply Fairy. When you work for yourself, all those supplies — not to mention the computer, printer, sticky notes, internet access, ink cartridges, paper, toilet paper, towel service, and electricity — come from your *own* magic wand. And unless you rent space in a gym or a personal training center, you may even have to supply your own exercise equipment. These goodies are tax deductible, but that's small consolation when they used to be free.
- » **No breakroom chitchat.** Forget Friday morning gabfests in the breakroom. Even if you hate working for an employer, working for yourself often gets very lonely — so lonely that you can suddenly find yourself down at Starbucks making small talk with anybody who gets within five feet of your Americano. Sure, you have your clients — but you can't tell *them* how exhausted you are or how you're afraid to raise your rates.

Trading spaces: Finding a place to train your clients

After you've asked yourself the tough questions and been honest with yourself about the answers, and after you've considered all the pros and cons of going it alone, if you still want to do it, you're off to the right start.

Now's the time to get down and dirty. Although you don't have to apply for a job when you pursue the solo path, you do have to deal with some other details, such as where you'll work. When you don't work for a gym, where are you supposed to train your clients?

In the following sections, I cover some of your options for places to train clients when you work for yourself.

GETTING OTHER PEOPLE ON BOARD

Before you make your final decision about whether to strike out on your own, put together an informal advisory board of friends and family members, health professionals, small business owners, and personal trainers you may know (you probably called a few when you were deciding which certification to pursue — but if you didn't, now is the time to make some connections). These people can give you honest feedback on your strengths and weaknesses, true tales about working for yourself or for someone else, and advice on where to start and how to get started.

Gyms

Some gyms will let you train clients there — for a price. They may ask for a percentage of your fee, a set amount per client, or a set amount per month. The bonus is that you'll have all the equipment you need, and your clients will have use of the locker rooms, showers, and so on. Contact local gyms and ask if they rent space to personal trainers.

Your clients' homes

Some of your clients will have fully outfitted home gyms — about half of my clients had at least some fitness equipment in their homes when I was training full time and a few had complete home gyms. Some people will be happy to pay you to train them in their own homes and even if they have nothing but a rug on the floor, you can do a lot with just a set of dumbbells and some resistance bands.



WARNING

When you work in a client's home, behaving like the professional you are is even more important than usual. You may get the urge to slack off because you're not in a professional environment, and this is a definite no-no.



REMEMBER

If you're driving from house to house for training sessions, you probably won't be able to book as many sessions in a day, because you'll be spending a lot of time cruising down the freeway or waiting in traffic.

Local businesses



TRUE
STORY

Sometimes you can rent space from compatible businesses. I moved my personal training business to a physical therapy clinic when I was between leases and building out my second location. There was plenty of open space for small group training and I was able to stock it with my own equipment.

The advantage to renting space from a business is that it won't break your bank and you don't have to worry about a lease. The drawback is that you'll be at the mercy of your landlord's schedule and rules.

Personal training facilities

Many cities have small independent gyms or personal training facilities where you can rent space — just like a hairdresser rents a station from a salon. A quick Google search for “gyms in my area” or “personal training” will give you an idea of what's available near you.

Working the 5 to 9

If you want to get hired at a gym or other facility, this section is for you. I give you the scoop on places that are looking for trainers like you, the pros and cons of working in various places, and how to get your foot in the door at the facility of your dreams. And yes, you read that right. Expect to see job openings with varying schedules because most people work from 9 to 5 and exercise outside of those hours. It's not uncommon for personal trainers to start their days as early as 5 a.m. or end them at 9 p.m. to accommodate clients' schedules.

Knowing whether you're the ideal employee

Answer the questions in the following sections. If you answer "no" to any of them, ask yourself how you can change your answer to "yes" — and if you can't, you may want to consider going solo. (Turn to the beginning of this chapter to find out if being a lone ranger — er, I mean trainer — is for you.)

Can you take direction?

As an employee, you'll need to take directions from your boss, whether that's the business owner or a manager. This doesn't mean, of course, that you have to blindly follow instructions, but too much questioning can land you in the soup.

GOING FROM EMPLOYEE TO EMPLOYER

If you really want to start your own personal training business, but you answered no to our questions earlier in this chapter, don't worry! Working for an employer will help you get your skill set up to snuff — especially if you work at a facility where you're able to get involved with all parts of running the business.

I worked for a large health-club chain for six years before going out on my own and developed a lot of useful skills during that time — such as how to hustle for work, how to treat clients, and how to sell personal training services — that helped me build a successful business.

Do you play well with others?

See those other people working at the gym you hope to work for? If you get hired there, you'll be interacting with them for the majority of your waking hours. Do you get along with all types of people? Can you handle working with someone who thinks or works differently from you?

Are you punctual?

Of course, being punctual is important whether you're self-employed or an employee — but as an employee, excessive lateness or tardiness can land you in the unemployment line. Do you have the willpower to get up when your alarm goes off and be at your workplace, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, at the appointed hour?

Can you stick to someone else's schedule?

Your employer will make up a schedule for you, and chances are they won't care that Monday is trivia night at your favorite sports bar. If the boss says you work Monday nights, guess what? You work Monday nights. If you need a certain day off, you'll need to let your boss know well ahead of time so they can work it into the schedule.

Can you do it someone else's way?

Your employer may have a different outlook on exercise programming, client relations, employee relations, or business operations than you do. A good employer will give you leeway to do your job your own way, but you'll probably have to make some changes to your preferred way of doing things to fit in your place of employment.

Identifying the pros and cons of being an employee

If you answered “yes” to all the questions in the preceding section and you're thinking about going to work for someone else, read on to find out about the pros and cons of your decision. Just like any other situation, working for someone else has its advantages and disadvantages.

The pros:

» **Your company pays for your health insurance.** Self-employed workers have to shell out megabucks in some areas to get insured — but not you! If

you work full-time for your employer, chances are you'll be offered health insurance as part of your benefits package.

- » **You may get a company-sponsored retirement plan.** You can have a certain percentage of your paycheck automatically deposited into your retirement account so your savings will grow — and it will be painless, because you probably won't even notice that the money is gone. If you're lucky, your employer will match your retirement contributions up to a certain amount — that's free money (something you should definitely take advantage of, if you can).
- » **You get a regular paycheck.** Every week (or every two weeks), like clockwork, your employer will put a check in your hands — unlike freelancers, who get paid when they have clients, and get zilch when they don't.
- » **Your employer provides everything you need.** Need a particular form? Your employer has a whole drawer full of them. Not sure what to wear? How about that snazzy polo shirt your employer gave you? Want to start your client on a new exercise? Have them hop on that brand new treadmill, courtesy of — you guessed it — your employer. As an employee, you don't have to drop money on supplies, equipment, or other work-related goodies.
- » **You can make new friends.** As an employee, you'll always have someone else to talk to, whether it's to trade ideas for client programming or chat about the latest news. You'll never get lonely with other employees around.
- » **You get paid vacation and sick days.** Unlike self-employed workers, if you get sick and have to stay home, you still get paid (as long as you still have sick days left). Your employer will most likely also give you paid vacation time, so you can relax on holiday without worrying about how the bills are going to get paid.

The cons:

- » **Your income potential is limited.** You can make only as much as your employer pays you (except when you get a raise). Unlike business owners, you can't make more moolah by raising your prices, adding more clients, adding more services, or working more hours.
- » **You don't choose who you work with.** Don't like that new client? Too bad. You'll be expected to work with — and be nice to — all clients, no matter how frustrating they may be. You also don't choose your colleagues, and may get stuck with a stinker of a coworker.
- » **You work set hours.** Working set hours can make it hard for you to do the things you like. For example, if you're scheduled to work the 9-to-5 shift, you'll have to find some way to do your errands after hours or during your lunch

break. If you're scheduled for Tuesday night and that's the night your son has a baseball game, you're out of luck unless you remember to ask your employer for the day off weeks ahead of time.

» **Your employer takes a cut of what you make.** If your employer charges clients \$75 for an hour-long session, why do you make only \$25 per hour? Because your employer has to take a cut of what you earn from each client to pay for *overhead* — things like heat, light, rent, and other operating expenses. Employers also pay additional taxes on their employees, as well as matching employees' Social Security withholdings.

Picking from the job jar

Don't think that because you're a personal trainer your working options are limited to gyms. Plenty of businesses that deal with health are willing to hire a sharp specimen like you. In the following sections, I give you a guided tour of some of your options.

Hospital-based wellness centers

Hospital-based wellness centers operate like any other gym, except that your client base will consist of a lot of doctors, nurses, and patients (though members of the community are also welcome to join). The good news is that being surrounded by medical professionals will be a great learning experience for you.



REMEMBER

A lot of doctors and nurses don't know nearly as much as you think when it comes to physical fitness and they need *you* to help them with adopting a healthy lifestyle!

University gyms

Many large universities have gyms for their students and faculty. You'll be working with plenty of brainy people, and the benefits package is usually impressive.

Chain health clubs

You know these places — they're the ones with super-fit people in designer sportswear in their ads. In this large gym environment, you have plenty of opportunity for advancement. However, much of your salary is based on sales, so you'll feel the pressure to sell, sell, sell — whether you're pushing nutritional supplements or personal training sessions.



WARNING

If the words “sales” and “spiders” give you the same dreaded feeling in your gut, you may feel uncomfortable working in a large health club setting. In order to boost your income, you’ll have to get comfortable with handing new and existing members a slick sales pitch for your personal training services.

Independent or small health clubs

Because the staff is small, you’ll wear many hats in an independent or small health club — such as working the front desk, answering phones, scheduling clients, cleaning, taking part in marketing campaigns, and, oh yeah, conducting personal training sessions.



TIP

If you hope to own your own personal training business someday, this may be the best workplace for you, because you’ll get to see all aspects of running a business.

Private personal training studios

Private personal training studios do nothing but personal training. Clients don’t go there to work out on their own, use the whirlpool, or use the sauna. You may also be sent out to train clients in their home gyms or in small corporate facilities.

YMCA/YWCA

The YMCA, immortalized by the Village People, caters to families (as does the YWCA). This employer will give you a good, solid base of experience. If you want to work with a diverse group of people, then the Y’s for you. And it’s a great place to start if you’re looking to get a feel for what the gym industry is like, as it typically offers everything from badminton to martial arts, so you can test your skills in different areas of fitness services.

Senior centers

If you want to work at a senior center, you’ll need to be aware of the changes the body goes through as it ages and you may need advanced certification as well. State-run senior centers may not pay as much as other fitness facilities. The good news is that even if your local senior center doesn’t offer a fitness program, they may be open to new ideas, so you can propose a program or a class to them.

Fitness management companies

These companies are like staffing agencies for fitness professionals. Management fitness companies outsource personal trainers to corporate fitness centers and other businesses that need staff but that don’t want to take on staffing

themselves. These employers have very stringent requirements; you'll probably be required to know CPR, turn in a résumé, and even take a test.

Alternative healthcare centers

Alternative healthcare centers are into natural care and an Eastern philosophy of medicine, so they offer treatments like acupuncture, massage therapy, naturopathy, and chiropractic services. Clients may be trying to avoid surgery or medication, and they may have ailments they're trying to resolve. Personal training fits in with this environment perfectly, because clients are looking for natural ways to improve their health — and what's more natural than exercise? Only those with open minds need apply.

Physical-therapy businesses

Some physical therapists hire personal trainers to work with patients after they get past the acute stage of an injury, to regain strength and mobility. You'll be teaching exercises under the supervision of the therapist to help patients improve their physical fitness and prevent re-injury. Because you'll be working for a licensed or registered therapist, you're in for a great learning experience.

Health resorts

These are the exclusive playgrounds of those with a lot of cash to drop. They usually boast a full-blown gym in addition to spa services, healthy meals, and activities. Most health resorts require trainers to show proof of certification plus a résumé, and they'll likely expect you to be certified in CPR as well. Because these are vacation spots, you won't have long-term clients, and you'll have to pack a lot of information into a short amount of time.

Day spas

Day spas are like toned-down health resorts. Clients usually visit for a few hours or a day to get massages, facials, and other treatments. The difference between working at a day spa and working at a health resort is that you'll see clients on a more continuous basis.

Evaluating potential workplaces

Before you go to all the trouble of convincing an employer to hire you, make sure that *you* want to work for *them*. Nothing's worse than knocking yourself out to get hired and then finding out that you're working for Satan himself.

WHERE THE JOBS ARE

Surf to these job sites to find personal training jobs in your area:

- **LinkedIn:** Most employers post openings here and on multiple job sites, and because LinkedIn is the most popular professional social networking site on the internet, you'll be able to connect with employers or recruiters directly about jobs you're interested in applying for.
- **Indeed.com:** This popular job-search site lets you search keywords or browse job categories. For personal training jobs, select the categories "Personal Care and Services" and "Healthcare — Other."
- **The International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA):** Job seekers can choose to browse through all available job listings on IHRSA's website or search for jobs by using specific criteria. The ads are mostly for directors and managers, but why not contact the businesses you're interested in working for and offer your services?
- **Exercisejobs.com:** This site has a good selection of fitness-specialist/personal-trainer jobs. You can also post your résumé (preferably in a way that stands out from the dozens of pages of other trainers' résumés). The site also includes career resources, such as interview tips and a résumé guide.



TIP

Head to the facility and take a look around. You can even ask for a day pass or a week pass so you can work out there yourself. Do you like the equipment? Do the employees seem happy, bored, miserable? What kinds of clients do they cater to — women, men, bodybuilders, young adults, seniors?



TIP

Corner a personal trainer and ask some questions. If they're busy or can't talk while on the job, ask if you can get coffee sometime (your treat) soon. Don't be shy — personal trainers love to talk about their jobs! Here are some questions you want to be sure to ask:

- » How is the facility's management to work with?
- » What's the pay like? Do you get a commission for bringing on new clients?
- » Is there a lot of pressure to bring in new clients or push products like nutritional supplements?
- » What are the hours like?
- » Do you like the equipment?
- » Does the employer take good care of the equipment?

- » What are the clients like?
- » What kind of certification do you need to work there?
- » Do you find it difficult to get clients?
- » What are the pros and cons of working for this employer?

Getting hired

Finding out where you'd like to work is the easy part. The hard part is convincing the owner or manager that you're the best darn personal trainer this side of the Mississippi and that they should hire you right away (preferably for a lot of money).



TIP

Unless you're applying online and the instructions specifically say to submit your application online, your best bet is to visit the facility of your choice in person, hand your résumé to the person behind the counter, and ask to make an appointment with the manager or owner (if it's a small facility). But don't make a move before sharpening the tools in the following sections.

Polishing your résumé



REMEMBER

Your résumé is you — on paper. Is the résumé sloppy? This tells an employer that you may do a sloppy job. Is it riddled with typos? This shows a lack of attention to detail. Is it well-organized? You'll probably be just as organized when dealing with client programs.

A résumé is also a sales tool. You're presenting information about yourself in such a way as to convince someone to hire you.

Here are some tips that will take your résumé from “ho-hum” to “hire me!”:



TIP

- » **Start with your most impressive credentials.** If you studied physiology or exercise science in college but have no job experience, start your résumé with a section that describes your education. If you have no formal training but you've worked in the fitness industry, put your job-experience section first.

Résumés can be chronological or functional in format. A *chronological résumé* lists your jobs and education from most recent to least recent. A *functional résumé* focuses on skills rather than job titles. A functional résumé is best if you want to highlight skills and strengths that your most recent jobs or education don't necessarily reflect. If you don't have much experience in the fitness industry, a functional résumé may be the way to go.

» **Use active verbs and phrases to give your résumé punch and help the employer understand how you can benefit the facility.** Rather than weak verbs (as in “Was a trainer for Club X” or “Was responsible for training at Club X”), use strong, active verbs that stress accomplishments (as in “Trained clients at Club X”). Here are some active verbs you can use:

- Trained (clients, employees)
- Implemented (programs)
- Reduced (costs, accidents)
- Increased (profits, sales, safety)
- Improved (clients’ fitness levels, customer service)
- Managed (employees, programs)
- Helped/assisted (clients, management)

» **Fake it ‘til you make it.** Never worked as a personal trainer before? Stress the responsibilities you held at previous jobs that will help you in your new position. For example, if you worked in retail, you know how to treat customers and handle complaints. If you worked in sales, you have the skills you’ll need to bring in new clients. Just make sure that your résumé is truthful — lying on a resume is a firing offense in pretty much any business!

» **Check it over.** Much like Santa, you should check your résumé twice — not to find out if you’ve been naughty or nice, but to make sure your résumé is free of typos and misspellings. Don’t rely on spell check, which can’t tell the difference between *you’re* and *your*. If you have time, put your résumé in a drawer for a few days so you can look at it with fresh eyes before turning it in. Even better, have a friend look it over for you. Or, if you have a little extra time and money, consult a freelance editor who can take your résumé up a notch.

Knowing what to wear



REMEMBER

Even though you’re applying to be a personal trainer, you shouldn’t wear your sweats when dropping off your résumé or during the interview. You don’t need to don a suit, but do dress professionally and comb your hair — your professionalism will shine through.

Brushing up on your interview skills



TIP

You don’t want to lose your cool when you’re being grilled by a potential employer. Follow these tips to become an ace interviewee:

» **Research the employer thoroughly.** This strategy will help you ask intelligent questions and show your enthusiasm for the job.

» **Ask a friend to pretend they're an interviewer and ask you questions.**

Typical questions you may have to answer are:

- Why do you want to become a personal trainer?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What would you do if a client hurt herself while doing a squat or deadlift?
- What certifications do you have?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Why should we hire you?

» **Use your phone to record yourself answering interview questions.**

Check for mumbling, slouching, fidgeting, wandering eyes, and saying things like “um” and “y’know.”



TIP

For many more tips, check out *Job Interviews For Dummies* by Joyce Lain Kennedy (published by Wiley).

2

Becoming a Successful Personal Trainer

IN THIS PART . . .

Personal training is about more than pumping iron and doing cardio. You're a business, which means that you need to think like a businessperson. In this part, I tell you all about how to create a business plan, project your income and expenses, develop your fee structure, and develop a marketing plan — just like a Fortune 500 company!

Next, I help you hire other professionals, such as an accountant and a lawyer (yes, you do need them). I also tell you how to create a business name and logo and how to determine your business structure (that's those modifiers that come after your business name like *Inc.* and *LLC*).

Keeping with the business theme, the following chapters describe how to develop sound business practices that will keep your business running smoothly, how to bring clients in the door, and how to keep those clients happy and motivated so they keep coming back.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Creating a road map for success
- » Developing your fee structure
- » Devising a marketing plan
- » Doing the math: Projecting income and expenses

Chapter 5

Creating Your Business Plan

Some trainers, eager to strike out on their own, jump feet-first into business ownership. They have a vague idea of what they need to do — go out, get clients, train them, collect money — but no real plan.

Success doesn't happen by accident; you need to plan for it. In this chapter, I show you how to develop a business plan, fee structure, and marketing plan, plus how to project income and expenses so you don't find yourself in a financial hole.

Developing a Road Map for Success

Before you rent a space, before you start advertising for clients, before you decide how much you're going to charge, you need a plan — a business plan, that is. A *business plan* is a detailed blueprint of how you're going to reach success. You can — and should — refer to it occasionally to make sure you're on the right track. (You also need a business plan if you ever decide to apply for a business loan.)



TIP

Here are some of the questions you answer in your business plan:

- » **What are your personal goals?** Do you want to make more money, have a flexible schedule, work with celebrity clients?
- » **Where do you want your business to be six months, a year, five years from now?** Do you want to stay solo or hire additional trainers?
- » **Whom do you want to train?** If you're not sure about the answer to this question, turn to Chapter 2, which offers information on the different types of clients you can work with.
- » **Where do you want to train your clients?** Do you want to travel to their homes or gyms, meet them at their offices, or have them come to you?
- » **What services or products will you provide your clients?** Will you offer specialty services like half-marathon training programs? Will you sell nutritional supplements or fitness equipment?
- » **How are you going to let clients know that you're available?** Read more about marketing yourself in Chapter 8.
- » **Why will clients hire you?** What makes you and your services different from Big George's Deep Discount Personal Training?

For a sample business plan to help you get started, check out *Creating a Business Plan For Dummies* by Veechi Curtis (published by Wiley).



TIP

For more information on writing business plans, visit the Small Business Administration (SBA) website at www.sba.gov. In particular, check out the "Write your business plan" page at www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan.

Sounds like a plan to me: Writing your business plan

After you've thought about what services and products you want your company to provide (your goods), who you want to provide those services to (your clients), and where you're going to provide them (your location), your next step is to create a business plan.



TIP

The business plan contains seven parts:

- » **Executive summary:** The executive summary is an overview of your entire plan, highlighting all key strategic points. You typically write this last but list it first.

- » **Company description:** The company description is, well, a description of your company — your vision and mission statements, a company overview, and an overview of your legal structure (the letters that come after your business name, such as *Inc.* or *LLC*). You can find more information on legal structures in Chapter 6.
- » **Products and services:** This section describes in detail the types of products and services your business will offer, any research and development that you may have done to support them, how much they'll cost, and how you plan to deliver them to your clients.
- » **Marketing:** In this section, you define the market you'll be operating in (the health and fitness industry), the type of client you expect to service (your target market), your competition (Big George's Deep Discount Personal Training), and your strategy for attracting clients.
- » **Operations:** This section describes your business's physical location, any equipment you need, the kinds of employees you need, your inventory requirements, and any other applicable operating details, such as a description of your *workflow* (how your business will perform its day-to-day activities). For more information on workflow, turn to Chapter 7.
- » **Management:** Here you outline your key employees (even if you're the only one), external professional profiles (that's your accountant and lawyer, as well as any other professionals you've hired to help you with your business), the members of your advisory board (if you don't have one yet, include this section for the future), and your human-resource needs (how many staff members you'll need to run your business and service your clients).
- » **Financials:** This section contains financial projections that will show whether your concept is viable or whether you need to head back to the drawing board. The projected financial statements — the income statement, the cash-flow projection, and the balance sheet — are estimates based on research of your start-up costs and projected sales.

For even more information on this huge topic, check out *Business Plans Kit For Dummies* by Steven Peterson, PhD, and Peter E. Jaret (published by Wiley).

Developing your mission statement

Having a mission statement is important because it's how you'll introduce your business to the world. The mission statement isn't the full story about you and your business. It's a brief description of who you are, what you do, and why you're in business. Apple's 2022 mission statement is a great example:

Apple's more than 100,000 employees are dedicated to making the best products on earth, and to leaving the world better than we found it.

The statement doesn't say anything about computers or iPhones, but it does tell us who they are (100,000 employees), what they do (make the best products on earth), and why they do it (leaving the world a better than we found it).



REMEMBER

Your mission statement is an important part of your identity and should convey the image of your business that you're trying to create.

Here are some tips for writing a strong mission statement:

- » Keep it short (two to three sentences are plenty).
- » Consider your long-term goals ("leaving the world a better place than we found it").
- » Ask for feedback. If your family, friends, or clients aren't loving it, ask why and try again.
- » Remember that it's okay to change it. Your company will change and grow and your mission will probably evolve too.



TIP

You can start formulating your mission statement by answering these questions:

- » Who are my clients? What is my client population, and what do they want?
- » Who are my competitors, and what makes my business different?
- » What can my business do for my clients?
- » How do we do this for the clients?
- » Why am I in business? What do I want for myself, my clients, my family?

Now compose a brief paragraph incorporating who you are, what you do, how you do it, and who you do it for.



TIP

Before you start framing your mission statement and hanging it all over the walls, put it to the test:

- » Ask your clients if they would want to do business with a company that has your mission statement.
- » Ask your friends if they understand the mission statement and if they would support it.
- » Ask vendors you buy products from (like equipment suppliers and supplement vendors) if it helps them understand your business.

Incorporate feedback you get from your clients into the mission statement, and then repeat the testing process until you have a mission that you can live and work by.



TIP

Your mission statement clearly articulates what your business is all about. Post it on the wall, include it in your marketing materials, and put it on your website.

Researching your market

When you were a kid, didn't you dream about being a spy? C'mon, you know you did. Well, here's your chance. Here's where you go undercover to get the dirt on your potential clients and your competition.

Gathering demographic data

If you don't know the demographics of your chosen location, you need to do research to determine whether the area you want to do business in can support your personal training prowess. You need to know your area's population, a breakdown of the ages and genders of the inhabitants, and the average income of the area. If you're planning to open a personal training business that caters to seniors, you probably don't want to open it across the street from a college campus.



TIP

A great — and free — place to find information about your chosen location is the Census Bureau website (www.census.gov), which lets you look up the demographic makeup of towns, states, or zip codes. You can search for specific information about the location you're considering by zip code or you can look at a town or city as a whole.



REMEMBER

Don't forget your own eyes and ears. If you're interested in opening a business in a particular part of town, drive around and see what kinds of businesses are already located in the area. Spend some time there and get a feel for the atmosphere.

Scoping out the competition

Another important aspect in determining your venture viability is having a strong awareness of your competitors. Your competitors are the personal trainers and personal training companies in your area that are already catering to the people you hope to train one day. The ones you want to scope out are the successful businesses, not the poseurs who think that *lat pulldown* is short for *lateral pulldown*.



TIP

The best way to know your foe is to “shop” them. Call as a prospective client and ask for information about their services. You’ll want to know things like:

- » What type of services do they offer?
- » How much does it cost?
- » Are their trainers certified? If so, how?
- » How many trainers do they have?
- » How long have they been in business?
- » Are they insured and bonded as a business?
- » When are they open?
- » Do they travel to clients’ homes or offices?

Not only will you get the information you need to compete in your marketplace, but you may also pick up an idea or two for yourself.



TIP

Pinpoint all your competitors within a five-mile radius of your proposed business location. (An industry survey by the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association [IHRSA] reported that consumers generally travel to fitness facilities that are within five miles of their homes or workplaces.) Make a chart listing the competitors you want to call and the specific items you want to know. This chart will make it easier to compare and contrast.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR COMPETITION

Don’t know where to go to find the competition? Start by searching online for personal training businesses in the area. You’ll find a list of businesses and you can check out other personal trainers’ websites and social media profiles. Get friendly with your local gym manager — gym managers typically have the scoop on the training scene and where to go to find people in the know. Also try your local fitness-equipment store — personal trainers often leave business cards on their counters, and the managers there can fill you in on who’s a poseur and who’s the real deal.

Another great tip: Search for every URL you can think of that includes the name of your town or neighborhood + “trainer,” “personal trainer,” “fitness coach,” and so on. If someone already has one of the URLs, go there to see who they are and what they do. Chances are, they’ll be your primary competition because they were there first and knew to grab a valuable URL. If one of the URLs isn’t registered, snap it up so someone else doesn’t.

Selecting a location

Now that you know everything about everyone — including where your target market lives, where your competitors are located, and what Big George had for breakfast this morning — selecting a location should be a snap.



TIP

If you're still having a hard time deciding, use Google Maps to look up a map of the area you live in. Outline the zip-code boundaries, then label the map with the demographic information you turned up for each zip code — the average household income, the number of households, the predominant gender and class — and take a step back. Does anything jump out at you? Do you notice certain areas with similar profiles that are close together? If you see similarities in certain areas, and those similarities match your objectives, that is most likely where you want to be!

Deciding How Much to Charge

You know about how much a computer, a car, or a house should cost. But how do you put a price on something as intangible as your personal training services? One of the ways your prospective client determines the value of your services is through your fee structure. Whether you realize it or not, what you charge says a lot about you. If your prices are too low, your prospect will think that you're not too confident with your skills as a trainer or that you're not really a pro. If your prices are stratospherically high, your prospect might think that you're a little *too* confident or won't be willing to pay that much for your services. Setting your fee structure at the right level is imperative — both for you and for your client.



TIP

Make a list of how much your competitors are charging. Add together all the prices, and divide that number by the number of companies you surveyed. Round up to the nearest dollar, and — voilà! — you have an average price per session. You should be fine as long as your prices are close to that average — you don't want to be too far under or too far over. Just like Goldilocks, you want your price to be “just right.”



TIP

If you don't have many competitors in your area to help you set your price point, first do a dance of joy. Then log on to the IHRSA website at www.ihrsa.org for industry statistics — such as average session price by state or club type — to point you in the right direction.



REMEMBER

Too often, newbie trainers are so hungry for clients that they'll do just about anything for the business — from offering multiple free sessions to charging bargain-basement rates. Be confident that you're offering a valuable service. After all, what can be more important than keeping people healthy? Recognizing

and standing by your worth tells your client that you know what you're doing and you know what it's worth. Charging fair prices even helps your clients — the confidence that you exude gives your clients the confidence to let you help them.

To Market, to Market: Getting the Word Out about Your Services

Owning a personal training business is not like *Field of Dreams* — if you build it, they may *not* come. You can go ahead and open your business, but you won't have any clients if they don't know you're there. Marketing is simple. It's about offering a top-notch service and then telling people about it. And that's where your marketing plan comes in.

You versus the competition: Knowing what sets you apart from the crowd

Before coming up with your marketing plan, think about what makes you different from your competition. How will you convince clients to sign up with *you*? What do you offer that sets you apart? By understanding and establishing your *unique selling proposition* (USP), you'll form the foundation on which you'll base your marketing strategy.



TIP

Consider each of your competitor's selling points. Do they have a good location? Are all their trainers certified? Are they bottom-of-the-barrel cheap? Make a comparative list of their selling points versus your selling points.

Developing a marketing plan

A marketing plan outlines the specific actions you need to take for getting in front of potential clients. In your marketing plan, make sure you detail:

- » **Your services and what makes them unique:** Refer to the preceding section, "You versus the competition: Knowing what sets you apart from the crowd."
- » **Your pricing strategy:** Refer to "Deciding How Much to Charge" earlier in this chapter.

- » **Your sales and distribution plan:** How are you going to get your services and products to clients — online or in person? Will you accept credit card payments? Will you offer refunds?
- » **Your advertising and promotion plan:** See Chapter 8 for more-detailed information on advertising.

Doing the Math: Projecting Your Income and Expenses

The last section of your business plan is the most important: your financial plan. The financial plan tells you whether you can do what you hope to do — that is, whether your business will make money.

Estimating expenses

Here's where you get a grip on what you're going to have to shell out to be in business for yourself. Divide your expenses into two groups: *start-up expenses* (typically, one-time costs) and *operating expenses* (which occur on a regular basis).



TIP

Start-up costs

Think of your business as a car: Before you can get anywhere, you have to fill up the tank. Start-up costs are all the things you have to pay for to get your business started. Start-up costs include the following:

- » Business registration fees
- » Business licensing and permits
- » Rent deposits
- » Equipment
- » Promotional materials
- » Your website (domain registration, hosting fees)
- » Utility setup fees (phone, internet, electricity)



This list is just a small sample of possible start-up costs. You'll find that, as you write down your own start-up costs, the list will seem to grow faster than the national debt.

Operating expenses

A full tank will get you moving, but as with your car, your business requires regular infusions of cash to stay in gear. Your operating expenses may include the following:

- » Payroll (your salary and/or staff salaries)
- » Rent and building maintenance expenses
- » Loan payments
- » Phone and utility bills
- » Advertising
- » Continuing education
- » Equipment maintenance

Again, this is just a sample list to put you on the right track. After you've completed your list of operating expenses, add up all the expenses to know how much dough you'll need to come up with each month.

Projecting income

Now that you have a clear idea of how much you'll need to pay the bills, you have to figure out how many clients you need in order to earn that money! Bear in mind when you're projecting your session load for the week that you need to leave room for:

GETTING HELP ESTIMATING EXPENSES

If you're having a hard time estimating expenses, turn to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA) for help. IHRSA performs extensive surveys every year of the entire health-club industry. They publish industry-specific periodicals and custom reports geared toward very specific sectors of the population. You need to be a member to access some of their information, but you can purchase their reports and books through their online store.

- » **Travel time:** If you travel to your clients' homes or workplaces, you need to factor in that driving time.
- » **Cancellations:** People inevitably cancel, and you have to figure that it'll happen — you're better off planning for at least some of your clients to cancel. That way, if they all keep their appointments, you'll be ahead of the game.
- » **Administrative time:** Your clients don't pay you for the time you spend writing their programs, but you have to do it anyway.
- » **Personal time:** If you don't want to burn out within six months, I recommend you build time off into your schedule now.



TIP

Okay, here comes the fun part. Break out your calculator and use this formula to determine how many sessions you need to conduct per week to meet your monthly income goal:

1. **Add your total monthly expenses (see “Operating expenses” earlier in this chapter) to the amount you want to make as a profit.**
Be realistic! This profit has to pay for your mortgage, food, entertainment, and all other nonbusiness expenses.
2. **Divide the number you came up with in Step 1 by your session price (refer to “Deciding How Much to Charge” earlier in this chapter).**
The resulting number is how many paid sessions you need to conduct per month in order to pay your bills.
3. **Multiply the number you came up with in Step 2 by 12 (the number of months in a year).**
4. **Divide the number you came up with in Step 3 by 52 (the number of weeks in a year).**

This figure is how many paid sessions per week you'll need to conduct in order to make your desired monthly income.



REMEMBER

If you plan to take vacation time, you need to account for this in your calculations. For example, if you plan to take two weeks of vacation time, divide by 50 rather than 52.

Now that you know how much you need to make, project your entire financial scenario — by month for the first year, then by year for the following years.

- » Getting help from the pros
- » Creating a board of advisors
- » Determining your business structure
- » Naming your business
- » Getting registered

Chapter 6

Setting Up Shop

You have a client. Now you're a full-fledged personal training business, right? Not quite. As you probably know, personal training involves more than just the training. You need to get all your ducks in a row in terms of handling taxes, registering your business, and deciding on a business structure. And you have to work with more people than just clients to get your business off the ground. Professionals such as lawyers, accountants, physical therapists, and other trainers will serve as your advisory board, mentors, and networking group. In this chapter, I show you how to connect with the people who will help you reach the pinnacle of personal training success.

Shakespeare said a rose by any other name still smells as sweet. But will a personal training business called Lazy Louie's Personal Train-o-rama still bring in clients? Probably not. In this chapter, I also help you come up with a winning business name (and come up with a logo to match).

A Little Help from Your Friends: Forming Your Support System

You'd think that an independent professional like yourself would be — how should I put this? — independent. Far from it. No matter how much of a take-charge person you are, to get your business up and running (and lifting, and stretching,

and jumping rope), you'll need to rely on lawyers, accountants, bankers, insurance brokers, health professionals (physical therapists, orthopedists, and so on), friends and family, athletic directors or coaches for local schools and sports teams, and other trainers. Sure, you can aspire to be the next Oprah Winfrey, an uber-entrepreneur with her hands in a thousand pies — but even Oprah has a team of assistants doing her bidding behind the cameras.

Drafting your professional team

At first, hiring a team of professionals probably feels out of your league — after all, you're not Oprah. But at the very least, you need to rely on a lawyer and an accountant to help move your business beyond the field of dreams and make it a reality. And because your business (like all businesses) will change with time — whether you're hiring new employees, moving across town, or opening additional locations — you'll need the advice of some pros to keep yourself on the up-and-up.

In the following sections, I tell you about the people you need and how to find them, and which questions you should ask before you put someone to work for you.



REMEMBER

You need to interview these professionals just like you would a potential employee. Finally, I let you know whether going it alone, without a team of professionals, is an option.

Knowing which players you need

Before you start drafting your team, you need to know which players you need (that is, which professionals have the kind of expertise that can help you out). In the following sections, I tell you about the four biggies: lawyers, accountants, insurance brokers, and bankers.

HIRING A LEGAL EAGLE

What do you need a lawyer for? You're not planning to sue anybody, are you? Despite the impression you may get from TV shows like *Law & Order*, lawyers do a lot more than represent you when clients mysteriously disappear after hitting on your spouse or missing a payment. A lawyer can

- » Help you make sure your business is registered and licensed properly.
- » Defend you if someone decides to bring legal action against you.

- » Give you legal advice related to the operation of your business (such as when you hire and fire employees).
- » Create and interpret contracts and leases — even the small type!
- » Choose the right business structure (such as a limited liability corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, or corporation — more on this in “Structuring Your Business” later in this chapter).



TIP

Don’t know where to start your search for a lawyer? Try these tips:

- » **If you already have a banker, accountant, or insurance agent — professionals that I recommend hiring — ask them for recommendations.**
- » **Go to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce website (www.uschamber.com) and search for small business attorneys in your state.**
- » **Ask your friends, family, and clients for suggestions.** Who knows? One of them may actually be a lawyer who would be willing to trade advice for training.



TRUE STORY

When I was planning to start my business, I turned to an attorney who was a long-time client of mine for advice about which business structure to choose for growth and personal liability protection. Starting here helped me to avoid potential pitfalls in my business that I wouldn’t have known about if I hadn’t asked for help.

GETTING ACCOUNTED FOR

They’re often called bean counters — though you shouldn’t call them this to their faces if you want them to help you — but accountants do a lot more than count legumes. In fact, they can make the difference between a personal trainer who thrives and one who gets tossed into jail for tax fraud. An accountant can

- » **Work with your lawyer to help you decide what type of business structure to have.**
- » **Design and set up your accounting system so that year-end financial reporting will be easier.**
- » **Keep Uncle Sam off your back by making sure you pay the correct types of taxes in the right amounts.**
- » **Make sure that you send out W2 and 1099 forms to the right people at the right times.** If you hire independent contractors, the accountant will make sure that they actually fit the criteria for independent contractors

(who get 1099s) and are not considered employees (who get W2s) by the government.

- » **Let you know whether that smoothie or pair of sneakers is a legitimate business expense.**
- » **Show you how to separate your personal and business expenses, from home offices to work mileage to foam rollers.**
- » **Advise you through the process if the IRS ever audits you.**
- » **Help you decide whether you're better off leasing or buying that exercise equipment or office machine.**
- » **Compile your financial records for the past period.**
- » **Advise you regarding tax shelters or direct you to professionals who specialize in investing and protecting your hard-earned income.**
- » **Help you understand your financial statements.**



TIP

Even if you have an accountant making sure your finances and taxes are on the up-and-up, you should be able to understand your business's finances so that you'll always know how your business is doing. Check out *Accounting For Dummies* by John A. Tracy and Taze C. Tracey, and the latest edition of *Taxes For Dummies* by Eric Tyson, Margaret Atkins Munro, and David J. Silverman (both published by Wiley) for more help.



TIP

Start your search for an accountant by following these tips:

- » **Check with the Professional Association of Small Business Accountants (PASBA).** The PASBA website lets you search for accountants in your area. Check it out at www.pasba.org.
- » **Ask your friends, family, and clients who their accountants are.**
- » **Ask local small businesses, such as salons, for their recommendations.**

INSURING YOURSELF

No matter how careful, thoughtful, and just plain wonderful you are, a claim of personal injury, bodily injury, or sexual harassment can wipe out your bank account — even if it's not true. That's why you need to find an insurance agent. An insurance agent can help you determine how much coverage you need if you set up your own place of business.



TIP

The type of insurance you'll need depends on whether you're working in someone else's facility or leasing your own space. Either way, you need to carry professional liability insurance. If you're ever involved in a lawsuit claiming you made a mistake in the service you provided (for example, if you aren't paying attention and a client is injured while training with you), this type of insurance will help to cover legal expenses. Most personal trainers can purchase this insurance, which is relatively inexpensive, through their certification body.



REMEMBER

It goes without saying, of course, that just because you're insured doesn't mean you have a free pass to do things that are irresponsible (just like car insurance doesn't mean you can drive as fast as you want). Ideally, you'll never need to file an insurance claim — but you still need the insurance in case an accident happens.

Most small-business owners seek out independent brokers in their area; brokers are independent businesspeople who deal with different types of insurance from different companies. Your insurance broker will be able to find the best liability insurance as well as health insurance and other policies.

Personal trainers can also find fitness-instructor insurance through credentialing organizations and insurance agencies that specialize in the fitness industry.



TIP

Check out these resources for finding an independent insurance agent:

- » **Search the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America (IIABA) website at www.independentagent.com.** The IIABA has a database of agents that you can search for by name or location.
- » **Check with your local Chamber of Commerce for recommendations.**
- » **Ask other local businesses whom they use.**

BANKING ON IT

Most small businesses (like you!) have banks, but no bankers. But a banker — the person who handles your account at the bank — can help you get credit, avoid fees, and enhance your business opportunities through the banker's extensive personal contacts.



TIP

Personal trainers rarely bother with bankers at all — and when they do, they don't understand how to cultivate an alliance with them. Follow these tips to build a good relationship with your banker — after all, good rapport is like money in the bank!

- » **Invite your banker to tour your facilities.** Just don't do this right before asking for a loan, because you don't want to look like you're pleading for sympathy or special favors.

- » **Let your banker know when something important occurs — for example, when you've landed new clients, reached a profit goal, or faced a new competitor.**
- » **Don't ask for favors at the beginning of your relationship.** First create goodwill by giving the bank your business.
- » **If something bad happens in your business — for example, if you lose several clients — try to determine the cause and develop a plan of action *before* contacting your banker.**



TIP

The best way to find a banker who will help keep the money flowing is to ask other small business owners in your area which banks they use, and then research the banks to figure out which one fits your needs. If you want to bank online, does the bank offer this service? How long does getting a loan approved usually take? How much red tape will you have to go through to, say, replace a missing ATM card?

Separating the good from the bad

Have you ever been stuck with a bad haircut because you walked into a hair salon without checking it out first?



WARNING

If you hire a lawyer, an accountant, or any other professional without doing some research first, you could end up being sued or in trouble with the IRS, which is a lot worse than a bad-hair day.



TIP

Ask to meet with the professional for a consultation (many will do this free of charge) and make sure that person:

- » **Has experience working with small businesses like yours.**
- » **Asks more questions than Barbara Walters.** The person should interview *you* in addition to being interviewed *by* you. They may ask you where you want to be in five years, what your goals are, how you expect to reach those goals, what your major concerns are, and what you expect from a lawyer/accountant/banker/insurance agent. Be prepared to answer these questions so your interview is productive.
- » **Has time for you.** A lawyer or accountant who constantly interrupts your meeting to answer her phone and deal with crises probably won't have the time to give you the attention you need.
- » **Explains their fee structure so that you understand it.**
- » **Defines industry terms you need to know, such as LLC and 1099, in plain English.**

Going it alone: Should you or shouldn't you?

Maybe you took a tax-preparation class, or maybe you were a lawyer before you realized that you'd rather pump iron than push papers. Can you save money by handling the accounting or legal tasks yourself?

It depends. Every hour you're sweating over tax filings or contracts is an hour that you're not making money or building your business. Sure, you may save money by filing that form yourself, but you're simultaneously *losing* money because you could have been training a client in that hour. The question is: How much will you save by doing these tasks yourself, and how much will you lose by not being able to spend the time training clients?



REMEMBER

When you're training a client, you're building goodwill and giving that person something to tell all their friends about (and referrals are the lifeblood of the personal training business — see Chapter 8 for more information on referrals). While you're hassling over a form, you're building nothing but a headache. You can also be spending that time working on meeting your business goals by networking, marketing, and dreaming up new ways to bring on more clients.



TIP

If you're strapped for cash when you first start out, doing as much as you can yourself may make sense. But as soon as you're able, hire professionals to do their thing so that you have time to do *your* thing — that is, train clients and build your business.

Someone to look up to: Mentors

A mentor isn't just someone who will tell you, "Jane, I prefer this logo to that one" or, "Bob, I think you need to drop that client to save your sanity." A *mentor* is someone you trust, who has an interest in you and your business, and someone who will tell you what you need to hear (not always what you want to hear). It's also someone who's a little further along than you are in your career who can relate to the challenges and opportunities you're facing. A mentor can be:

- » A friend
- » A professional, such as a former teacher or professor
- » Your spouse, son or daughter, parent, or sibling
- » The owner of a local business
- » Another personal trainer



REMEMBER

You can create a formal mentor-mentee relationship, but you don't necessarily have to; in other words, no one needs to sign on the dotted line. But as you develop your network, you'll find people whose opinions you trust and whose success you'd like to emulate. You'll naturally gravitate toward these people when you have a question or a problem.



TIP

I recommend finding mentorship early and having at least one mentor at every stage of your career.

Building your network

Networking is a low-cost and effective way to build your reputation, grow your professional contact list, and earn personal training referrals. Like marketing, networking involves getting the attention of people you want to do business with, but there's more to it than that. Networking is less about pitching your services to prospects and more about establishing and nurturing relationships. It gets your name out there, but more importantly, you will have professionals you can call on when you need to. For example, let's say you have a prospective client with an injury. Instead of turning the client away, or "referring out" to a physical therapist, you call a physical therapist in your network and help the client to schedule an appointment.



REMEMBER

Having a strong professional network to call on is invaluable, but keep in mind that you are one half of your professional relationships. You too need to be available when someone in your network needs personal training advice. Being a good partner in your professional relationships goes both ways!



TRUE
STORY

I am super lucky to have an awesome network. I have the best physical therapist, dietitian, orthopedic surgeon, massage therapist, and many more in my circle and consider myself even luckier to call most of them friends. I didn't set out to market my services to any of these people; instead, I have always taken a genuine interest in what they do so I could get to know them and learn about what they do. This has given me so many opportunities to expand my knowledge and I have received a lot of personal training referrals from my network over the years. More important though, I have helped countless personal training clients by referring them to the best professionals in my area.

Networking with your peers

Your peers are the people who are doing what you're doing: personal training. "Peers? You mean competitors," you gripe. "Why should I network with them?"

Being active in the fitness community and networking with other trainers will keep you up to date on industry happenings, help you generate new ideas for

running your business, and give you understanding ears to bend when your spouse is sick of hearing about gym drama. In addition, personal trainers often refer potential clients to other trainers when they have too many clients to handle or when a client is looking for specialized services they don't normally provide.



REMEMBER

You can't be all things to all people and there are plenty of clients to go around!



TRUE
STORY

Networking with your peers can give you more than a convenient sounding board — it can also boost your business. When I decided to go back to graduate school full-time, I sold my personal training business to a peer. It was a win-win for both of us and I was able to pursue the next chapter in my career knowing that my clients were in good hands.



TIP

To get in on the networking loop, you can:

- » **Attend industry conventions.**
- » **Talk to other trainers in your area.** You can find many of them online through their websites or on social media.
- » **Participate in Facebook or other online social networking groups for personal trainers.**



TIP

Your network doesn't only have to consist of healthcare and fitness professionals. Look to other industries for services that you or your clients might need and that could benefit from you. This could include attorneys, accountants, real estate agents, and many more.

You may also want to consider forming an advisory board for your business. An *advisory board* is simply a group of people you go to for advice on running your business, and it can be as formal or as informal as you like. With their expertise, these people can help you get funding, make smart business decisions, and avoid costly mistakes.

An advisory board can consist of:

- » Your lawyer
- » Your accountant
- » Your mentors
- » Professionals in related fields (such as physical therapists or orthopedic surgeons)
- » Public relations (PR) people
- » Other small-business owners



TIP

To form your advisory board, simply ask these people if they'd like to serve on your board. Be clear as to what this means — do you expect to contact them only when you have a problem or a question, or do you expect more hands-on advising?

You're already paying your accountant and lawyer; if you feel bad asking other people to advise you for free, you can offer them personal training sessions in exchange for their counsel. In addition, if they agree to meet you in person, you can treat them to a cup of coffee or a nice lunch.

Structuring Your Business

Y'know those letters businesses have after their names, like *Inc.* or *LLC*? They aren't there just because they sound cool. They indicate the legal structure of the business. The legal structure has an impact on how much you pay in taxes, the amount of paperwork you have to do, the personal liability you face, and your ability to raise money for your business.

Liability, taxation, and record-keeping are all things to keep in mind when choosing your type of business entity. The following sections offer a brief look at the differences between the most common forms of business entities.



REMEMBER

A lawyer can help you to decide which of these entities is best for your business:

Sole proprietorship

A *sole proprietorship* is the most common form of business organization among small business owners. In this type of business, you're the proprietor and you have complete managerial control of the business. The drawback to sole proprietorship, however, is that you're personally liable for all financial obligations of the business. If someone sues your business, they can come after you personally to ante up the dough from your own personal bank account.

Partnership

A *partnership* is a business relationship between two or more people who share the profits and losses of the business. The partners report any losses or profits on their individual income-tax returns. The benefit of this business structure is that it's easy to set up and operate. Unfortunately, as in a sole proprietorship, the partners remain personally liable for all financial obligations of the business.

Corporation

A *corporation* is taxed (just like an individual is) and can be held legally liable for its actions. The corporation can make a profit or take on a loss. The key difference between a corporation and a sole proprietorship is that, if someone sues your business, your personal assets remain safe at home underneath the mattress. In other words, your personal finances are separate from your business finances. The drawback is that running a corporation requires extensive record-keeping.

Limited liability corporation



TIP

Want to have it both ways? The *limited liability corporation* (LLC) is the one to pick. It's taxed like a partnership but has limited liability like corporations (meaning your personal finances are separate from your business finances).

Getting Registered and IDed (Even if You're Over 21)

When you start a business, you need to get the proper licenses, permits, and ID numbers so that all those government officials can look busy when the boss walks by. The permits, licenses, and IDs required of you depend on where you live, but I offer some general guidelines in the following sections.



TIP

This is only a sampling of the licenses, permits, and ID numbers you may need to do business in your city or state. A lawyer will be able to help you navigate the maze of requirements in your particular location.

Employer Identification Number

The Employer Identification Number (EIN), also known as a federal tax identification number, is used to identify a business entity. You'll use the EIN in place of your Social Security number on tax forms. You can find instructions to apply for an EIN on the IRS website (www.irs.gov).

Business license

No matter where you decide to set up shop, you'll likely need a business license to operate legally. If your business is located within an incorporated city's limits, you

should get a license from the city; if you're outside the city limits, you'll probably get your license from the county.



TIP

For more information, contact the county or city office in your area. You can find links to individual states' business-license forms on the Small Business Administration (SBA) website.

Certificate of occupancy

If you plan to occupy a building with your new business, you may have to apply for a Certificate of Occupancy from a city or county zoning department. For more information, contact the county or city office in your area.

Fictitious business name

Businesses that use a name other than the owner's must register the fictitious name with the state. This rule doesn't apply to corporations doing business under their corporate name or to those practicing any profession under a partnership name. For more information, contact your state or local government.

A Rose Is More than a Rose: Naming Your Business

Can you imagine people referring their friends to “that personal trainer, um, what's his name, the guy down the street”? Probably not. That's why you need a catchy, memorable name for your business.

Your business name should convey your expertise, value, and uniqueness. You want something that will tell potential clients that you're a personal trainer, and a darn good one (so “Doughnuts and Dumbbells Personal Training” is out). Don't stress — in the following sections, I show you how it's done.

Playing the name game

The first step to finding a business name that will have clients beating down your doors is to decide what you want your name to communicate. In Chapter 2, you started thinking about what your client population will be, how you'll position yourself (an affordable alternative? trainer to the stars?), and whether you'll concentrate on individuals or group classes. Your name should convey this information in as few words as possible while avoiding potential misunderstanding by

prospective clients. (For example, if you chose the name “We Pump You Up,” people may not know if you’re a personal training company, a balloon manufacturer, or a tire retailer.)



TIP

Many experts say that your business name should be made up of real words or combinations of words rather than made-up monikers. Sure, Xerox and Nike work for those companies, but those companies also have million-dollar marketing budgets to help their names stick in consumers’ minds. If your marketing budget consists of spare change and pocket lint, you’re better off going for actual words that people will recognize.



WARNING

Think carefully before going with constrained names that limit you to certain locations or services. For example, say you name your business “San Antonio Personal Training.” What if you move to Walla Walla, Washington? And if you choose the name “Fun and Games Fitness for Kids” you won’t be able to expand into another client population.



WARNING

Think carefully before using your own name for your business name. It’s probably fine if you know for certain that you don’t want to grow your business beyond just you, but if you do hire additional trainers down the road, everyone who walks in the door will want to train with the person whose name is on the sign (yes, that’s you). And if you ever want to sell the business, you’re going to have to explain why the brand has value even without you staying involved.



TIP

Ask yourself the following questions to decide on a moniker for your business:

- » What is my target market? (See Chapter 8 for more information.)
- » What problems do I solve for my target market? Do I help them lose weight, get healthy, increase their confidence?
- » What words or phrases appeal to my target market? Perhaps words like *healthy*, *fit*, or *strong*?
- » What are the best benefits my business brings to customers?
- » What kind of name would differentiate me, in a positive way, from my competitors?

When you have a few contenders, run them by friends, family, and potential clients to get their reactions. Be sure to say the names aloud. Can you imagine answering the phone with this business name? If it doesn’t roll off the tongue, 86 it.



TIP

If you’re having trouble deciding on a name, try using a free business name generator. You can find several by searching online for “business name generator.”

Marking your territory: The trademark

Any word or image (or combination of words and images) used to distinguish your business or services from other businesses or services can be a trademark. You don't have to officially trademark the name, but doing so ensures that someone else can't start using it next week.

Making sure your name isn't already taken

Earlier in this chapter, I recommend hiring a lawyer to handle your legal matters. But in the case of searching out names, you can easily do this yourself.



TIP

Search the trademark filings on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) website (www.uspto.gov) to ensure your name isn't already trademarked. Their Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS) contains more than three million pending, registered, and dead federal trademarks. They also have other helpful resources, such as instructions on how to submit your trademarks and information about how much it will cost to send in an application.

In addition, search online to make sure nobody else has already staked a claim on your preferred name.

Filing a trademark application

You can file your application online with the USPTO at www.uspto.gov/trademarks/apply.



REMEMBER

You don't have to have a lawyer submit your application, but if you do it yourself, you're responsible for complying with all requirements of the trademark statute and rules. If you do use a lawyer, the USPTO will correspond only with the lawyer, not with you directly.

As they say, nothing in life is free, and that includes trademark applications. As of this writing, submitting an application costs \$350.



TRUE
STORY

Several years after starting my personal training business, I decided to re-name it. We were preparing to move into a larger facility and the timing was right to separate my personal name from my business name. About three years later, a very large and recognizable company with similarities to my business announced that they were re-branding. This included a new name — the same name as my small business with a slightly different spelling. After expressing my concerns to one of the company's vice presidents, I was told that they didn't see their new name as a conflict of interest and would not be changing it. Fortunately, because I had followed the advice from my attorney to file a trademark application when I changed my business name, I was able to legally support my claim of trademark

infringement. I never could have anticipated something like this happening, and had I not trademarked my name, that big company with much deeper pockets than mine could have simply waited until I ran out of money before running me out of business.

Image Is Everything: Creating Your Look

When you see a pair of shoes with a swoosh on the side, you know they're Nikes without reading the label. That's the power of a logo — a graphical depiction of your company. Your logo will help people recognize and remember your business. A logo gives you an image of substance and stability. It also shows you're serious about what you do.

But choosing a logo design is only one part of creating your image. Your logo design is part of your brand and should express the personality of your business to your audience. Your potential clients should have an idea of what you do just by looking at your logo, and ideally your logo will become recognizable on its own over time. Did you know colors also influence how people perceive your business? In this section I show you how to decide on a logo design and how to choose the right colors for your branding materials.

Branding that works

Branding is simply the process of creating your company's image. This includes things like your logo, the colors you use in your marketing materials, and your company mission statement. Putting some thought into your branding matters because you want people to have a positive perception of you and your company.

There's not a right or wrong way to start the process, and if you're not sure where to begin, I recommend working on your logo design first. Asking yourself questions about your business and the image you want to project will help you to envision what your overall look will be, including what you want your logo to look like.

Here are some criteria of a good logo for your brand or company:

- » **Readability:** A busy design may make it hard for people to understand your logo or read the name of your business.
- » **Memorability:** You want your logo to create interest, not yawns. When potential clients see your logo, they should think of your business.

- » **Uniqueness:** If your logo looks like the logo of the personal trainer down the street, it won't distinguish your services from your competitor's.
- » **Appropriateness to your business:** Weights, healthy bodies, training shoes? Good. Flowers, puppies, cookies? Bad.
- » **Professionalism and stability:** You want to look like a professional business, and not some fly-by-night with a clip-art logo, so cutesy cartoons are out.
- » **The ability to convey the message in any size and any medium:** You should test your logo to make sure it looks good in email, on your website, and on your Facebook business page.
- » **A design that's not too trendy:** A trendy logo will quickly go out of date and make you and your business look out of date as well.



REMEMBER

You don't have to answer *all* the questions about your business in your logo design.



TIP

When you're designing your logo, keep in mind the message you want your business to convey and who your customers are.



TIP

Not too long ago, unless you had graphic-design experience, logo design had to be done professionally if you wanted it to look, well, professional. These days you can use various programs and apps to create a stellar look on your own without spending big bucks. I recommend checking out Canva if you want to give DIY logo design a try. If you would rather stay in your own lane and let someone with graphic-design experience turn your vision into the perfect logo, check out Upwork or Fiverr. Or you can try contacting art and design schools for students who would be willing to design your logo in exchange for a few bucks. Who knows? Maybe someday you'll become a globally recognized brand. After all, the iconic Nike swoosh logo was created by a graphic-design student for \$35.

Giving your logo some color

In addition to the graphic design of the logo — the image you choose — you'll need to decide on colors. Color conveys emotions, so the colors you choose for your logo, your office or gym (if you have one), and your branded apparel (especially if you employ other trainers and they wear your branded apparel) are important aspects of your image.



TRUE
STORY

Choosing a logo for my business didn't come easily to me until I really thought about how I wanted the image to represent my vision. The logo I ended up using included a prominent orange circle — because in psychology, round shapes represent community (like “circle of friends”) and orange is the color of vitality, good health, and energy.

Okay, so you decide on a three-color logo incorporating a duck-billed platypus lifting weights. You go all out and spend several thousand dollars getting some big-shot designer to draw it up for you. And the first time you print your logo on a black-and-white printer, that beautiful, expensive logo ends up looking like a big blob.

That's why you need to make extra sure that the logo you go with works in black and white, as well as in all different sizes. The solution: Keep it simple. The most common mistake made by anyone designing a logo is creating a symbol that is much too complicated and difficult to read — especially in smaller sizes.



TIP

You can trademark your logo if you like; this will ensure that other businesses can't "borrow" your awesome design. You trademark your logo in the same way that you trademark your business name (see "Filing a trademark application" earlier in this chapter).

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Using legal forms
- » Determining how to conduct your business
- » Creating policies for working with your clients
- » Maintaining records for your business
- » Paying taxes

Chapter 7

Developing Sound Business Practices

I'm guessing you probably want to be a personal trainer because you love physical action and you'd rather do push-ups than push papers. But alas, every personal trainer must push some paper, from legal forms to client session notes and activity logs.

In this chapter, I show you how to keep your business organized and running smoothly. Here, you discover everything you need to know about setting policies, maintaining documentation, tracking your cash, and more.

Crossing Your T's and Dotting Your I's: Legal Forms for Your Business

Personal training is an injury-prone profession, and we're a litigious society. Add these together and what do you get? Clients who sue if they get a hangnail when they're doing battle rope waves. Okay, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration. But

when people get hurt, they tend to sue, so you need to do everything you can to make sure you don't wind up on *Judge Judy*.

Three kinds of forms will help you keep yourself out of hot (and by hot, I mean legal) water — incident-report forms, liability waiver forms, and disclaimer and informed-consent forms.

Disclaimer and informed-consent form

The disclaimer and informed-consent form states that the client understands that there is a risk involved with personal training, and that they have disclosed all relevant medical, physiological, and lifestyle information that you need to create their exercise program. It also gives you permission to work with the client based on the information the client has given.



TIP

You need to collect detailed health history information for every client from the very beginning and update your records if anything changes. I show you how to do this in Chapter 10.



REMEMBER

If you have the client write out any past injuries and sign the disclaimer and informed-consent form, you're somewhat protected if the client tries to sue you for causing an injury they already had. Not only that, but having this information allows you to design a program around the client's previous injuries and illnesses. Here's a link to the consent form I use and recommend from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM): www.acsm.org/docs/default-source/certification-documents/b_exprescripreferral_pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=45ad4f30_0.

Incident-report form

The incident-report form is the one you'll need to fill out if a client gets injured on your watch.

ATTORNEY (N): YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND

In Chapter 6, you learn why you need a good attorney on your professional team. An attorney can help you create forms that reduce your liability and can represent you if you get sued. If you haven't found an attorney yet, follow the advice in Chapter 6 on how to find the one who's right for your business.



TIP

The incident-report form should include the following information:

- » **Identification information:** Record the date and time, the name of the person in charge, the activity that was going on, the names and contact information for all witnesses, and the name of your insurance company. (See Chapter 6 for more information on getting liability insurance — a must.)
- » **Location of incident:** Take note of the area where the accident or injury took place plus the location of any witnesses and other participants.
- » **Action of the injured party:** Describe in detail what was going on and specifically what action caused the injury.
- » **Sequence of events:** Describe when, in the course of the workout, the injury happened (for example, during the warm-up).
- » **Preventive measures that could have been taken by the injured party:** Detail what the client could have done to prevent the injury.
- » **Procedures followed in giving aid:** Write down what first-aid measures were taken and by whom, including who called for help and when the help arrived.
- » **Disposition or follow-up:** Follow up with the doctor or hospital and record how long the medical professional said the client must refrain from exercise after the injury. Be sure you ask your client if it's okay to follow up; you'll need their written permission.
- » **Person completing the accident report:** Record the name of the person completing the report, along with the person's position and whether that person witnessed the incident.



REMEMBER

You should keep completed incident forms for seven years, although this number varies by state. Contact your lawyer for advice.

Liability waiver form

Before you go skydiving or take a dance class (or do just about anything these days), you have to sign a form that says you promise not to sue if you plummet to your death while skydiving or lose an arm while tap-dancing. That's a *liability waiver form*, and you need one for your personal training business. It's not foolproof, but a liability waiver form can go a long way toward keeping you out of court.



TIP

Consult your attorney for help developing a liability waiver that you can have clients sign. You can draft the form yourself, but you should still have your attorney review it before you use it to make sure all your i's are dotted and t's are crossed. You can check out a sample liability waiver form at https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/championships/resources/common/NCAACamp_VolunteerWaiverofLiabilityForm.pdf.

Going with the Flow: Determining in What Order to Conduct Your Business

When a prospective client comes to you and eventually (you hope) becomes a paying client, things happen in a certain order. A stranger doesn't just walk in off the street and start doing goblet squats. And a client you've seen for five years doesn't walk in one day and expect you to do an initial assessment. This order in which things happen is referred to as *client flow* — it's literally just the way your clients *flow*, or progress, through your business operations. Step 1, for example, may be when a prospective client expresses interest and you fill out a client lead sheet. Step 2 may be an initial consultation, and so on through the life cycle of a client.

In order for everything to run smoothly and efficiently, you need to plan what to do and when to do it. For example, what if someone expresses interest but then doesn't end up becoming a paying client? Will you call in two weeks or send a card in a month — or both? When will you do a fitness reevaluation? When will you make stay-in-touch calls to former clients? Putting *standard operating procedures* and *systems* in place for tracking all these details will help you stay on top of things. I show you how to create them here.



REMEMBER

Much of this information comes from your business plan (see Chapter 5), which tells you who your client population is, how you plan to target them, and what you'll do when you have them.

SOPs and Systems: Maintaining a well-oiled machine

Have you ever noticed how your favorite Starbucks drink or Subway sandwich or (insert chain restaurant name and item here) is always exactly the same every time no matter where you order it from? That's because your go-to place has *standard operating procedures* or SOPs that every employee at every location follows. SOPs are clear step-by-step instructions that ensure your drink is made exactly the same way by every single person every single time.



TIP

SOPs are important for all businesses and you can learn a lot from other industries about how to create yours. Here's a great article to get you started: <https://medium.com/the-mission/building-a-business-machine-the-ultimate-guide-to-standard-operating-procedures-1cc4cc473aca>.

Consider creating a client flow SOP to keep track of your client flow. These days I use Google Docs to keep track of everything from administrative actions and client care, and when I had my training facility, I also included trainers' responsibilities for each client.

Your client flow SOP may have data like what you see in Table 7-1. **Remember:** This table is just to give you an idea of what kind of information your client flow SOP may contain — it doesn't contain all the steps or possible scenarios.

TABLE 7-1 **What You May Include on Your Client Flow SOP**

Situation	Administrative	Client Care	Trainer
Prospect buys a package and pays up front.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Take the client's picture.2. Schedule a fitness assessment.3. Collect the payment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Assign the client a client ID.2. Set up a service contract.3. Have the client sign the waiver, cancellation policy, and service contract.4. Give the client a tour of your facility.5. Give the client a copy of the waiver, contract, and What to Expect sheet.	N/A
The client shows up for the initial fitness assessment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Greets the client and alerts the trainer assigned to them that the client is here.2. After the assessment, schedules the next session.3. Rings up sales.	N/A	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Has the fitness assessment equipment, blood-pressure cuff, heart-rate monitor, and towel ready.2. Greets the client.3. Performs the assessment.4. Enters a follow-up call two days out in planner.

(continued)

TABLE 7-1 (continued)

Situation	Administrative	Client Care	Trainer
Two days after the first session.	N/A	N/A	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Calls to follow up with the client. Asks the client how they're feeling and asks if the client has any questions.2. Confirms the next appointment.3. Makes notes in client file.

**TIP**

Notice how detailed the chart is? This extra detail is there to ensure that every client gets the same exact treatment and that you (or your employees) don't skip any steps.

**REMEMBER**

Did you know that all airline pilots complete the same safety checklist in the cockpit every single time before they fly? And that your entire flight crew follows several SOPs every time you fly? You know, "flight attendants prepare for landing." And how many times have you learned how to fasten your seatbelt on an airplane? That's because most plane crashes are caused by human error. Just like you wouldn't want a pilot to skip any steps on the safety checklist, be sure that you don't skip steps in your order of operations. If you skip the fitness assessment because the client is eager to begin, and then the client gets injured, you're in big trouble. Or if you send a thank-you note or special offer to one client and not another — and that second client finds out — you'll create hard feelings.

Every step you take, every move you make . . .: Keeping track of everything you and your client do

Keeping notes on everything you do with a client from day 1 can keep you out of court. For example, if a client claims you charged them for a session they didn't complete, you can whip out your client file that shows when the session happened and exactly what you did. Or if a client is unhappy with your services and cancels the credit card charge, you'll need to send the credit card company a record of everything you've done with the client. If you have no documentation, the credit card company will likely take the money from you.



TIP

Make a record of every time you have contact with a client and keep it in their file. For example, you may write something like, “March 2, 2022: Talked with Eric about his interest in our services,” “March 3, 2022: Made appointment for initial consultation,” and “March 4, 2022: Sent follow-up email. Eric will come in next Wednesday to sign up for 10 personal training sessions.” If there’s an issue that might come up again (like the credit card cancellation example), you can send yourself an email documenting your conversation so it’s date stamped.



REMEMBER

You don’t have to write the Great American Novel (besides, this isn’t fiction!). You just have to write enough so that you know what you and your client have done and when.

Putting Policies in Place

Don’t you hate it when you ask for a little flexibility somewhere — for example, to get onion rings rather than fries with the Super Gulp Meal at your local fast-food joint — and you’re told, “We can’t do that — it’s against the policy”? Well, the time is ripe for revenge — now you get to set policies of your own.

Of course, the purpose of policies isn’t to wield power over clients or to make them jump through hoops. It’s to make sure that everyone is treated the same way and that you have a set way of dealing with every process in your business, from payments to refunds.



REMEMBER

Your policies are in place for a reason, but you’re also in the business of serving your customers. You don’t want to become a dictator, shouting, “It’s against our policies!” every chance you get. Instead, you want to try your best to adopt policies that make sense, and then explain them to your clients so that they understand that you aren’t just setting rules for the sake of setting rules.

Setting a payment policy

Asking for money makes many people feel uncomfortable. People who go into personal training generally want to help people. When they ask for money, they feel greedy, miserly, like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Eve. But money is, if not the main point of being in business, a big part of it. Without money, you wouldn’t be able to run your business and you wouldn’t be able to help your clients.



TIP

You have two basic options when it comes to accepting payment from your client:

- » You can charge up front.
- » You can charge for each session on an individual basis.

Although getting some or all your money from a client up front is a good idea, some states prevent you from collecting over a certain dollar amount without being *bonded*. (Being bonded means you pay an insurance company or bonding agent an annual fee to cover costs if you don't finish the job — bonding is a kind of insurance.)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In the 1980s, some gyms collected for lifetime memberships and then folded, leaving their lifetime members in the lurch. The government created this law to protect consumers from such snafus. Personal training falls under the recreation/gym category, which means that this law applies to you. Contact your lawyer to find out how the law affects your business (read more about finding and hiring a lawyer in Chapter 6).

Charging for a month's worth of sessions at a time has many benefits. Clients don't feel trapped as they may with a long-term package, and you get a steady monthly income. Also, because you're collecting less money at a time, you may not need to be bonded.

Another option is to collect for one session at a time. Of course, if you do this, you have no guarantee that the client will sign up for another session.



WARNING

If you're allowed to charge for sessions up front and choose to do so, budgeting your money is especially important. Some months you'll get \$50,000 because many clients are signing up for packages and paying up front, and other months you'll take in nothing because the clients are still working on the sessions they already paid for. In the business world, this is called *feast or famine*. Make sure you save enough from your feast to get through the famine!



TIP

Try collecting a small amount of money up front and then collecting for services either every six sessions or monthly. That way you get some money right away but still keep the cash flowing. Also, this method eliminates the hassle of refunding a whole truckload of money if the client buys and pays for a huge package up front and then decides to cancel after a few sessions.



TIP

See Chapter 5 for information on how to set your fees.

Show me the money: Collecting fees

Now that you know how you plan to charge your clients, you have to have a way to actually collect the money. You can use any one or more of the following methods.

Checks

Checks used to be a popular way to accept payments, and you can still accept them, but it's less common now for people to pay by check than it used to be. If you do decide to accept checks, you'll get the money fairly quickly, and you're not charged a fee as you are with credit cards and electronic funds transfers (more on these in the sections that follow). You also don't need to have a special setup to accept checks — just take them and deposit them in your business account.



TIP

Sometimes, whether on purpose or by accident, people bounce checks. When this happens, as unfair as it seems, your bank will charge you a small fee. Setting up a policy of charging clients to cover this fee if they bounce a check is perfectly within your rights. Just be sure that the client gets a copy of your check-bouncing policy in writing — do this the moment they sign on with you, *before* they bounce a check.

Peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms

I'm sure you've heard of these and probably use at least one of them already to send and receive money. Some of the more popular ones include Apple Pay, PayPal, Venmo, and Zelle. P2P payments have replaced checks and cash for a lot of folks, including many service providers (personal trainers, massage therapists, hairdressers, and so on).



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that P2P business income is no different from any other transaction from the IRS's point of view. You'll need to report any payments you receive through PayPal, Venmo, and so on as taxable income.

Credit cards

Most of your clients will probably expect you to accept credit or debit card payments. Although using credit cards is easy for your clients, it can be complicated for you.

Before you can accept credit or debit card payments, you need to get a merchant account. A merchant account is a type of business bank account that allows your business to process credit and debit card payments. Providing credit-processing services to merchants is risky for financial institutions. Credit card users can return items or dispute charges, which means the bank loses money. And if the merchant goes out of business, the financial institution is responsible for the

charged amounts. That's why, before approving your application, the financial institution asks such questions as:

- » Will you electronically authorize all credit cards?
- » How long have you been in business?
- » What prior experience do you have in managing a business?
- » What type of refund or return policy does your business have?
- » What is your anticipated *credit card volume* (that is, how many credit card payments do you expect to accept each month)?

If you're approved, you'll need to buy, rent, or lease credit card processing equipment from the financial institution if it's not included in your merchant agreement.

Accepting credit cards and debit cards isn't free. The financial institution will charge you a transaction fee for every payment you receive. Merchant fees vary by provider but typically the merchant will keep a percentage of each transaction (typically 2 to 3 percent) and some will also charge an additional fixed rate (for example, 2.5 percent + 10 cents) per credit and debit card transaction. You may also be charged for your monthly statement and for chargeback fees.



TIP

An alternative for accepting credit and debit card payments without a merchant account is to use a credit card processor for small businesses. Some popular options include Square, PayPal, and Intuit QuickBooks. You'll still pay transaction fees, and although these providers' fees are higher than most merchant account fees, I still like this option for small business owners because you only pay for the processing you use. You don't have to pay additional annual or monthly fees and there are no long-term contracts (meaning you can pay as you go and stop when you want).

EFT

Electronic funds transfer (EFT) lets you debit fees directly from your clients' bank accounts. Your client will need to fill out a form that includes their bank name and address, routing number, bank account number, and signature to approve funds transfers. The bank will likely charge you a small processing fee for each transfer (much like with a credit card), as well as setup and monthly fees. Contact your bank for more information on how to set up EFT capabilities for your business.



TIP

Most gyms require members to pay for their membership dues either through EFT or automatic charges to a credit card that is kept on file. EFT is less common for personal training services but it's an option.

Cash

You can always accept cash, but beware the allure — walking down the street with \$500 in your pocket and not spending it can be tough! Also, having a lot of cash hanging around your place of work is an invitation to thieves. I recommend depositing all cash payments in your business bank account as soon as possible and keep all cash in a lockbox or safe if you can't get to the bank right away.

Billing your clients

Now that you know how you'll accept payment from your clients, you have to decide how you'll bill them.

Accounts on file

Y'know how you can go to a bar, order a drink, and say, "Can I start a tab?" The server holds your credit card and then charges the total amount you owe when you're ready to leave rather than charging you each time you order something. You can start a tab for your clients by keeping an *account on file*.

Some clients will allow you to keep their credit card number on file and charge them for sessions they use. Each credit card company will tell you what they need to have to validate the receipt. Generally, you write "signature on file" on the receipt and email the client a copy of the receipt.



REMEMBER

You're responsible for protecting the client's credit card number from prying eyes.

Invoices

You may want to mail or email your clients invoices that they can pay within a certain period of time, such as two weeks or a month. Make sure your invoices include the following information:

- » **The name of your business**
- » **The client's name**
- » **The date**
- » **An invoice number:** This will help you keep track of your invoices.
- » **The services rendered:** What kind of sessions? How many? On what dates?
- » **The amount due:** You may want to break this down for the client — for example, "Ten sessions @ \$80/session = \$800."
- » **The due date:** Expecting payment in two to four weeks is fair.

Determining a cancellation policy

Sometimes clients get sick, or they have work emergencies, or they're too tired to return to a vertical orientation after lying down on the couch. In other words, sometimes clients cancel sessions. You need a plan for what will happen when a client misses a session.

When a client cancels on short notice, that session time is gone, and you get paid nothing for it. If the client gives you enough notice, however, you may be able to schedule a last-minute session with another client and recoup your losses. That's why deciding how much heads-up time you need when a client wants to cancel is important. Will you let a client cancel an hour before the session without charging them? Or will you require 6 hours' notice, or 24 hours' notice?



TRUE
STORY

I require 24 hours' notice to avoid being charged for cancellations and my "missed session fee" is \$50 for cancellations with less than 24 hours' notice. Stuff happens, clients get stuck at work, kids get sick. I get it. Charging a cancellation fee ensures that I am still being paid and demonstrates to my clients that my cancellation policy is firm. It's up to you to decide how you will handle cancellations. Be up front about it and make sure you consistently enforce it.



REMEMBER

Whatever you decide, put your cancellation policy in writing and have all your clients sign it.

Maintaining Records

If the very thought of paperwork makes your hair stand on end, you're not alone — keeping records and maintaining files is probably not on any personal trainer's top-ten list. But don't worry — in the following sections, you see how to make record-keeping as easy and painless as possible.

Understanding why records rock

You may become a fan of record-keeping when you discover that keeping good records can save you hundreds of dollars. For example, suppose you forgot to record a \$20 business expense, which would have taken you a mere five minutes to record had you remembered it. This oversight raises your business's net income by \$20, for which you will now be taxed. As a result, your federal, state, and Social Security taxes go up — even if I'm very conservative in my estimate, the taxes may go up by \$5. If you had recorded the deduction, you would have saved \$5 in taxes in five minutes — which comes out to a whopping \$60 per hour!



TIP

If that's not enough to convince you, I have more. Accurate, well-maintained records:

- » Provide a record of your business's financial performance so you always have a handle on the health of your business.
- » Give you income-tax data, which will make your life easier come April 15.
- » Give you ammo for when you're applying for a loan or a merchant account.

Keeping the books

Part of maintaining records is keeping the books, which will help you:

- » Keep track of your income and expenses
- » Have the data you need on hand to file tax returns

Whenever you're feeling overwhelmed by the daunting details of keeping your books, keep those two simple goals in mind.

You can keep your financial records in any way you want, as long as they work for you — but I explain the common methods that will make your life easier.

"I'm no number cruncher!" you cry. "I'm a personal trainer!" Well, have no fear — keeping books consists of just three easy steps:

- 1. Keep receipts and records of every payment and expense.**
- 2. Summarize these records on a regular basis.**
- 3. Use these summaries to create financial reports, which will help you determine the financial health of your business.**

Keeping receipts

Unfortunately, Uncle Sam won't just go by your word when you claim that you spent \$3,000 on a piece of equipment — or even \$5 buying a smoothie for a potential client. Whenever you make or spend money, you need to have the transaction backed up with receipts or other records that show the amount, the date, and other relevant information.

Legally, you can keep all your receipts under a rock in your yard if you want, but choosing a system that fits your needs makes more sense. If you handle only a few clients, you can get by with a low-key system; if you have lots of sales and expenses, you'll need something stronger.



TIP

Make sure you have a place to keep all your records and to handle bookkeeping duties — an inexpensive filing cabinet or file box works well. You can scan receipts directly into your bookkeeping software too. You also need a desk or table, a comfortable chair, and good lighting for when you need to do some number crunching.



REMEMBER

How long do you have to hold onto these pieces of paper? According to the IRS, you need to keep your records as long as they may be needed for the administration of any provision of the Internal Revenue Code. In plain English, most financial advisors recommend keeping all tax-related materials for seven years. After seven years have passed since your first year filing taxes as a business, you can throw a bonfire in the yard and burn your tax records for your first year of business if you want — unless you file a fraudulent return or don't file a return at all, in which case the IRS can come after you at any time.

Summarizing your records

You'll need to keep a summary of your income, expenditures, and anything else you need to track, all entered according to category and date. This wonderful document is what accountants call a *ledger*. This summary will help you determine, at a glance, how your business is doing — how much money you're making versus how much you're paying out.

Using a piece of ledger paper (you can get ledger pads at an office-supply store), transfer the amounts from your receipts and records into the ledger. You can keep one journal for receipts and one for *disbursements* (expenditures). Recording receipts and disbursements in the journals is called *posting*. You can do this as often as you like, but make sure it's often enough that you won't feel overwhelmed with a mountain of receipts to enter. If you have just a few transactions every month, you can post weekly or monthly.



TIP

If you're a total bookkeeping newbie, check out *Bookkeeping All-In-One For Dummies* by Lita Epstein and John A Tracy (published by Wiley) for more information. I also recommend using a software program like QuickBooks for managing your financials records and keeping them up to date. To learn more about this popular program, check out *QuickBooks 2022 All-In-One* by Stephen L. Nelson (published by Wiley).

Creating financial reports

Financial reports bring together everything you've recorded in your ledger. Sure, you can see how much cash came in from your ledger, but you can't get the big picture about how your business is doing without measuring your income against total expenses. This is where the financial report comes in. The report will also tell you whether money from clients is coming in quickly enough to allow you to cover your bills.

THERE'S NO ACCOUNTING FOR PERSONAL TRAINERS: HANDLING YOUR MONEY LIKE A PRO

People who become personal trainers and people who become accountants are typically two very different kinds of people. You may not be excited by numbers — unless they're the number of reps and sets your client has completed — but you can still manage your money wisely. Here are some suggestions:

- **Open a separate checking account for your business.** Don't make the mistake of using your personal checking account for business purposes.
- **Pay your bills by check or electronic check through your bank, and note on the check what you purchased.** This tactic will help you keep track of expenditures.
- **Deposit checks and cash often.** Keeping checks and cash hanging around your place of business is an invitation for theft.
- **Record all your sales by using invoices, duplicate receipts, or some other method.** This approach will help you keep track of who has paid and who owes you money.
- **Keep records neat and tidy, the way your mom wanted you to keep your room.** You probably couldn't find your favorite baseball glove or Barbie doll when your room was a mess — and messy records will keep you from finding the data you need for tax purposes. (Your parents were the only people you had to contend with as a kid, but now you have Uncle Sam breathing down your neck. How's that for motivation?)



TIP

If you're using software such as QuickBooks, you can have it generate reports for you with the click of a button. Pie charts, bar graphs — you name it, the chart is there.

Developing an accounting method

Choice is good. The red or the blue? Small or large? Today or tomorrow?

Well, you'll be happy to know that you also get a choice in accounting systems: cash or accrual. These methods are different sets of rules for the timing of income and expenses. Usually, you report income and expenses in the year in which they're paid. So if you buy a piece of equipment in January 2023, you can't include it as a deduction on your 2022 taxes, even if you haven't filed your taxes yet. But

what if you bought the equipment in 2022 but paid for it in 2023? The year in which you'll take this deduction depends on which accounting method you choose.

Cash

Using the cash system, you record an item of income or expense when it's paid. So when you receive money from your clients, you report it in that tax year. (Even if you invoice them for it in 2022, if they pay you the money in 2023, you report it in 2023.) And if you buy that piece of equipment in 2021, but you don't pay your credit card bill until 2023, you can't deduct it on your taxes until 2023. Most businesses that sell services (such as yours) use this method of accounting.



REMEMBER

Even though it's called the *cash* method of accounting, it actually covers any kind of payment, such as credit card, check, or even barter.



WARNING

In some cases, you must report income as soon as it becomes available, even if you don't have it in hand. For example, if someone gives you a check in December 2022 and you don't deposit it until January 2023, you still must report the income for 2023. You're also not allowed to take a deduction for the current year for items paid for but not yet received.



REMEMBER

Check with your accountant to make sure you're always on the right side of the tax law. (See Chapter 6 for more information on finding and hiring an accountant.)

Accrual

Many C corporations, businesses with inventories of products, and manufacturers use the accrual method of accounting. It may not be the best for your service business, but I want you to know what it is just in case.

With the accrual method, you count the money as received as soon as it's earned, even if it isn't actually in hand. (That means if you've had a session with your client and invoiced them for it in 2022, but the invoice isn't paid until 2023, you still report it on your 2022 taxes.) You record expenses when the obligation arises, even if you haven't actually paid it yet. This means if you buy a piece of equipment on your credit card in 2022 and don't pay for it until 2023, you still need to report the expense on your 2022 taxes.



REMEMBER

If you decide to use the accrual method, you'll definitely need to consult your accountant to get set up and stay on the right track. (See Chapter 6 for the scoop on hiring an accountant.)

The Tax Man Cometh

Think paying taxes once a year is bad? Well, I hate to scare you, but as an independent contractor or business owner, you need to pay taxes four times per year. That's right, I said four. But don't worry — in this section, I tell you how to breeze through these quarterly tax payments without breaking a sweat.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

If you're curious about why you need to pay taxes more often when you're an independent contractor or a small-business owner, here's the lowdown: Essentially, when you're an employee of someone else, your employer withholds enough to cover your federal and state income taxes. (That's why your paychecks are always less than you think they'll be!) When you're working for yourself and your client writes you a check, no one is withholding anything for tax purposes. As an employee of a company, your tax dollars are going to the federal and state governments all throughout the year — every time you get a paycheck. So to even out the playing field a bit, when you work for yourself, you have to pay taxes four times a year. (Lucky for you, you don't have to pay taxes every time someone writes you a check!) Also, when you work for an employer, the employer is required to pay half your Social Security tax; the other half is deducted from your paycheck and turned over to the government. When you work for yourself, you have to pay the whole Social Security tax yourself. And you thought being your own boss was going to be all fun and games. . . .



TIP

Before I get started on the tax talk, I want to let you know about the IRS Small Business and Self-Employed Tax Center. Here you'll find all the resources you need for staying on the up-and-up with the IRS as a small business owner or self-employed taxpayer. Check it out at www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed.

Computing your estimated tax

To avoid an underpayment penalty, your estimated tax must be at least the lesser of the following:

- » **Ninety percent of the tax liability shown on the return for the current year:** This means that you predict how much you're going to earn (minus deductions), and you pay 90 percent of that estimated amount over four quarterly payments.
- » **One hundred percent of the tax liability shown on the return for the prior year:** This means that you pay the same amount of taxes that you paid last year over four quarterly payments.

For example, say you paid \$10,000 in taxes in 2022. For 2023, you can either predict what you're going to make and how much you'll owe in taxes and be sure to pay at least 90 percent of that amount in four quarterly installments, or you can pay \$2,500 per quarter, which will add up to \$10,000 — which is 100 percent of your liability from 2022.



TIP

In general, unless you expect your income to fluctuate dramatically one way or the other, your best bet is to pay 100 percent of what you paid last year. It's the surest way to avoid an underpayment penalty, even if your income skyrockets.

Knowing when to pay

Most businesses use the calendar-year accounting period, meaning that their business year ends on December 31 every year. You may also use a fiscal-year accounting period, which is a 12-month period ending on the last day of any month *other than* December.



TIP

Unless you have a reason to do so (for example, your accountant recommended it), using the calendar-year accounting period makes the most sense.

If you use the calendar-year accounting period, you need to pay your quarterly payments on:

- » April 15
- » June 15
- » September 15
- » January 15 of the following year

The idea is that your April 15 payment will cover what you earned January through March, your June 15 payment will cover what you earned in April and May, and so on. Don't ask why the payments aren't evenly spaced (in April, July, October, and January) — it's just a quirk of the IRS.



TIP

If you also earn a salary or wage in addition to your self-employment income — for example, if you have a “day job” in addition to your personal training clients — you can get around the whole quarterly tax deal by asking your employer to withhold more tax from your earnings. To do this, you need to file Form W-4 with your employer.

CONTACTING UNCLE SAM

Want to contact someone at the IRS to ask tax questions, get the status of your refund, or just shoot the breeze (okay, maybe not)? You can find everything you need from ordering forms to tax FAQ's online at www.irs.gov.

Filling out the forms

You'll use federal Form 1040-ES to determine the amount of your estimated taxes. You can get this form from the IRS website. After you file the form, it'll automatically be sent to you in following years. Your state will have a similar form — check with your state's income-tax authorities for more information.

Saving for taxes



TIP

To get a head start on paying your taxes and avoid last-minute panic, why not do what an employer does and deduct taxes from every check? Using last year's figures, determine what percentage of your income goes to taxes. Then deduct that percentage from every check and deposit it in a special savings account set aside just for taxes. If you expect to make way more this year, up the percentage accordingly.



WARNING

This is not a vacation fund or a Christmas-gift fund or an I-really-need-those-new-shoes fund! Resist the temptation to dip into your tax savings account.

Tracking Your Clients

No, I don't mean heading off after your clients with bloodhounds. I *do* mean that you need to document all sorts of information about your clients to help you create the best programs for them (and also to help you remember who's doing what).

Creating client forms



TIP

These forms are the ones you need to run your personal training business well:

- » Prospect lead sheet
- » Initial consultation form (you can also include your informed consent and liability waiver forms here)

- » Medical history form
- » Fitness assessment form
- » Workout log
- » Session log
- » Exercise prescription form



TIP

Search online for sample forms that you can either replicate or use to create your own forms that fit your way of doing business.

Putting together a client file

The client file will include all the forms listed in the preceding section. This way, you'll have the client's contact information and medical information, plus be able to track their fitness status and progress through the personal training sessions. Your files can be hard copies or electronic; it's up to you.



TIP

Keep the files consistent from client to client. For example, if the first page in one client's file is the prospect interest lead sheet and the second page is the initial consultation form, it should be that way for every client file. This setup makes it easier for you to find what you need pronto — and if you ever hire employees, they'll all be on the same page (pardon the pun).

Maintaining client files

Maintaining client files entails more than sticking them in carefully labeled, alphabetical folders. After all, what good are the files if they have clients' old addresses or don't note new injuries or other medical issues?



TIP

Go through your files quarterly and update the information. Make sure clients' contact information is up to date and that you have their most current medical information. The files should also specify the date of the last fitness assessment, when you need to do a follow-up, and so on.

- » Understanding who your clients are
- » Building a solid reputation
- » Getting new clients through referrals
- » Marketing on a shoestring

Chapter 8

Flexing Your Marketing Muscles

Before you can convince prospective clients to hire you, they need to find you. That's where marketing comes in. Marketing doesn't require a fortune or a specialized college degree, at least not right away — most independent professionals and small-business owners do their own marketing until they can afford to pay someone else to do it for them.

In this chapter, I show you how to identify your ideal customers — in other words, the people you should be marketing to. You can successfully market your business when your marketing budget is small and I can show you how.



TIP

This chapter is just one chapter on marketing — for a whole book dedicated to the topic, check out *Small Business Marketing Strategies All-in-One For Dummies* presented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (published by Wiley).

Ready, Aim . . . Focusing on Your Target

In marketing-speak, the people you want to target with your marketing efforts are called your *target market*.



TIP

Figuring out who your target market is will save you bundles of money. For example, if your target market is seniors who want to prevent heart disease, Snap Ads (paid advertising on Snapchat) would probably be a waste of money.

Developing a specialty

Pinpointing a specialty within the personal training industry will help you identify your target market — and will make you stand out in people’s minds to boot. For example, maybe you want to be known as the Goat Yoga Trainer (which you can check out at www.goatyoga.net if you’re curious).



TIP

In Chapter 2, you get an idea of different client populations you can work with as a personal trainer. Knowing who you want to work with will help you target your marketing efforts and that’s a good place to start. You also need to understand what your target market wants if you want your marketing plan to work.

Part of your specialty is your persona. Some clients will want you to stand on the sidelines and cheer them on — “You’re doing great! Just one more set! I know you can do it!” Others will prefer the drill-sergeant approach — “Okay, drop and give me 50. Move, move, move!” Which fits your personality? And which group of people do you think would most appreciate that approach?

Which of the following is your personal training personality:

- » **Drill sergeant:** If your teaching style is to yell, “Faster! C’mon, no slacking!” you’re a drill sergeant. You may be best off training competitive athletes and healthy, gung-ho adults.
- » **Cheerleader:** If your favorite phrase is, “Awesome! You got this!”, the cheerleader is your type. You’ll be great with clients who are looking for lots of encouragement.
- » **Teacher:** If you’re a patient soul who can handle a barrage of questions from your client, you’re a teacher. You would be great as a trainer of kids or for adults who are new to exercise.



TIP

Whatever your “personality,” it needs to mesh with your market. For example, the senior population may need more of a cheerleader personality rather than drill sergeant, whereas an athlete may need the drill sergeant rather than a cheerleader. Though some people may prefer the teacher personality, what really matters is what *you’re* most comfortable being. Clients who like your persona will find their way to you — always be yourself!



REMEMBER

Don’t worry, you won’t have to try too hard — you’ll find your style after working with a few clients when the nervousness that comes with being a “newbie” goes away.

Targeting your market

The next step is to delve deep into the psyches of the people you want to work with to figure out who your target market is, what makes them tick, and how you can get them interested in your services. Ask yourself the following questions about your prospective clients.

What's their gender?

Do you want to work with men, women, both? For example, if you want to work with women only, you'll want to advertise your services in places where women will notice. For example, if your target market is working moms with young children, ask the schools in your area if you can send their families a monthly email newsletter with simple fitness tips for busy moms.

How old are they?

Within your chosen category, what age range do you prefer? Perhaps you want to focus on young men in their 20s, or women approaching 50, or kids between the ages of 7 and 12. If your focus is on older people, for example, you'll want to emphasize in your marketing how exercising helps the aging body.

What kind of income do they have?

Would your target market prefer less-expensive group classes, or do they expect pricier one-on-one sessions? If you plan to target people who are looking for low prices, your marketing needs to emphasize the value you deliver. If you're targeting people who are willing to pay more, your marketing can focus on the high-end services you provide.



WARNING

Be careful not to confuse “less-expensive” with “cheap.” You can offer an excellent service for less money with group classes or semi-private personal training sessions. Emphasize “value” instead of “price” in your marketing.

Where do they live?

Do they live in the city, suburbs, country? Do they live in houses, apartments, dorms? Knowing where your potential clients live helps you to know where to concentrate your marketing efforts. Also, if you target people who tend to live in apartments or dorms, you can emphasize in your marketing that clients don't need to have a home gym to work with you.

What are their main concerns?

Are your clients mostly interested in looking or feeling better, improving their golf swing, preventing cardiovascular disease? How can your personal training

business help them with their concerns? Make sure you mention this in your marketing. For example, if your clients are people who put in a lot of time at work, you can stress your flexible hours and quick workouts.

The Power of Publicity: Spreading the Word about Your Services

Want to get people talking about your personal training business? Then publicity is for you. In this section, you find out how to get media attention, garner positive word of mouth, and turn your clients into walking billboards for your business.

Breaking the news

If you dream of seeing your name in print or online (more about online marketing later), success is only a press release away. A *press release* (sometimes referred to as a *news release*) is a document you email to members of your local media in the hopes that they'll put it online, or call you for an interview. Even if members of the media don't use your press release, they may keep you on file as an expert they can call when they're writing an article about health or fitness — and that's just as good.

In the following sections, I give you some tips for writing a stellar press release that will land in the press instead of in a spam folder.

Be newsworthy

News releases are for news, not advertising — so don't try to pass off a self-serving ad as news. When an editor or producer reads such a release, they'll see that you're trying to get a free ad and toss it.



TIP

Here are some examples of real news:

- » The opening of a new business (like yours!)
- » Health stories, such as a new study linking exercise to longevity (you can quote yourself as an expert)
- » An event, such as a seminar or demonstration (more on these topics later in this chapter)
- » Community service (donating free fitness classes to at-risk youth, for example)
- » A move to a new location

- » A new product or service (but *only* if it's truly new and unique to your community, such as offering the first underwater bench-pressing class or being the first person in your area to use a new type of equipment)

Follow the proper format



TIP

A standard format is key to press-release success. Check out this article to learn how to write a press release and tips for getting the recipient to open your email: www.dummies.com/article/business-careers-money/careers/general-careers/prepare-a-personal-or-business-press-release-171981.



REMEMBER

You could have a great news story on your hands, but if you don't follow the format that editors and producers are used to seeing, they'll likely ignore you.



TIP

To follow the latest health & fitness industry news, you can check out current press releases at www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/health-latest-news/fitness-wellness-list.

Get it out there

After you've created a press release that will have editors champing at the bit to share it, it's time to email it out to the media. But who should you bless with this paragon of publicity perfection?



REMEMBER

You don't need to spend a fortune to have someone distribute your release (though you can if you want); you can compile your own list of media outlets for nothing. Just be sure to make it targeted. If you want to get coverage for a new personal training service you're offering, for example, don't send a press release to *The Beekeepers' Journal*.

Most people get their news online, but the internet doesn't have a lock on the news — send your release to the producers at all the radio and TV stations in your area as well. Local news outlets are often looking for interesting stories to tell.



TRUE
STORY

Once in 2012 a local media outlet contacted me for a story about P90x simply because I wrote a news release about Paul Ryan's P90x workouts on the campaign trail.

Sitting for an interview

If you follow my instructions for creating a press release, you may actually have a journalist, podcast, or even a local radio or TV station contacting you for an interview. Kind of a scary thought! Have no fear — the tips in the following sections will turn you into a veteran media personality in no time.



TIP

If possible, have interviewers visit you in your workplace. This will help them get a better idea of what you do and you'll feel more comfortable on your home turf.

Be prepared

Preparation is the key to success in any interview. To get yourself ready, think about some of the basic questions you can expect the reporter to ask. Make sure you have interesting, concise answers to these questions.



TIP

If you're stumped for an answer, say, "That's a great question." That response will buy you some time while you wrack your brain for an answer. Don't stop with the basic queries. Be ready for the obvious questions, but also for the kinds of questions that give even seasoned press jockeys sweaty palms. For example, a reporter may ask you, "What do you think of so and so celebrity's diet that they swear by?"



REMEMBER

As you may have discovered from watching political debates, *what* you say sometimes matters less than *how* you say it. Distill your message into a few memorable words — what's called a *sound bite* — and practice saying it with conviction.

Answer the questions you're asked — and don't be afraid to admit when you don't know the answer

Despite all your preparation, you're bound to be asked a question that you don't have an answer to. When this happens, don't fake it. It's perfectly acceptable to say, "I'm not an expert on that, but I can tell you someone who is." You can also offer to get back to the reporter later with the information.



REMEMBER

You were asked for an interview for a reason, and you owe it to the reporter (and to your reputation) to answer the questions you're asked. Using the interview for self-promotion or free advertising for your business is a big no-no. If you sidestep the reporter's questions and only talk about how wonderful you and your business are, you'll only make it difficult for the reporter to do their job — and not only will you not get any coverage, you'll also blow your chances of ever being contacted again by that reporter.

Dress the way you normally do

If you normally work in spandex, don't go pulling your lone suit out of its dry-cleaning bag for the TV reporter. If you feel uncomfortable, you'll look uncomfortable, and the audience won't take you seriously. For television, avoid pure white shirts or suits with stripes, checks, or small patterns, which don't mix well with the cameras.



Once I gave an interview early in the morning wearing sweaty workout gear with my hair in a messy ponytail. My gym was doing a 24-hour indoor “bikeathon” fundraiser for cancer research and a local TV station ran the story. The reporter showed up ready to go after I had been cycling for 2 hours. I admit that I wasn’t thrilled to appear on live TV without taking a shower first, but giving a live interview during the event had a positive impact on our fundraising efforts.

Going to the head of the class: Giving free seminars or webinars

One way to get the word out about your business is to give free educational seminars, webinars, and demonstrations. Potential clients get free information, and you get the chance to promote your business, establish yourself as an expert, gain credibility — and maybe even land a new client or two.

Picking your project

Here are some ideas for educational programs you can offer potential clients:

- » Give a talk about the benefits of exercise for stress relief, osteoporosis, or heart disease.
- » Demonstrate how to use resistance bands.
- » Give a seminar or webinar about nutrition for healthy living.
- » Give a talk about starting an exercise program to a local business’s employees.

Finding a venue

When you have an idea of what you want to offer potential clients, consider hosting a webinar. Webinars are virtual seminars that people can attend from anywhere with an internet connection. If you would rather present in-person, you’ll need to find a place to do it. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- » Browse the websites of local colleges and universities to see if any of them offer seminars or lectures by local experts — like you!
- » Reach out to medium to large businesses in your area and ask if you can give your demonstration or seminar to their employees. Don’t forget to mention that healthy employees take fewer sick days!
- » Contact a venue that your client population frequents — such as a community center or high school — and offer your expertise.

Getting the word out

Tell people about your talk, seminar, or other program by sending a press release to your local media outlets, posting flyers on public bulletin boards, and leaving flyers at health-food stores, doctors' offices, and other places where your potential clients hang out. You should also use social media to spread the word. You can buy micro-targeted Facebook ads, post on your personal and business pages, and/or reach out to moderators of Facebook groups focused on your community or activity (a local runners' group, for example).



TIP

Social media is probably your best bet for making direct contact with a journalist or other media personality in your area unless you've already established contact via email. You can send a direct message (DM) to media personalities you follow on social media who might be interested in what you're offering.

Standing on your soapbox

Now's the time to brush up on your public speaking skills. Here are some tips that will give you the gift of gab:

- » **Know your audience.** If you read Chapter 2, you know who your target audience is. Keep their interests in mind when you're developing your presentation. Think about who they are and what they want to know.
- » **Practice, practice, practice.** Grab a friend or family member and practice your presentation in front of them. Ask for feedback. Do you speak loudly enough? Is your presentation interesting? Ask them for honesty — and remember not to take criticism personally. (If you do, not only won't you learn anything, but they won't tell you the truth the next time you ask.)
- » **Repeat yourself.** Adhere to the public speaking maxim "Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em, tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em."



TIP

Public speaking is a huge topic — way too much to cover completely in this chapter. Before taking the stage, pick up a book like *Public Speaking Skills For Dummies* by Alyson Connolly (published by Wiley). Toastmasters International is another excellent resource for developing your public speaking skills. Check them out at www.toastmasters.org.

Reaching Your Clients through Referrals

The idea behind referrals is to get trustworthy people to give your business a little word of mouth. Referrals are a powerful — and free! — way to build your personal training business.

HAPPY CLIENTS ARE LIKE WALKING BILLBOARDS

There's no better publicity for your business than satisfied customers. Your role? To make your clients happy and keep them that way. Give your clients 100 percent, ask how you can make their personal training experiences better, and show them you care. You know the saying "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care?" It's true. Some of the most successful personal trainers I know aren't the most experienced or credentialed, but they do have the most loyal clients. These trainers show their clients that they care by listening to them, remembering important things about them like their kids' or grandkids' names, sending them birthday cards . . . they become an important part of their clients' lives.

Say you have to choose between two hairdressers — one who has a few positive Yelp reviews and one who was recommended by a trusted friend (who also happens to have great hair). Which would you pick? If you're like most people, you'd go with the hairdresser your friend referred you to. That's how referrals work.

Earning referrals

How do you get referrals? Well, you ask for them! More important though, you need to earn the right to ask people to recommend your business to others. I suggest building and nurturing relationships with other businesses with the same clientele you're looking for. When someone sends you a referral, send them a handwritten thank-you card. Refer your friends and clients to businesses that you like and trust. Be the kind of person that people want to do business with!



TIP

GIVING TO GET

Google Ads and getting people to follow you on social media can be part of your overall marketing plan, but only a small part. Before asking people to buy something from you, give them something of value for free. This could be free articles, a cookbook with simple and healthy recipes, a basic exercise plan with an instructional video, or anything else your target market could benefit from. If it seems counterintuitive to give away what you're trying to sell, I get it. Some people will take your freebies and never become clients. And some will become paying clients when they see how much value you offer for free. They figure if your free stuff is that good, your paid services must be amazing!



TIP

Local healthcare professionals (physical therapists, massage therapists, chiropractors, and so on) can become some of your best referral partners. Start with your own healthcare providers. Ask for a ten-minute meeting to explain what you do and to develop a professional relationship. Ask your friends, family, and even your clients if they can introduce you to their healthcare providers too — scoring a meeting with a busy provider will be easier if you have a connection!



REMEMBER

You may not get to meet with the provider, but an office manager or receptionist is just as good. Treat these gatekeepers well and be sure to leave literature with your contact information they can give to patients or leave in the waiting area.

Here are a few healthcare providers who are the most likely to send you referrals:

- » **General practitioners (GPs):** These family doctors are the front line against disease for many people. Because exercise can prevent problems like diabetes and heart disease, GPs are likely to send their patients to personal trainers.
- » **Physical therapists:** Recovering from knee surgery? Suffering from back pain? Physical therapists help people reduce pain and regain function. After a patient recovers, exercise helps prevent reinjury.
- » **Obstetricians/gynecologists (OB/GYNs):** OB/GYNs deal with women's health and changes associated with aging, pregnancy, hormones, and so on. Exercise can alleviate symptoms related to hormonal changes, reduce cancer risk, and prevent age-related muscle and bone loss.

When a healthcare provider refers a patient to you, make sure you do the following:

- » **Send a thank-you note.**
- » **Follow any exercise instructions sent along with the referral.**
- » **Return the favor — refer back!** As you become more established, your clients will start asking if you can recommend a doctor, physical therapist, and so on.
- » **Make sure you're clear on the medical needs of your referral.** If you have any doubts, call and ask the provider about your client's medical issues before making any exercise recommendations.

Getting referrals from other people whose recommendations count

People talk — and you want to get them talking about your business in a favorable way. Doctors are great, but don't pass up these other opportunities for referrals:

- » **Health-food stores:** People who shop at these stores tend to be health conscious — and you're just the person who can help them get fit. Ask the store manager if you can leave flyers at the register.
- » **Spas:** Clients of health and beauty spas want to look and feel their best — and they're willing to spend money to do it. Establish a relationship with the manager and ask to become referral partners.
- » **Friends and family:** Who *better* to advertise your business than the people who already think you're the greatest thing since sliced bread? Tell everyone you love about what you do, and ask them to spread the word.
- » **People you do business with:** Your hairdresser, your mechanic, your tax accountant — all these professionals come into contact with dozens of people each week who could be getting fitter with your help. Talk up your business with the people *you* do business with.

Turning referrals into clients

Congratulations! You've gotten your first referrals. Treat them right and watch your business boom. Here's how:

- » **Offer a free strategy session.** This will give you a chance to establish good rapport with your referrals, find out what they're looking for, and show them how you can help.
- » **Follow up with each potential client who has been referred to you three times — one week, three weeks, and six weeks after your initial contact.** Call or email any more frequently than that, and you could be mistaken for a stalker.
- » **If you have no luck after three calls or emails, take the potential client off your contact list, but keep them on your email list (if they have opted in) so they get occasional updates, newsletters, and offers from you.** One time I had a prospect turn into a client *four years* after first meeting her — don't give up!

Marketing on a Shoestring

Coca-Cola, Apple, and Nike have multibillion dollar marketing budgets, and they spend it on celebrity spokespeople, billboards, multipage magazine spreads, and TV spots during the Super Bowl.

You? If you're just starting out as a personal trainer, chances are your marketing budget jingles when you shake it. But don't let your tiny budget get you down! Smart business owners know how to market on the cheap. The publicity tips I provide earlier in this chapter are a good start, but you have plenty more ways to get the word out without spending a mint.

Establishing your internet presence

You might be asking yourself why you need to be online if your personal training business is offline. Well, the answer is simple. We live in a technological world and most consumers (over 90 percent) find businesses or services they're looking for on the internet. Reaching your target market will be tough if you're not online — and it's hard to say how many new customers you could miss out on.

The good news is that you don't need a multi-billion-dollar marketing budget to establish an internet presence for your small business. Setting up a simple website with information about your services and how to contact you is a great place to start. You also need to make sure your target market can find you when they search online for local personal trainers. This is where *local search engine optimization* (local SEO) comes in. Local SEO involves adding local listings about your business to search engines like Google and to local online directories like Yelp. It's worth taking some time to work on your local search visibility because you'll reach more people who are already online looking for a local personal trainer.



TIP

The internet is a big place and search engine optimization is a way bigger topic than what I'm covering here. It's not necessary to become an expert in SEO, but I do recommend understanding it well enough to make finding you online easier for your target market. Check out *Search Engine Optimization All-in-One for Dummies* by Bruce Clay and Kristopher B. Jones (published by Wiley) to learn more.



WARNING

Your potential clients will probably read online reviews about your business before deciding if they want to do business with you. Positive reviews on popular online directories like Yelp might attract people to your business, but a negative Yelp review can seriously damage your reputation.



TIP

No matter how amazing you are, eventually someone isn't going to like you and might write a negative online review of your business. Some things are out of your control, including what people say about you online. But you can control your reaction. Responding to online reviews (positive or negative) shows that you care, and even if a review feels unfair, ignoring it says more about you than a respectful reply ever could.

Today, connecting with your target market through social media is another way to establish yourself online. Social media can be an extremely useful marketing tool, but it can just as easily become a distraction. Before setting up any social media

accounts for your business, I recommend figuring out which social media platforms your target market uses and only focus on those. To learn more about using social media to boost your business, check out *Social Media Marketing All-in-One* by Michelle Krasniak, Jann Zimmerman, and Deborah Ng (published by Wiley).



TIP

Make sure all your online content (website, social media posts, and so on) has a clean, attractive layout with relevant and clear graphics or photos.

Donating your services

Want to feel good about yourself and generate positive word of mouth at the same time? Of course you do! Consider donating your services to charitable causes.

Offering a training package to be auctioned off at a fundraiser where the proceeds go to a charity is one way to donate your services. Your clients may ask you to participate in an auction, but if you want to be proactive, you can look up the head of a local charity organization and offer to donate your services for their next fundraiser. Places like private schools, hospitals, and social groups often hold black-tie charity events with auctions.

Putting it in print

For the cost of paper and a little time, you can create printed materials like newsletters and flyers that will educate your clients and potential clients about your business. Most of your marketing and advertising will probably be done online, but it's still a good idea to have some printed material to hand to people if they ask.

GIVING YOUR SPIEL

Write down a description of your business and its benefits — a description you can recite in 30 seconds or less and ideally with real examples of people you have helped. This little spiel is called an *elevator speech*, because you can give it in the time it takes for the elevator you're riding in to reach your floor. Practice your speech until you've memorized it and until it sounds natural — not like a pitch. For example: "I help people over 60 to get active and move better so they can feel great and keep up with their grandkids." Then whenever you meet someone, you're prepared to tell them who you are and what you do. **Remember:** Never miss an opportunity to spread the word about your services.

Newsletters

Newsletters are a great way to gain credibility, put your name in front of potential clients on a regular basis, and spread the word about your product or service. If you're sending a newsletter, you should email it to everyone on your email contact list, and you can mail a copy to clients, prospects, businesses, or anybody else who hasn't opted in to receive emails from you. If you're mailing copies of your newsletter, be sure to budget for envelopes and postage.



TIP

Here are some tips on how to create a newsletter that your prospective clients will look forward to receiving:

- » **Collect the mailing addresses and email addresses of your clients and of all the people who have shown an interest in your business and use this as your mailing list.**
- » **Decide how often you'll send out your newsletter.** A weekly newsletter sounds great, but will you really have time to create new content every week, especially when your business picks up? Monthly, bimonthly, and quarterly newsletters are probably more realistic.
- » **Come up with a name for your newsletter that will grab your readers' attention.** You want to start with a hook that keeps your audience reading. Don't make the mistake of sticking with your company's name — or you'll be throwing away prime newsletter real estate. For example, if your company's name is Perfect Personal Training, don't call your newsletter *Perfect Personal Training News*. A name like *The Health Success Guide* is more likely to pique the interest of all readers.
- » **Share your knowledge.** Is there anything people like more than getting something for free? Filling your newsletter with free helpful information, tips, and resources will make you a valuable resource to your readers and create the kind of goodwill that all the ads in the world can't buy.
- » **Include special offers like a discount for first-time clients or incentives like one free session to clients who get a friend to sign up.**
- » **Give the heave-ho to the hard sell.** A newsletter full of sales propaganda will get sent straight to the spam folder. Focus on sharing information instead. If you make your newsletter a valuable resource rather than a boring sales tool, your audience will read it and maybe even file it away for future use. Can you say that much for an ad?
- » **Tell them how to contact you.** Let your potential clients know how they can set up a consultation with you or become a client.
- » **Liven up your articles with quotes.** People love to hear what other people have to say. Quoting experts lends credibility and quoting clients or the "man on the street" gives the newsletter a newsy, human-interest feel. Who can you quote in your newsletter?

- *Your clients:* If you're writing a newsletter article about exercise tips for busy professionals, for example, you could quote a client who lost 50 pounds in six months through healthy eating and exercising for 30 minutes a day. You can even include a different client success story in each issue. Clients love to see their names in print, and they're sure to show off your newsletter to others.
- *An expert in a related field such a physical therapist:* Write an information piece on how exercise helps to prevent a certain condition and quote the appropriate practitioner. Or try writing about nutrition and interview a local nutritionist for quotes.
- *Your employees:* If you have employees, why not include a question-and-answer session with one of them in each issue, addressing their specialties.
- *A local celebrity:* Perhaps a popular restaurant owner serves up low-fat, organic cuisine — what a great idea for a short newsletter article! If someone in your area ran the Boston Marathon or won a power-lifting contest, they would also be perfect to interview.

Another bonus to using quotes: Instead of doing the hard sell, you can quote other people's great opinions of you or your product. It sounds less like hype if a third party is saying it for you.

Flyers

A *flyer* is a single sheet of paper printed on one or both sides. You won't be able to fit every detail about your business on a flyer, and that's ok. The purpose of a flyer is to have something you can hand to prospective clients so they'll remember how to reach you.

NEWSLETTER NEWS SOURCES

If you'd like to include health news in your newsletter, check out EurekaAlert (www.eurekaalert.org), a science news site that includes press releases about health advancements, and PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), a media site mentioned earlier in this chapter that posts press releases on health-related topics.

You can also read health magazines like *Health*, *Fitness*, *Prevention*, *Oxygen*, *Men's Fitness*, and *Men's Health*. You can find all these magazines online, but you'll need a subscription to see all the articles. Using these magazines to find topics for your newsletter is okay, but be aware that you can't publish the articles in your newsletter without getting permission from the copyright holder first.



TIP

Include this information on your flyer (much of which can be taken from your newsletter):

- » **A catchy headline.**
- » **The name of your business.**
- » **A list of benefits of going to a personal trainer:** Some benefits you may want to include are more energy, more confidence, increased strength, better heart health, lowered risk of disease, and better sleep.
- » **Any special offer you want to make:** For example, a discount for first-time clients.
- » **How people can reach you.**

YOU ARE YOUR BEST ADVERTISEMENT

The best marketing medium is also the cheapest, and the one you have the most control over — it's you. The way you look, talk, and act, and the things you say, can make a potential client drool over the prospect of working with you — or run the other way.

The last thing people want to see in the person who's supposed to get them healthy is a frowny-faced trainer with their arms crossed over their wrinkled shirt. People go to personal trainers in part to improve the way they look and feel, and they need you to serve as an example of someone who likes the way they look and feel.

Your appearance should be neat and stylish, but stylish doesn't have to mean expensive or trendy. Choose clothes that fit properly and that you feel comfortable and confident in. See more about dressing for success in Chapter 10.

If you're confident, if you're happy, if you love personal training, it shows. Do everything you can to stay as healthy as possible, including eating well and getting adequate rest. You don't have to be perfect, but do be an example for your clients of a confident person with healthy habits.

Love your work — if you don't, something has to change. Your clients can tell if you're unhappy and they won't stick around for long if you give them about as much attention as that bored kid flipping burgers gives to his customers. Hopefully the tips in this book will help you build a career that you love!

- » Making fitness achievable
- » Keeping clients motivated
- » Connecting with clients
- » Resolving conflicts
- » Setting your clients free

Chapter 9

Retaining Your Clientele

Getting clients is easy. Keeping them — ah, there's the rub. As a personal trainer, you have to use every trick in the book (this book!) to keep your clients happy, motivated, and on the track to living an active and fit life. Social media is full of trainers like yourself, and if you don't make an effort to retain your clients, they just may click on over to one of your competitors down the street.

In this chapter, I give you the basics for keeping clients coming back, including how to motivate them, how to adjust your training sessions to their personalities, how to keep them excited about fitness, how to connect with them on a personal level, and how to resolve conflicts when they arise (alas, the road to fitness is never a straight line).

Keepin' It Real: Putting Fitness within Your Clients' Reach

Say you're using a computer for the first time. Your teacher tells you, "Okay, by next week I want you to write a ten-page document with tables and clip art in Google Docs, create a slide deck, and, while you're at it, write a program that will control all the electronic appliances in your house." Chances are, you'd be so frustrated that you'd give up hope before ever even trying to open Google Docs or use email.



TIP

The same principle goes for your clients, many of whom are learning how to exercise for the first time in a long time. Maybe even for the first time ever. If you tell a new client, “You need to overhaul your diet, stop smoking, exercise five times per week before work, sleep for eight hours every night, and meditate for 30 minutes every night before bed to manage your stress,” they won’t be a client for long. Getting to know your clients and learning what makes them tick helps you to help them tackle their fitness goals one step at a time.

Knowing who you’re dealing with

Before you can give your clients what they need, you first have to understand their reasons for hiring you, their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses, what they had for breakfast this morning . . . Getting to know your clients will keep them coming back — and knowing your clients means meeting them where they’re at today, not where they want to be someday. When you understand where your clients are starting *and* where they want to go, you’ll be able to create exercise programs that help them to reach their fitness goals at a pace they can handle.

But how do you get to know your clients without taking them out for dinner, going for long walks on the beach, or reading their memoirs? (Hey, who *doesn’t* have a memoir these days?)

You start with your initial consultation, where your job is to ask question after question until you feel like a job interviewer for the CIA. (You can find out more on initial consultations in Chapter 10.) In the following sections, I show you how to take it beyond those first consultations and develop great relationships with your clients.

Getting to know you: Personality types

People tend to fall into distinct categories of personality types, and recognizing your clients’ individual personality types will help you to coach them effectively. If you’re not familiar with personality typing and want to learn more about it, I recommend starting here:

» **The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** divides people into 16 types of personalities, such as “The Scientist” and “The Executive,” based on four main traits: introversion/extroversion, intuitiveness/sensing, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving. (The trait names have nothing to do with what career the person has; you may have a “Scientist” client who hasn’t touched a Bunsen burner since high school.) Knowing the different types of personalities and how to recognize them is actually a lot of fun, and you can use this knowledge to communicate effectively with your clients. If your client is a “Scientist” type,

for example, knowing how the exercises work and what muscles are involved can spur his enthusiasm. An “Executive” type of client, on the other hand, may be motivated more by research demonstrating that entrepreneurs who exercise daily are more likely to meet income goals. For an explanation of the 16 personality types and to take a test to find out *your* personality type, check out www.myersbriggs.org.

- » Discovering whether your client is **Type A or Type B** will help you determine how much you can push him and how long you can spend on one exercise before moving on to the next. The Type A person is competitive, impatient, and goal-oriented, and thrives on challenges. These types of clients probably expect you to change up their program frequently, and they’ll want to achieve fitness milestones quickly. The Type B person, on the other hand, is more laid back, patient, noncompetitive, and maybe not as driven as the Type A person. They’ll want to take things nice and slow. Push them too hard, and they may quit in frustration, despite making progress.



TIP

Taking inventory of your own personality type will help you understand how other people perceive you. And understanding how your clients perceive you will help you to communicate with them effectively.

Reading you right the first time: Learning styles

Unlocking the secrets of how your clients think and learn will help you to make meaningful connections with them. By gathering information about people’s personality types, temperament, discipline, and various other qualities that make individuals who they are, you’ll be able to create a “profile” of each one of your clients. When you have a clear profile of your clients, you’ll understand how to best support them when they need you to.



TIP

Can I tell you a secret? This may surprise you, but most of your clients really won’t care how much you know about exercise physiology. Sure, they want you to know enough to help them get in shape, but that alone won’t get you far in this field. Some of the best personal trainers I know are great because they can read people well. Sure, they know how to get results for their clients, but more important, they recognize their clients’ unique personality traits. And they understand each individual client’s preferred learning style. The best trainers I know coach their clients according to how they like to learn. Some people are visual learners (they learn by watching), some are auditory learners (they learn by listening), and others are kinesthetic learners (they learn by doing). When your training approach matches your client’s preferred learning style, you’ll get really good at demonstrating exercises, explaining assessment results, and much more. On the other hand, if your approach doesn’t match your client’s learning style, they’ll probably either feel overwhelmed by too much information, frustrated by a pace that’s too fast or too slow, or otherwise underwhelmed by your inability to connect with them.

Let me hear your body talk: Understanding body language

Think that what you say is more important than the way you say it? Not so. Fifty-five percent of the impact of what we say comes from our body language and other visual cues, 38 percent from the way we sound, and a piddling 7 percent of the meaning comes from our words.

You can use this knowledge to your advantage by reading your clients' body language. Even if they never say a word, you'll be able to tell whether they're bored, excited, angry, or happy — and whether you should offer some positive reinforcement, push them a bit harder, or keep mum.

The cues in Table 9-1 will help you understand what your clients are saying — even when they say nothing at all.

TABLE 9-1 **Understanding Body Language**

Body Language	What It Means
Leaning forward	They're engaged in what's going on.
Standing with open arms	
Standing with their arms behind their back	They're paying attention to what's going on.
Moving backward	They're rejecting what you're saying or you're being too aggressive and making them uncomfortable, regardless of what you're saying.
Crossing their arms in front of their chest	
Tapping their fingers or foot	They're feeling combative.
Looking around	They're eager to leave or they're self-conscious and feel you're drawing too much attention.
Pointing their feet toward the door	
Blinking quickly	They're listening to what you're saying.
Tilting their head	
Clenching their hands	They're feeling defensive.

Coaching your clients

You might think that your job as a personal trainer is simply to design exercise programs and teach people how to use them. This is definitely a key part of what

you do, but you'll soon find that your role in your clients' lives goes far beyond teaching them how to bench press. Your clients look to you for coaching — someone who can show them how to succeed in improving their health and how to fit exercise into their busy lives. And if doing this were simply a matter of following instructions, people wouldn't be looking to personal trainers for help.

Now, if you're wondering how you're supposed to come up with a different training approach for each individual client's personality and learning style, never fear. Understanding your clients for the unique individuals they are matters, but you don't need a new approach for every client to be a good coach. Fortunately, most people can be sorted into categories by "type" and I show you how to do it in this section. But first let's talk about what it means to be a coach.

In sports, a coach works with athletes to develop their full potential. The coach analyzes the athlete's performance and teaches them relevant skills to maximize their strengths and improve their weaknesses. At the same time, the coach encourages their athletes and guides them in their chosen sport and in their lives. In other words, coaches create the right learning conditions for their athletes to be successful human beings. In personal training, a coach (that's you!) helps to overcome obstacles that stand between their clients' health and fitness goals and what they need to do to reach those goals.

In a nutshell, being a coach means providing sound advice and personal, thoughtful solutions — rather than textbook answers — to your clients' problems. That's why you need to understand the human side of lifestyle change in addition to being able to teach your client how to do a proper deadlift.

So how do you sort your clients into categories that you can use to guide your approach to coaching them? I recommend using the Skill-Will Matrix, a tool popularized by author Max Landsberg in his book, *The Tao of Coaching* (Profile Books, 1996). The Skill-Will Matrix, shown in Figure 9-1, combines a person's skills (can they do it) and motivation (do they want to do it) to determine how you should coach them. The four quadrants in the matrix categorize clients into four general "types" based on their combined skill/will level. Table 9-2 provides a breakdown of each.

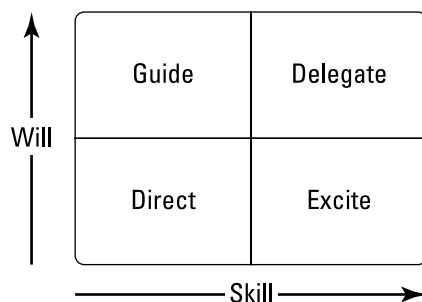


FIGURE 9-1:
The Skill-Will
Matrix.

TABLE 9-2

Understanding Client Types

Client Type	Coaching Style	Description
High skill/High will	Delegate	Typically good at everything and motivated to improve
High skill/Low will	Excite	Good at things but loses interest
High will/Low skill	Guide	More enthusiasm than skill
Low skill/Low will	Direct	Often quiet, shy, and introverted



TIP

Here are three key tips to remember for coaching your clients:

- » Always listen — *really* listen — to your clients' questions and problems. Don't formulate a response in your head while your client is still talking.
- » Don't interrupt, and don't jump in with your quick fix as soon as sounds cease to come out of your client's mouth.
- » Take the time to formulate a customized solution, even if it means you have to get back to your client in a day or two.

Setting your clients up for success

If your client loses those 20 extra pounds, lowers their blood pressure, or feels more energetic than they have since high school, they're sure to keep coming back. In other words, if you want to retain clients, you need to help them succeed at their fitness goals.

Planning one step at a time



REMEMBER

Nothing is more frustrating for a client than getting nowhere because the trainer has given them too much to do. Any program needs to be broken down into manageable steps. For example, if your client wants to start exercising but doesn't know how, start by having them exercise twice a week as opposed to three times a week. After mastering that, they can go to three times per week; then maybe four times per week if they want to. This strategy is much more effective than starting clients off on tough programs that leave them feeling sore and discouraged.

Making the program livable and doable

If you've gotten close to your client as I've suggested in the section "Knowing who you're dealing with" earlier in this chapter, then you understand their lifestyle and any constraints this puts on their schedule and ability to follow a fitness program. For example, maybe your client is a working mom with a high-powered career and is so busy that she barely has time to put on pants in the morning let

alone trying to work out for an hour. You need to work within the confines of how your client lives her life and create her fitness program accordingly.



TIP

Something is always better than nothing. If a client continually has reasons for why they can't fit a workout into their schedule, listen carefully to figure out why they're struggling. Some days there really isn't an extra hour available, but there's probably a way to sneak in 15 minutes of exercise. More often than not, you'll be able to come up with a solution to help your client stay on track if you understand their barriers. The longer you let a client slide by on excuses for skipping workouts, the farther away they'll be from their goals — and they may turn the blame on you, losing you both a client and your reputation.

Motivating Your Clients

Great motivational speakers (like Tony Robbins) make their audiences believe that they have the power to change their lives for the better. Great motivational trainers do the same for their clients. Being an example of a healthy and fit person, keeping things interesting (people who are bored are rarely motivated), providing positive reinforcement, and substantiating their progress are all things you can do to keep your clients interested.

Being a role model

You want clients to look at you and think, “Seeing this healthy, vibrant person motivates me to work hard to meet my fitness goals.” You *don't* want them to look at you and think, “It looks like my trainer slept in that shirt, and now I'm ready for a nap.” In other words, be a good role model for your clients.



TIP

It sounds like a lame cliché — okay, it is a lame cliché — but the reason people keep saying it is it's true. To be a good role model and keep your clients motivated, you have to practice what you preach. You need to:

- » **Be fit.** You should look reasonably healthy. (Looks can be deceiving, but appearances do count. You want to project fitness to your clients so they can look to you for inspiration.)
- » **Be strong.** Spotting clients, handing them weights, and putting plates on the machines takes a lot of strength. Make sure you have it.
- » **Be a nonsmoker.** I can't think of anything worse than a trainer who teaches clients how to be healthy while they reek of stale stogies — except maybe a trainer who burns cigarettes off a client!

- » **Eat healthfully.** Even though your clients may not see what you eat, it's the principle of the thing. You can't, in good conscience, tell your clients to deep-six their favorite goodies while you eat fast food for every meal.

Changing up the program

Would you want to eat egg whites for breakfast, a salad for lunch, and a grilled chicken breast for dinner *every day of your life*? Your clients feel the same way about their personal training sessions. Doing the exact same exercises in the exact same order on the exact same days of the week gets stale pretty fast. Not only that, but their progress will soon plateau, which can be discouraging.



TIP

To keep clients interested, motivated, and coming back for more, you can't stick with the same ol' same ol'. Throw them a few curveballs without changing the program so dramatically that they feel lost. Here are some ways to do this:

- » **Up the weights.** Increase the weights as your client gains strength. They'll always be challenged and will be super-motivated when they now bench-press way more weight than when they first started!
- » **Decrease rest time** with active recovery. If your client's program calls for two minutes of rest between sets, try filling the rest time with corrective exercises.
- » **Superset it.** It sounds like what you do in a fast-food joint when you upsize your fries and drink for a nickel, but *supersetting* is actually putting two exercises back to back without a rest period in between. This technique is for more-advanced clients. (Read more on advanced programming techniques in Chapter 15.)
- » **Periodize it.** Talk with your clients about where you're taking them. Are you taking them from a fat-loss/endurance program lasting from three to six weeks, moving on to a hypertrophy phase for six weeks to build muscle, and then going into a strength phase to help them get stronger for their outdoor adventures? Periodizing — and telling them what they stand to gain from it — helps your clients set goals and look forward to new programming. Depending on what their goals are, be sure to tell them whether they can expect to lose more fat or add more muscle during one period than in another. You can stick to a fat-loss phase for a good chunk of time, but shaking things up will help both mentally and physically.
- » **Mix it up.** Even something as simple as changing your client's schedule can keep things interesting. For example, try changing the days of the week that you do strength training and cardio, or change the order of the exercises in a session.

Providing positive reinforcement

People thrive on feedback. Your client will appreciate a pat on the back for finally getting their deadlift form right or a high-five for doing their first chin-up. You need to create a positive environment that fosters growth and mastery for your clients to stay motivated. Sport and exercise psychologists base these techniques on *principles of reinforcement*.

There are positive and negative ways to reinforce behavior. The positive approach means rewarding your client for their achievements. Focusing on what's going well (even if there's a lot that's not going so well) increases the likelihood of the client repeating the thing that earned the reward. This could be as simple as a "way to go" for showing up ten minutes early to do a dynamic warm-up and foam roll. The negative approach focuses on what's wrong and tries to change unwanted behaviors through punishment or criticism. For example, if your client shows up ten minutes late for a training session, you criticize them for it, hoping your punishing words will lead to the client showing up on time in the future.



WARNING

Reinforcement is more complex than you might think. Sometimes the same reinforcement will affect two people completely differently, which is why it's so important to get to know your clients and understand their personalities. For example, a lecture for showing up late might feel like punishment to one client and recognition to someone else.



TIP

Take a positive approach with your clients. Here are some ways to encourage and motivate them:

- » **Make a comparison to a past performance.** For example, you could say, "You did five more reps than last time. Awesome job!"
- » **Compliment their form.** Focusing on form is a subtle reminder that it's not just about the end result.
- » **When you record workouts in their training log, include encouraging notes about what they're doing well.**
- » **Send your clients an occasional greeting card or email, or give them a call, to say you're proud of them.** Everyone likes to get things in the mail or email besides bills and spam (and phone calls from people who aren't trying to sell them something). Your clients want you to be proud of them (sounds cheesy, but it's true) and an encouraging note or text might motivate them more than you realize.



WARNING

Don't overdo the gushing — people can sense insincerity a mile away.



REMEMBER

Reward effort. People are more willing to try new things when they know they'll be recognized for trying instead of being criticized for falling short.



TIP

We all have days when we feel like we can't do anything right. If a client is feeling down, try turning their negative comments into positive ones. For example, if they say, "I'm doing horribly today," give a gentle reminder that, "even though you're not feeling at your best today, you're doing your best and getting stronger every week." Training logs can really help on days like this — showing your clients how much they've improved since starting will help them through down days and keep them focused on their long-term goals.



TIP

The ability to motivate their clients, rather than technical knowledge about personal training, is what separates very good trainers from average ones. All the personal training knowledge in the world means zilch if you can't get your clients to follow your programs. Motivation is a vast subject and I could write an entire book describing the various points of view on the role motivation plays in sport and exercise. I hope you'll put some time into learning more about it, and about sport and exercise psychology in general. When you do, you'll become a personal trainer who knows how to get your clients results because you'll understand what makes your clients tick.

Following up for follow-through

If you're a parent, you know that sometimes getting your kids to do their chores takes some nagging. "Please take out the garbage." "When do you plan to take out the garbage?" "Have you taken out the garbage yet?"

Parenting a kid is good training for working with clients, except with clients, we don't call it *nagging* — we call it *following up*. Following up with your clients holds them accountable for following the plan you've laid out for them and gives them little motivational boosts.



TIP

Following up with your clients doesn't mean calling them every five minutes between sessions to ask if they've done their workout yet. Follow these tips for following up:

- » **Lay out a plan.** Give the client specific directions, such as, "You will do exercises X, Y, and Z on these days, drink eight glasses of water per day, and eat a fruit or vegetable with every meal."
- » **Put it in writing.** Ask your client to record their workouts (exercises, sets, reps, and so on) in a log.

- » **Check in once or twice while your clients are between sessions (depending upon how often you see them).** A quick call or email to make sure they're on track and to see if they have any questions is all you need.
- » **Be a problem solver.** If your client reports that they haven't been sticking to the plan, ask why. For example, if they're crunched for time after work, you could suggest getting a quick workout in before work or going for a walk at lunchtime.
- » **Schedule sessions.** Plan to see your clients at regular intervals to re-assess goals, measure body composition, and other measures of progress.

Getting Connected: Fostering Good Relationships with Your Clients

If you've ever been on a dud of a first date (and who hasn't?), you know that sometimes you just don't feel a connection with someone. Maybe they didn't share any personal information, or maybe they only shared personal information. Maybe they were just really boring to be around. In any case, you probably didn't want to see that person again.



REMEMBER

Your clients are trusting you with their most important assets— their bodies and their health— and you need to establish a connection with them based on trust, sharing, and rapport. Keeping a connection alive will keep your clients coming back.

Knowing when to listen and when to talk

They say talk is cheap, but they're dead wrong. Saying the right thing at the right time (and knowing when not to say anything at all) will help you forge a connection with your clients that will keep them happy and motivated — not to mention paying.



TIP

Open up a little bit about yourself. When you do, you're telling your client, "I hear you, and I experience the same things as you." For example, you might have a client who is trying to cut back on sugar but struggles at night with chocolate cravings. You can offer tips like eating a piece of fruit to curb a sugar craving or you can teach your client how to incorporate chocolate into their diet without sabotaging their fitness goals. Also, don't pretend you're not human. Tell this person that sometimes it's hard for you to make healthy choices too.

Sometimes your client needs to vent, and you happen to be the person who's nearby at the time. You don't need to be a problem solver in this situation. If your client shows up late and starts complaining about their jerk of a boss, for example, don't tell them to take that job and shove it. Just listen and let them know that you can relate.



WARNING

Be careful not to fall into the trap of commiserating with your clients — remember that you're at work when you're with your clients. Your time with them is their time and I guarantee that clients don't want to listen to you complain about your job.



REMEMBER

If your client is normally talkative but is suddenly glaring at you and giving monosyllabic answers to your questions, don't take it personally. They're probably having a bad day and need some space (and some silence). No need to fill the silence with small talk. Sometimes silence truly is golden.



TRUE
STORY

Many of my clients had high-stress jobs and often their time with me was the only hour they had to themselves all day. Some days these clients would come in and chat away, and other days they would barely mutter two words. At first, I thought I had done something wrong, but I eventually understood that a client's silence wasn't a personal slight — sometimes they just had a lot going on and didn't feel like talking.

Say this, not that

Certain words and phrases should never come out of a personal trainer's mouth (at least when the client is within earshot). Naturally, you want to avoid cursing, talking smack about other clients, or insulting a client. But even such seemingly innocuous terms as *overweight* should be purged from your patois. Check out Table 9-3 to know what not to say, and for suggestions of what to say instead.

Respecting your clients' privacy

Would you like it if your hairdresser told another client exactly how not natural your blonde is? Or if your accountant told all your neighbors how much your tax bill was last year? No? Then please understand why your clients' doings — even the positive ones — should be marked "Strictly Confidential" in your mind.



TIP

Here are some suggestions for keeping the lid shut on your clients' private affairs:

» During the initial consultation, assure the client that anything they say and do in the training sessions stays between the two of you.

TABLE 9-3

What Not to Say to Your Clients

Instead of . . .	Say . . .	The Reason
Overweight	Nothing	Weight isn't an indication of a person's health status and unless your client specifically tells you they want to lose weight, it's not your place to tell them how.
Inflexible or not flexible	Shortened range of motion	Inflexible sounds so . . . inflexible, as if the client can do nothing to fix it. Referring to it as a shortened range of motion lets the client know that the range of motion can be increased.
Weak	Not strong yet or not strong on this exercise	Telling the client they're not strong <i>yet</i> indicates that eventually they will be. Or perhaps they're not strong on a certain exercise because they're using a small body part — on the next exercise, they may be stronger.
No stamina	Low lung capacity	If you say that a client has no stamina, they may think that's just the way they are, that nothing can change that. If you say low lung capacity, that sounds like something that can improve.
Out of shape	Deconditioned	The word <i>deconditioned</i> says that your client's current state of fitness is temporary.

- » **If you have employees, have them sign a nondisclosure agreement that states that they won't disclose information about clients, including their names, to anyone.** You can have your lawyer draw one up for you.
- » **If your client gets tight lipped about a subject, back off.** If they want to talk about it, they will.
- » **If you're in a client's home and you see or hear an argument or anything else the client would rather you didn't see, keep mum and don't pry.** Don't even share details about the client's belongings or decorating style. Even raving about the client's beautiful home isn't wise — if they hear you've talked about them in *any* way, they'll wonder what other things you've said about them.
- » **Never talk about one client with another client.** If a client hears you talk about others, they'll probably wonder if you talk about them too.
- » **If a client asks about another client, simply tell them you can't talk about your other clients because you don't want to violate their privacy.** Remember in your first meeting when you said what happens between you and your clients is confidential?

RECOGNIZING THE SOURCE OF YOUR CLIENTS' FRUSTRATION

A normally cheery client snaps at you during a workout. What did you do wrong?

Maybe nothing. Sometimes people have a bad day, and they take it out on the people closest to them. Psychologists refer to this as *transference*. Your cranky client may have had a fight with their spouse, had a bad day at work, or been cut off by a rude driver, and they're taking it out on you.

The best way to deal with transference is to use simple words: "You seem angry. I'm sorry. How can I help?" Chances are, they'll cool down.

If your client seems too angry to focus on the session, offer to reschedule, but suggest that a good workout could be just what they need to work out those negative feelings!

Remember: Just because you work in a gym doesn't mean you have to be your client's punching bag. You deserve to be treated with respect and civility; if your client can't grant you the minimum of human decency, you can — and should — ask them to leave and come back when they can.

If asking someone to reschedule or leave seems harsh, sometimes it is, but it's also effective. Most of the time the client will apologize for behaving badly and it won't happen again. Remember, if you don't insist that people respect your boundaries, they won't.

Resolving Conflicts and Addressing Concerns

You know that you rock, and I know that you rock, but every once in a while a client will think that you do *not* rock — and you'll have to take action to make things right.

Figuring out what went wrong



TIP

The minute you sense something is wrong, start asking the client questions to dig up the root of the problem. You can come right out and say, "You seem upset — is anything bothering you that I can help you with?" Or you can ask questions that will help uncover the problem, such as, "Are you achieving your goals? Are you happy with my services?"

Why wrack your brain if you don't have to? If a client is unhappy with your services, ask what you can do to make them better. Often, the client will tell you exactly where you're going wrong and how to fix the situation.

Acknowledging your mistakes

We all make mistakes. That's right, even the esteemed author of this book has made *lots* of mistakes. So you're not alone if you've made mistakes. In fact, you're alone if you *haven't*!



TIP

If you make a mistake, you have two choices: You can compound the mistake by denying it or blaming someone else, or you can do the right thing, fess up, and do what you can to make things right. You may feel that admitting to a mistake will lower you in the eyes of your client, but in truth they'll respect you for owning up to your actions.



TIP

Many trainers commit the faux pas in the following list. If you're aware of their mistakes, you have a better chance of avoiding them yourself:

- » **Not following through:** For example, if you tell a client that you'll research a certain piece of equipment and then you don't do it because you were busy watching the season finale of your favorite reality show and forgot, apologize, then do what you promised ASAP.
- » **Giving the client incorrect information:** For example, if you tell a client an exercise will work their biceps when it will really work their triceps, correct yourself as soon as you realize your mistake.
- » **Not admitting that you don't know the answer to a question:** When you don't know the answer, you're much better off telling your client that you'll have to find out and get back to them. They'll respect you for it in the long run — and even if they don't, you'll still be able to respect yourself.
- » **Showing up late:** Time is money — and this holds true not only for you, but also for your clients. If you're late to your appointments with your clients, the message you're communicating is that your time is more important than theirs. And that's the last thing you want your clients to feel. If you can't avoid being late, call ahead of time to apologize and explain the situation, and make sure you extend the session to make up for the lost time.
- » **Not showing up at all:** Worse than being late is not showing up. If you have an emergency and you have to cancel your appointment, be sure to call your client and explain the situation. And make sure you don't make a habit of it. Emergencies don't happen every day.

» **Not being prepared for your sessions:** For instance, if you were supposed to update your client's program but you didn't, your client will wonder how much you really care about their progress. Apologize and do what you promised — pronto.

Making things right

If you make a mistake, the first thing to do is apologize. Then try to fix the problem. Remember you can try asking the client what you can do to make it right. If you really messed up, a free session or two may be in order.



Before sharing this story, I have to tell you that it happens once to all of us. And if you're anything like me, it will only ever happen once. Thinking about it over 20 years later still makes my stomach drop. One morning I woke up to my phone ringing at 6:20 a.m. It was the gym calling to ask if I was okay and to let me know my client was there waiting for me. Yep, you guessed it. I slept right through my alarm and no-showed my 6 a.m. client. Fortunately, my client forgave me, despite being stood up at 6 in the morning. To make amends, I offered the client two free sessions — one to make up for the missed one, and one more to say thank you for understanding that, I too, am human.

"BUT YOU PROMISED!" GUARANTEES AND WARRANTIES

Sure, promising clients they'll definitely lose 20 pounds in three months or that your plan will lower their blood pressure might keep them coming to you. But is this a good tactic? Not really. You may offer the best workout sessions around, but you have no control over what clients do outside of the sessions. Maybe they go home and down two pints of Ben & Jerry's. Maybe they sit on the couch watching eight hours of TV every day. You simply can't guarantee that a client will lose weight, be free from back pain, or lower their cholesterol.

A better idea is to do what salespeople call "under-promise and over-deliver." In other words, downplay what you can do for the client. For example, you can tell your client that your workouts will make them stronger and more flexible — you know this will happen if the client is working out with you regularly, even if they don't do it at home. If you give your clients exactly what you promised, they'll be happy. If you give them more — say, they do lose pounds or their back pain goes away — you're golden.

If you can't resolve a problem, the best option may be to refund the client's money for any unused sessions and refer them to another trainer. In fact, you should have a refund policy in place for such situations.



TIP

Many experts recommend a simple refund policy: 100 percent satisfaction or your money back. And why not? If you're good at what you do, you should be able to back it up with a strong refund policy. Of course, you should refund only for those sessions the client hasn't used yet. (See the nearby sidebar, "But you promised!": Guarantees and warranties.")

Breaking Up is Hard to Do: Setting Your Client Free

Whoever said "All good things must come to an end" must have been talking about personal training. And the person who said "If you love something, set it free"? Well, that person was talking about unicorns (if the posters bearing this slogan are any indication). But we can pretend this applies to personal training too. In other words, sometimes you have to let a client go.

Time to spread your wings and fly

Sometimes you can easily tell when it's time to set a client free — they can work out successfully on their own, and you don't think they need you anymore. Or maybe a client has gone as far as they can with you, and it's time to start working with another trainer (for example, maybe they want to start doing sport-specific workouts and you know a trainer who would be a better fit for their goals).



TIP

If you've determined that your client is ready to move on, and you've had a good relationship with them, you can either suggest that they visit another trainer (you can refer them to a trainer you know) or that they start working out on their own more often and with you less often. For example, if you're seeing a client three times a week, cut back to two times a week and have them work out once on their own between sessions. Continue to taper off the sessions until you're seeing the client only once every couple of months to check progress and change the program as needed.

It's not you, it's me

Sometimes deciding to cut a client loose isn't so easy — you may be burned out on a client or you just don't click with them. If any of the items on the following list are true, it may be time to let go:

- » The client regularly cancels sessions at the last minute or doesn't show up at all.
- » You find yourself wanting to end workouts early, or you no longer have the passion to make the training sessions as engaging as possible.
- » The client has started to complain a lot (or a lot more than usual).
- » You don't look forward to seeing the client.



TIP

Sound mean? Well, think of it this way: In order to give all your clients your best effort, you need to care about what you do. If you start feeling burned out because you and a particular client aren't a good match, everyone suffers if you continue hanging on.

Letting a client go requires an abundance of tact and grace. Try saying something like, "I sense that you're not getting as much as you can from our training sessions. I really think that Trainer X can offer you more than I can, and you'd enjoy working with them more." This puts the blame on your shoulders rather than the client's — you can't meet their needs — and eases the blow.

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH CLIENTS AFTER THEY'VE MOVED ON

Y'know how you get notes in the mail from your dentist, your mechanic, and your cat's veterinarian reminding you that it's time for a checkup? Or how you changed from one cell provider to another, and now your old provider sends you email every once in a while (or every five minutes) with a new offer?

These companies know that staying in touch with former clients is a good business practice. If you have clients who've moved on, shoot them an occasional email to touch base and make sure they're on track. You never know — they may decide to come back to you!

Try these little reminders to keep former clients thinking about how wonderful you are:

- **Holiday cards:** Holiday cards are a great way to stay in touch. Just be sure they're nondenominational so you don't offend clients who don't celebrate a particular holiday. Sending a "Happy New Year" card in the last week of December is a good approach — plus, you'll catch your former clients at a time when lots of people think about getting or staying in shape.
- **News clippings:** If a former client is a florist and you run across an article about new flower arranging techniques, clip it and send it along. This method drives home the importance of getting to know your clients.
- **Newsletters:** Turn to Chapter 8 for more information on creating winning newsletters.
- **Coupons or gift certificates:** Special offers like these may prompt your former clients to give you another try.
- **Thank-you notes:** Right after the client heads for other pastures, send a hand-written thank-you note for doing business with you. They'll remember you for it.

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3

Putting the Personal into Personal Training

IN THIS PART . . .

You're ready to meet your first client. Yipes! What to wear, what to do, what to say? No worries — I talk all about this in Chapter 10.

Next, Chapter 11 describes the fitness assessment, where you prepare your clients for their first session and take baseline measurements like resting heart rate and range of motion.

And finally, starting with Chapter 12, I get to the good stuff — the actual training of clients! It's time to figure out how to plan your client's program, such as determining which exercises to prescribe, how intense they should be, and what order the client should do them in. I also tell you how to conduct the client's first session and how to advance your client when the time comes.

- » Honing your phone and email skills
- » Meeting face-to-face for the first time
- » Conducting the consultation
- » Wrapping it up

Chapter 10

Getting to Know You: Performing Initial Consultations

Have you ever walked into a restaurant, sat down, and had a server put a plate in front of you without first asking what you wanted from the menu? I hope not! Before you can help your clients, you need to find out what they want.

How do you find out what a prospective client wants? Simple — you ask! Before someone hires you to be their personal trainer, you need to find out about their goals, lifestyle, expectations, and so on. This is typically done in the *initial consultation*. The information you collect during this meeting helps you to make sound, safe, and effective recommendations.

Before you meet face-to-face with a prospective client, they will probably call or email to inquire about you and your services. Think of this as a job interview. If the prospective client likes what they hear, they will come in for a consult and hire you to be their personal trainer. In this chapter, I show you how to sell your services (and yourself) and how to conduct effective and efficient initial consultations that convert prospects into clients.

Hello, My Name Is . . .

I'll bet that if you're talking with a potential client, they have already read all about you online. They probably know what you look like, how your training program — or programs — work, how much your services cost, and so on. Selling yourself online first helps, but you still have to convince your prospects to take the next step and schedule a face-to-face initial consult.

"No sweat," you think.

Not so fast! Picking up the phone or sending an email is easy, but convincing the person on the other end, through one conversation, that you are different from every other trainer they have checked out is a lot harder. On an inquiry call or email, your objectives are:

- » To establish rapport
- » To qualify your prospective client
- » To schedule an initial consultation

Polishing your "netiquette"

There may be times when your phone rings with a potential client inquiring about your services, but more often than not, your first communication will happen over email.



TIP

Make sure you reply within one day when you receive an email inquiry. I also recommend sending an auto-reply thanking the person for their interest and letting them know when you will get back to them. Keep your emails brief and professional, check for spelling and grammar errors, and avoid typos.

Figuring out what you're going to say

Instead of coming up with what to say every time someone calls or emails, use a script. Your script should be a well-thought-out checklist of answers to commonly asked questions about your services. A script helps to guide your conversations and will also save you time once you have it down.



REMEMBER

Your script is like your elevator speech and is only effective if you are comfortable with it. Start by describing who you are and what you do in a few sentences. Then make a check-list of common questions and answers, including why you are different from your competitors.

Here are some common questions that prospective clients ask:

- » How long have you been a personal trainer?
- » What do you charge for your services?
- » Do you offer group or family discounts?
- » Do you have other clients my age and with similar goals?



TIP

Write out the answers to these questions and anything else you think someone might ask you; then practice saying it out loud until you have it down. Whether you are talking on the phone or writing an email, you need to convey confidence in your choice of words and your tone. Be concise and definitive in your answers. You don't have to recite from a prepared script every time you talk to someone, but practicing your answers in advance will help you to avoid stumbling over your words or pausing to think of the right answers. You will come across as confident and knowledgeable when you know what to say, and you will be able to keep the focus of the conversation on the prospective client's needs.

You'll usually need to gather some information from the prospective client, but some people are reluctant to give the details you need. So you need to practice the art of getting information without being pushy.



TIP

If the caller seems reluctant to share personal information, offer to schedule a face-to-face consultation instead so they can get to know you. I have always referred to my initial consultation as a strategy session and I explain to potential clients that it's an opportunity for them to ask questions and for me to thoroughly evaluate their needs and goals so I can make a sound training recommendation. This is a free, no-obligation meeting.

If the person doesn't want to schedule a consultation, you can still give a brief overview of your services and pricing, and then offer to email them with more information. If they're interested, they will be back in touch when they're ready. You can also ask for permission to follow up in the future.

Building credibility . . . fast!

A person is showing interest in your services by contacting you, but they might still need to know more about you before committing to training with you.



REMEMBER

You can use this conversation to gain credibility, but establishing good rapport — and fast — is vital. Did you know that most people will have a solid impression of who you are within seven seconds of meeting you? Prospective clients can read about your credentials online, but it has been my experience that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. You need to be

passionate about what you do and about helping people with their fitness goals. Someone might believe you're an expert, but if they don't trust you, they probably won't feel comfortable sharing personal information with you. First impressions are everything!



TIP

Here are some ways to quickly establish rapport, but remember to be yourself; you don't have to use all these ideas.

- » **Listen more than you talk.** When someone reaches out to ask for help, listen. Something prompted them to call you, and most of the time, people just need to feel like they are being heard.
- » **Don't take yourself too seriously.** You can take what you do seriously without taking yourself too seriously. People feel more at ease when you come across as relaxed.
- » **Use layperson's terms when you are talking.** Most people won't be familiar with technical anatomy and physiology terminology and will have no idea what you're talking about if you over use it. For example, don't say patella. Say kneecap.
- » **Be relatable.** You are the expert. You are also human. You won't always feel like working out, competing demands will make it hard for you to prioritize yourself, sometimes you make mistakes. You don't have to highlight your shortcomings, but your clients will appreciate your transparency and the example that you set for them by doing your best to stay on track with your fitness goals in the midst of everyday life.
- » **Share your experience with similar clients.** Tell your prospective client about people you have worked with who started with similar goals.
- » **Mention other respected providers in your area (doctors, physical therapists, massage therapists, and so on) with whom you work.** If you are meeting with a prospective client after they have recovered from an injury, knowing their physical therapist and learning how to work around injuries will boost your credibility.

Qualifying a potential client

You will learn with experience that not all clients are a good fit for your business and that you are not a good fit for all clients. You could be someone's first choice, but your location and schedule are inconvenient for them. Or, maybe your rates are outside of their budget. It's tempting to work with anybody and everybody when you're getting started, but don't offer a service that you can't deliver.

You need to ask *qualifying questions* to see whether you and the potential client are a good fit before scheduling an initial consultation. You don't want to waste your time or a potential client's time with a consult if they want a type of training that you don't offer or if your schedule won't work with theirs.



TIP

Here are some qualifying questions you could ask:

- » What type of training are you looking for? (Is it something you offer?)
- » My rates range from X to Y. Does that work for you?
- » When are you available for training sessions? (Does their schedule work with yours?)
- » Where do you live or work? (Are you in a convenient location?)

Knowing what to say before you hang up or hit send

Now that you have gone through your script, learned what the caller is looking for and how you can help them, ask to schedule an initial consultation even if they are ready to get started right away.



TIP

If you're talking on the phone, take notes and summarize key points of the conversation. Tell the caller that scheduling a free initial consultation is the next step. Do the same thing when you reply to an email inquiry, and in both situations, be sure to explain what the initial consultation entails and why it's important.

Sending a follow-up email the same day

Even if you schedule a consultation, send a follow-up email to thank the person for their interest and tell them you are looking forward to seeing them. If you don't schedule a consultation, send an email to thank the person for their interest and include more detailed information about your business. You might include an attachment with a detailed overview of your services and links to your website and social media accounts. Set a reminder to send another follow-up email in a week to ask if they are ready to schedule a consult.

Getting to Know You: Preparing to Meet for the First Time

Getting ready for your first meeting with a new client is a lot like preparing for your first day of school. That day was a long time ago, but I'll bet you can remember it. The night before, you probably had your backpack filled with new school supplies, clothes laid out, lunch waiting downstairs in the fridge — all in anticipation of meeting your new classmates and teachers for the first time. You wanted to make sure that you made a good impression and that everyone liked you.

That's just what you need to do before meeting a potential client for the first time. Taking a little time beforehand to make sure you have your ducks in a row will give you the extra boost of confidence of knowing that you're well prepared.



WARNING

Don't skip the initial consultation! Some trainers skip this step, eager to show their clients how great they are, and it will come back to haunt them. The client could get injured if the trainer isn't aware of previous injuries, or the client might head for the door early if the trainer doesn't understand the client's needs and expectations.

The time, energy, and effort you devote up front to learning everything you can about your client will benefit you in the long run. The more you know about the client, the better your service will be — which means your clients will get the results they are looking for.

Making a good first impression

Good or bad, the first impression is the one that lasts. Either you're going to wow the prospective client with your amazing professionalism and knowledge, or you're going to completely underwhelm them with your lack thereof.

Don't despair, grasshopper! Whether this consultation is your 1st or your 50th, I'll share with you my time-tested tips that are sure to leave your new client all aglow afterward. These tips are simple — no studying required.

Practice punctuality

Always be on time. Better yet, plan to be ten minutes early, even if you risk sitting in your car in front of the prospective client's house for nine of those ten minutes. Besides, you can do a lot during those nine minutes. You can:

- » Review the notes from your earlier phone conversation with the prospect.
- » Make sure you have your paperwork in order.
- » Mentally rehearse your presentation.

Planning to arrive early allows time for the unexpected — a traffic jam or a lost client form — to happen without causing you to be late. Nothing is worse than greeting a potential client with, “Hi! Sorry I’m late! The funniest thing happened to me on the way over here”

Dress for success

Granted, personal training lends itself to spandex work apparel, but you should still strive to look professional. Is it possible to look professional in workout clothes? Of course! Whether you’re working solo or planning to have a whole fleet of trainers, picking the right attire matters and can make or break your professional image.



TIP

Keep these tips in mind when choosing your personal training uniform:

- » **Choose fabrics with some stretch.** This will allow the garment to retain its shape and for you to be able to move comfortably.
- » **Opt for high-quality shirts with breathable fabric.** Add your logo for a more professional look.
- » **Make sure your clothes fit well.** It’s ok for your clothes to accentuate your physique, but don’t wear revealing clothing when you’re at work. My motto has always been “no boobs, no butts, no bellies.”
- » **Make sure you don’t have any rips or stains (like sweat) on your clothes or shoes.** Save your old workout clothes for mowing the lawn or cleaning the house. Just as you wouldn’t wear torn or stained clothes if you worked in an office, you shouldn’t wear them when you meet with clients. You might want to get a new pair of shoes that you only break out for assessments or other meetings. You can wear (slightly) older shoes for your actual training sessions. Same with the rest of your clothes. Set aside the best stuff you own for sales meetings and assessments. Eventually, when your best stuff gets a few scuffs, they’ll become your regular clothes, and you’ll buy new ones to replace them.

Be enthusiastic

Smile, smile, and smile some more! Your smile is your best asset for putting your potential client at ease. Naturally, they’ll probably be nervous about sharing personal health information with a stranger. Your pleasant demeanor will help set the tone for a successful first meeting.



Smiling can help *you*, too! If you're feeling nervous about conducting your initial consultation, it's ok to crack a joke or use small talk to break the ice. Sometimes you have to fake it 'til you make it.

Being prepared

Being prepared can save you headaches and embarrassment while you're presenting your services to a potential client. The more organized you are, the more smoothly the whole consultation will go. Knowing you have everything in place ahead of time lets you concentrate solely on your consult.

Before setting out for the initial consultation, consider putting together a *consult packet* to give to your prospective client. This packet will contain information about you and your services that the prospect can keep after the consultation is over. Your packet can include copies of your:

- » Company overview or personal bio
- » Services and rates
- » Training philosophy
- » Client testimonials



Remember when you put reports in plastic folders to score brownie points with your high-school teacher? You can do the same with your consult packet. Put the copies in a folder that has a slot for your business card, or you can take the copies to an office-supply store and have them spiral-bound with a clear cover. Professional presentations help establish your credibility.



In addition to your consult packet, before leaving for the consultation, make sure you have the following items in your attaché (yes, you should carry a backpack or a nice bag, not a duffel bag like the one you throw your gym clothes in):

- » Forms and information on your prices and policies (such as your liability policy, your cancellation policy, and your refund policy), as well as information on what to expect during the client's first training session
- » Forms you use to record information on your prospective client, such as health history and exercise history
- » Clipboard
- » Notepaper
- » Pens and pencils
- » Business cards



TIP

Arrange your paperwork in a clipboard in the order you'll be using it. I recommend filling out the forms yourself during the consultation, using them to guide your conversation.

The order of your paperwork should be:

1. Informed Consent and Waiver of Liability
2. Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q+)
3. Health History and Present Medical Condition Questionnaire
4. Comprehensive Client Information Sheet (goals, preferences, and so on)
5. Readiness for Change Questionnaire
6. Typical Day in the Life Questionnaire
7. Social Support Questionnaire
8. Cancellation policy
9. Refund policy
10. What to Expect During Your First Session sheet



REMEMBER

No matter how good you are, you must set your ego aside during an initial consultation. You need to find out as much as you can about your prospective client, which means asking insightful questions and being a good listener. The initial consultation is all about the other person and how you can help them with their fitness goals.

Conducting the Initial Consultation

You've arrived ten minutes early in your clean polo, clipboard in hand. It's go time! You're about to meet with your prospective client for the first time — take a deep breath, relax, and go for it! You've done most of the hard work already. Now is the time to relax and enjoy getting to know your client-to-be.

Setting the tone

Say you meet someone at a party, and before you can even say, "So, come here often?" they launch into an interrogation about your health problems and eating habits. You'd probably bolt for the door, right? That's why setting the tone with a potential client is so important.

Upon greeting your consult, shake hands and make small talk about the weather or driving conditions to break the ice. Settle yourself in a position where you can look them directly in the eyes while you're speaking. You should be close enough to share your clipboard with them when you're presenting your services, but not so close that you invade their personal space.

Reviewing the client's health and medical history

The health history form contains important information that will help you to determine how you'll train your client and note how exercise might affect them.

Preparticipation health screening

The purpose of preparticipation health screening is to identify risk factors for cardiovascular, pulmonary, and metabolic diseases and any other health conditions that you should be aware of (like pregnancy or previous injuries). I recommend screening all prospective clients regardless of age or health status as part of your initial consultation. This way you can determine if the person should consult with their physician before starting an exercise program. You don't need to bring this up with a prospective client until they have decided to become an actual client, and I'll tell you later in this chapter when and how to ask for a physician's clearance.

PAR-Q+

The *Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire* (PAR-Q+) is a simple medical history and health risk appraisal questionnaire that anyone can access online and use for free. I recommend using the PAR-Q+ in your initial consultations to gather information from your prospective clients. Check out the current version of the PAR-Q+ online at www.acsm.org/docs/default-source/files-for-resource-library/par-q-acsm.pdf.

Medications

Some medications affect heart rate or blood pressure, or can make a person dizzy from exertion, among other side effects. That's why you need to know the type of medications your client is taking.



If you don't know what a medication does, or what the side effects are, ask a local pharmacist. You can also look up medication information in the *Physicians' Desk Reference* online at www.pdr.net.

Previous surgeries

You'll want to know about any surgeries your client has been through — especially if the surgery involved a joint, muscle, tendon, or cartilage. If you're unsure of the training parameters for a client who has had a surgery involving *soft tissue* (muscle, ligament, or tendon), ask for permission to contact their surgeon or physical therapist for guidance. **Remember:** you'll need written permission from the client before their healthcare provider will share patient information with you.



TIP

Don't hesitate to contact the surgeon's office or physical therapy clinic to ask for exercise parameters — it will show your prospective client that you care enough to make sure you have the right information to work with them safely. And, as a bonus, you may also develop a new professional relationship with the provider.

Muscle aches, strains, and pulls

When asking your potential client about any aches, strains, or muscle pulls they experience frequently, pause and give them a chance to think about it. People will often forget about nagging aches and pains, or they just think it's no big deal and don't mention it. It's a good idea to ask about each joint specifically during the initial consultation because often times you'll trigger a memory of waking up with a stiff back or having knee pain when walking down steps.

Be sure to make a note of which side the person is experiencing pain or soreness and how frequently it happens. Use this part of your consultation to flag any movements that may cause problems during the actual workout.

Learning about a day in the life of your potential client

You need to know about your potential client's daily lifestyle, from their eating and sleeping habits to their stress levels. Using a "typical day" questionnaire, ask the person to verbally take you through a typical day, starting from the time they wake up, and explaining in as much detail as possible everything they do until going to bed at night.



TIP

Some questions you'll want to ask include:

- » Do you wake up in the morning feeling rested and refreshed? Or do you wake up feeling tired?

- » How many meals a day do you have? Do you typically eat each meal around the same time each day?
- » Do you have lasting energy throughout the day?
- » Do you feel stressed throughout the day?
- » How many hours of sleep do you get?
- » What kind of job do you have? Is it active, or do you sit in a chair all day?

These types of questions will help you determine exactly where your client is starting from in terms of lifestyle. Understanding how a person is feeling and why will help you determine how to get them started with making healthy lifestyle adjustments that are in alignment with their goals.

Identifying your client's goals and reasons why

After asking typical day questions, have your prospective client describe their goals to you. Ask specific questions to get to the root of what they want and why it matters. When you feel like you understand your client's goals, repeat them back in your own words. Doing this demonstrates to the client that you understand what they want, or it allows them to correct you if you didn't quite get it right. Keep talking through it until you're sure you're on the same page.

Discussing your client's exercise history

After you've identified your prospective client's goals, move on to the exercise history questions. This will allow you to find out what your prospect's experience has been with exercise, what they liked or didn't like about it, and other information that will help to guide your recommendations.

Before You Say Goodbye

Now you know everything there is to know about your prospective client, down to what brand of toothpaste they prefer (okay, maybe not that), and it's time to say goodbye. Before you head for the door (or show your prospective client out), summarize everything you've discussed and answer any remaining questions. Then show your prospect how you can help and which of your services you recommend.

Outlining solutions that will meet your prospect's goals



TIP

Propose a plan for the potential client to reach their goals, and using their goals as your objectives, outline how you can help. (This is where all that stuff you studied for in your certification comes in handy!) For example, you might say:

I believe that if we start training together twice a week, we can steadily progress to your goal of exercising three times a week on your own in four to six weeks. I wouldn't want to start you working out three times a week immediately, because you haven't exercised consistently before and your schedule is really busy. Starting slowly will help you get into the habit of exercising without feeling overwhelmed by it.



REMEMBER

Your plan isn't set in stone and it's important to communicate this to your prospective client. You can make sound recommendations, but can't predict with certainty how the client will respond to a program before trying it. You can say, "I don't know you or your body yet, but if you respond well to your fitness assessment, this is what I envision for you . . ." Then lay out the plan.

Explaining your prospect's options

After you propose your solution, explain your services and go over your rates. For example, if you only offer one-on-one personal training, you might recommend starting with eight personal training sessions so your new client can exercise with you twice per week for their first month. If you offer personal training and group training, make your recommendation based on your client's needs and preferences.

Requiring a physician's release

Occasionally, you'll meet with a prospective client who should undergo a medical evaluation to obtain a physician's release before they start working with you. This *physician's release* is important both for the client's safety and yours. For most people, physical activity is safe and the benefits of regular exercise far outweigh the health risks associated with being sedentary, and you don't need to require a physician's release from all your clients. You do however need to understand when you should and shouldn't ask for it. A basic personal trainer certification will prepare you to work with apparently healthy adults, and most will provide at least some information about when to require a physician's release, but some won't. Either way, your clients' safety is your responsibility, and so is knowing how to identify who could benefit from a medical evaluation. I recommend following the American College of Sports Medicine's (ACSM's) exercise

preparticipation health screening recommendations, which you can download for free from their website at www.acsm.org/docs/default-source/files-for-resource-library/acsm-prescreening101.pdf?sfvrsn=bc703144_4.



TIP

The ACSM's recommendations were updated recently to reduce barriers to exercise and encourage more people to adopt an active lifestyle. These guidelines recognize that physical activity is safe for most people. No doctor's appointment required.

Setting the stage for the first appointment

If all has gone well, the next step is to set up your first appointment with your new client. Explain that the first session is a fitness assessment, where you'll be measuring your client's baseline fitness levels.



REMEMBER

After you've set the appointment, you'll need to collect payment based on your payment policy. **Remember:** You're not charging for the initial consultation (which you're just wrapping up); you're charging for the first appointment.



TIP

After you've set up your first appointment and collected your fee, make sure before you leave that you have your new client sign your:

- » Client agreement form
- » Waiver of liability
- » Cancellation policy
- » Refund policy

Before the client signs each one, briefly explain the purpose of each policy and answer any questions they may have. Have the client sign two copies— one for your records and one for theirs.

You're almost done! The last step is to explain to your new client what happens next. Clarify what they should wear to the first session, whether or not to eat beforehand, whether they should purchase anything (like a pair of sneakers if they don't have any), and remind them to bring a water bottle and towel if you don't provide these. This helps to alleviate anxiety the new client may have before their first appointment. It also sets you up for a great first session — one that will leave a positive impression in your client's mind. Let them know that everything you covered is also in their consult packet on the "What to Expect During Your First Session" sheet.

KNOWING WHEN TO BACK OFF: LETTING THE CLIENT THINK ABOUT IT

When you go car shopping, you don't open your wallet for the first car you look at — you tell the salesperson you'll think about it, then head out to look at other options. In the same way, some prospective clients would rather think about all the information you've gone over with them before signing on the dotted line. If your client seems unsure or combative, give them some space to make a decision.

Remember: Your time is limited and precious — you want clients who are champing at the bit to get in shape, not ones whose arms you have to twist. Leave your consult packet with the potential client to peruse on their own time, and let them know that you'll follow up in a few days to answer any questions they may have.

If a prospective client isn't interested, don't push the issue. Personal training is a service that clients will buy when they're good and ready. By being gracious and professional and respecting a person's space, you'll create a good first impression — and when that person is ready to start working with a personal trainer, you'll probably be the first one they call.

- » Getting your client started
- » Preparing your client for the session
- » Recording baseline measurements
- » Assessing your client's fitness
- » Going over the results

Chapter **11**

The First Session: Performing the Fitness Assessment

Before you take your new client into the gym and get their heart pumping, you need to know what they're ready to do, and what you should avoid. That's where the client assessment comes in. The client assessment is where you record baseline measurements and safe working ranges for the client's starting sessions. The baseline measurements provide an excellent motivational tool to use when showing your client their progress, and the safe working ranges ensure that your client does enough without doing too much.

You can measure baseline fitness levels in many different ways, and some methods are easier than others. Some require expensive equipment that's not all that portable, while others call for a PhD in exercise physiology to interpret the results. In this chapter, I cover some of the most practical assessment methods — ones that you can administer safely and effectively with little equipment (and without a PhD).

Prepping the Client

When your client arrives for their appointment, before you jump into the assessment, take a few minutes to go over your fitness assessment forms. Thoroughly explain each section of the form, detailing what the client will be doing in this initial session, what you're looking for, and why it's relevant. Having your client sit for a few minutes before getting started should help to lower their heart rate and blood pressure, as well as calm any jittery nerves before starting the fitness assessment.

Introducing the tools of your trade

After you've fully explained how the session is going to work, it's time to break out all the fun toys that you'll be using with your client!



REMEMBER

You don't have to own the most expensive gadgets to be a good trainer! Start with the bare essentials, and as you build profits you can upgrade your equipment if you want.



TIP

When purchasing equipment, consider factors such as safety, warranties, portability, durability, and cost. Ask other professionals in your area what they recommend — you don't need to reinvent the wheel.

The following list includes some low-budget tools that can increase your professionalism and profitability. Explain what each of the following tools does and when and where you'll be using it:

- » **Tape measure:** You won't believe how handy a tape measure is. You can measure girth, range of motion, flexibility, distance — and the stacks of money you'll earn as a personal trainer. Inexpensive and portable, tape measures with a *lanyard* (a string so you can hang it around your neck) and a self-retracting wheel will work best for you. (You don't want to spend all your time rolling and unrolling it!) You can find them for as little \$2 or \$3 in the arts-and-crafts departments of major discount stores or at online retailers, or you can check your local craft, sewing, or hobby store. Make sure the tape measure you choose is inelastic (not stretchy) too.
- » **Skinfold calipers:** Skinfold calipers are used to measure the thickness of skinfolds on various points of the body so you can estimate a person's bodyfat percentage. If you're going to include skinfold testing in your assessments, I recommend investing in a Lange Skinfold Caliper. At around \$200, the Lange Caliper isn't the cheapest option, but you'll get more accurate measurements because the arms are spring-loaded and provide constant standard pressure

(which basically means you're less likely to mess up). You can also calibrate the Lange Caliper each time you use it, meaning that you can be certain that your starting point is the same every time. You can get an inexpensive plastic skinfold caliper for around \$20, but I wouldn't recommend using one of these for the same reasons that I *do* recommend using the Lange Caliper. If you're going to do skinfold testing, you need to make sure your measurements are accurate every time. If you're not using a caliper that can be calibrated every time, you won't get accurate measurements.

» **Body-weight scale:** You'll need a scale to measure body weight. When purchasing a scale, ask yourself these questions:

- How portable is the scale?
- Is it thin and flat or big and bulky?
- Is it solar powered with battery backup, or just one or the other?
- What's the maximum poundage it can measure (and will I someday take clients who weigh more than that)?

Scales can range from \$30 to \$200, with the more expensive models being marketed to the medical community. I recommend scales made by Tanita, which are available online at www.tanita.com or at your local home store.

» **Heart-rate monitors:** Taking a heart rate manually can be tedious and time-consuming, especially if you're trying to get an active heart rate! Buying a heart-rate monitor to use with your clients is a good investment — the reading you get from it is immediate and accurate. Prices range from \$50 to \$350. Check out your local fitness-equipment stores for pricing, or do an online search for "heart-rate monitor." The most popular manufacturer is Polar, and you can check out their products at www.polar.com.

» **Blood-pressure cuffs and stethoscopes:** With prices ranging from \$30 to \$300 for a stethoscope and \$20 to \$80 for a blood-pressure cuff, you have a lot of options. Your best bet is to order from a medical-supply company like Quick Medical (www.quickmedical.com). You don't need anything fancy, but I wouldn't go with the cheapest. You'll need to listen to your client's heartbeats when you're measuring their blood pressure and it's hard to hear with cheap equipment. If you're not sure what to order, chat with one of the customer-service reps. Explain what you're looking for and they can offer advice about which products will best suit your needs.



TIP

While you're explaining the tools, go ahead and put your heart-rate monitor on your client. Have them sit down to relax, because your first step in the fitness assessment will be to measure their resting heart rate, which will be more accurate if your client is calm and relaxed.

Explaining the purpose of assessments

While your client rests for the heart-rate reading, let them know that the assessment isn't meant to test the limits of their physical ability. You're not looking for them to Hulk-out and pop veins in their forehead; you just want to determine a starting point for what they can do *comfortably*.



TIP

Playing down the assessment is critical because many clients will try to impress you with how much they can do, sometimes going above and beyond their safe working limits.

Using rate of perceived exertion scales

A good way to teach your clients how to manage the intensity of their workouts is to explain how easy or difficult a particular activity should feel. This method of letting your client evaluate their own working intensity is called *rate of perceived exertion* (RPE). (Ring a bell? This is one of the basic training principles taught in most certification courses.) Pair this technique with a heart-rate monitor, and you have a great method for showing your client how to evaluate workout intensity.



TIP

Teaching your client up front — at the initial fitness assessment — about perceived exertion will help you later on, because they'll be able to provide feedback as to how they're feeling compared with the actual intensity of the exercises you prescribed. You'll be able to make simple adjustments that make sense to your client based on how the exercises feel. This can be especially helpful with beginners because their perceived exertion might be much different from what the heart-rate monitor says. In other words, they'll probably feel like they're working much harder than they actually are at first. You can also set intensity levels for your client by using the same method when they're not with you (for instance, "When you're performing your circuit sets, you should be working around a level 6").

Another simple method for helping your clients understand how an exercise should feel is the talk test. This works especially well with aerobic exercise where you want the client to maintain a certain intensity level for several minutes. For example, you could say, "You should feel like carrying on a conversation would be challenging, but you could do it. If you can easily have a conversation, push yourself a little harder. If you're gasping for air and couldn't talk even if you had to, you're working too hard."

You may want to prepare something like the chart in Table 11-1 that you can use with each new client to describe how their exercises should feel.

TABLE 11-1 **The Perceived-Rate-of-Exertion Scale**

Cardio-respiratory Conditioning Level	Perceived Exertion Rating Level	Workout Intensity	Similar to . . .
No Effort	0	Not exercising	Sitting down and relaxing
Very little effort	1	Very easy	Standing up
Warm-up or recovery effort	2	Somewhat easy	Walking
Warm-up or recovery effort	3	Moderate	Walking moderately
Aerobic effort	4	Somewhat hard	Walking uphill moderately
Aerobic effort	5	Moderately hard	Jogging slowly
Aerobic effort	6	Hard	Jogging fast
Anaerobic effort	7	Hard	Running moderately
Anaerobic effort	8	Very hard	Running
Anaerobic effort	9	Very, very hard	Sprinting
Anaerobic effort	10	Maximal	Sprinting maximally

Recording Baseline Measurements

All-righty then! You have your client relaxed and ready to begin, your assessment tools are laid out and ready to be put into action, your pencil is sharpened, and your clipboard is at the ready. What are you waiting for? Let's get started!

Taking your client's resting heart rate

You can use either one of two easy methods for measuring heart rate — the palpation method or the heart-rate-monitor method. I cover each of these in the following sections.

Palpation method

Palpation is the most common method for taking heart rate. It's also the least expensive — all you need are your index and middle fingers and a stopwatch. The three commonly used sites for this are the radial artery, brachial artery, or the carotid artery. I recommend using the radial artery (located near the thumb side

of the wrist) because it's the least invasive and easiest to palpate for most people. Here's how you do it:

1. Using the tips of your index and middle fingers, locate the radial artery.

Avoid using your thumb, because it has its own pulse and may confuse your count.

2. Using your stopwatch or the second hand on your watch, keep time while counting the beats for either 30 seconds or 60 seconds. (If you're counting for 30 seconds, multiply the final count by 2 to calculate the one-minute resting heart rate.)

If you start your stopwatch simultaneously with a beat, count that beat as 0. If your stopwatch or secondhand is already running, count the first beat you start your time measure on as 1.



TIP

When measuring heart rate, make sure your client is calm and still, and remember that the *white-coat effect* (elevated heart rate due to nervousness from being around an analyst) may skew the results.

Heart-rate-monitor method

Heart-rate monitoring is easy and painless — the equipment does all the work for you! A monitor is always on, giving you continuous feedback. To use a chest-strap monitor, follow these instructions:

- 1. Attach the transmitter to the elastic strap.**
- 2. Moisten the two grooved electrodes.**
- 3. Adjust the strap length to fit snugly and comfortably.**
- 4. Secure the strap around your client's chest, just below the chest muscles at the *xiphoid process* (the area where the two halves of your rib cage meet at the bottom of your breastbone), and buckle it.**
- 5. Make sure the area under the electrodes are wet as well, or that the transmitter has snug contact with the wet fabric/skin.**
- 6. Check the specific manufacturer's directions on the interaction of the watch (receiver) and the chest strap (transmitter).**

Measuring your client's blood pressure

Measure blood pressure when your client is in a full resting state for at least five minutes. A normal resting blood pressure is below 120 systolic and 80 diastolic (120/80). "Hypertension," or high blood pressure is a condition where resting

blood pressure is chronically elevated above normal. If your client's resting blood pressure exceeds 130/80 at rest, they may have hypertension. Slightly elevated blood pressure isn't cause for alarm; however, a reading of 180 or higher systolic and 120 or higher diastolic (180/120) is considered a hypertensive crisis and the client should seek medical care right away.



WARNING

Hypertension can't be diagnosed with one blood pressure reading. That requires several measurements on different days. If your client's resting blood pressure is elevated during the assessment, check it again at their next session. Sometimes you'll get a high reading if the client is nervous or overly caffeinated that day. If you measure again a few days later and it's still elevated, you don't have to send your client away, but you shouldn't blow it off either. Tell your client that, for their safety, you recommend sharing the information with their doctor.



TIP

Follow these tips to take your client's blood pressure:

- 1. Have your client sit upright in a chair that supports their back, with either the left or right arm exposed, palm facing up and supported at heart level.**
- 2. Select the appropriate cuff size for your client.**

The large adult cuff size is for people whose arm circumference is 13 to 16½ inches (33 to 42 cm). The adult standard cuff size is for people whose arm circumference is 9½ to 12½ inches (24 to 32 cm).
- 3. Place the cuff on your client's arm so that the *air bladder* (the cuff that goes around your client's arm) is directly over the *brachial artery* (the large pulse point on the inside of the arm) and the edge of the cuff is 1 inch above the *antecubital space* (the crease where your arm bends on the inside of the elbow).**
- 4. With your client's palm facing up, place the stethoscope directly over the antecubital space.**

Do not press so hard that the stethoscope indents the skin.
- 5. Position the *sphygmomanometer* (the dial on the cuff you use to measure blood pressure) so that the center of the dial is at eye level.**

Be sure that all tubing is free and not in contact with anything else.
- 6. When everything is in place, quickly inflate the air bladder to 160 mmHg.**
- 7. Upon maximum inflation, turn the air-release screw counterclockwise to release the pressure slowly, at a rate of 2 mmHg per second.**
- 8. Mentally note the mmHg at which you hear the first *Korotkoff sound* (a heartbeat-like sound).**

This is your systolic number.

9. Mentally note the mmHg where the Korotkoff sounds disappear.

This is your diastolic number.

10. Continue to observe the manometer to ensure the sounds stay disappeared.

11. When you've confirmed the absence of sound, rapidly release the pressure and remove the cuff.



TIP

If you feel uncomfortable using these tools, buy an automatic blood-pressure cuff similar to the ones used in drugstores. Use it until you get more practice with the sphygmomanometer.

Measuring body composition

Your clients will all have their reasons for hiring you, and for many, their goals will include losing fat, putting on muscle, or both. Because body weight consists of muscle, fat, organs, bones, and fluids, tracking only scale weight can be a very disheartening and misleading assessment tool for monitoring change. A client's body weight can fluctuate a lot, and for many different reasons, and sometimes by several pounds in a day— and for a fat-loss client, it's not very motivating to step on the scale at the high point of those extra pounds! A more accurate way to measure your client's progress (fat loss or muscle gain) is to include a body composition analysis in your initial assessment. A body composition analysis can tell your client roughly how many pounds of fat versus fat-free mass they have. Personal trainers have several options for measuring body composition and I review the most common methods in this chapter.

Skinfold assessment

The least expensive and most reasonably accurate method for use in the field is the *skinfold* assessment, which analyzes body composition by measuring the thickness of skinfolds at several points on the body using a skinfold caliper (this is where you'll use your Lange Caliper). This method assumes that there is a predictable relationship between subcutaneous fat and total bodyfat, and when administered properly, a skinfold assessment can predict bodyfat percentage fairly well (within 3 to 4 percent). Several formulas for analyzing bodyfat exist, from three-site methods to nine-site methods. The more sites that you're able to read from, the more accurate a picture you're going to get. Depending on the method you use for measuring bodyfat, the number of locations and site locations themselves vary. Refer to your certification manual for the specifics on how to locate, measure, and mark each site based on the formula you will be using.

Follow these tips for skinfold testing:

- » **Take all skinfold measurements on the right side of the body.**
- » **Take all measurements pre-exercise, when the client's skin is dry and free of lotions or oils.** Exercise causes hydration changes in the skin that significantly affect skin thickness, therefore affecting the skinfold reading.



WARNING

The skinfold method isn't appropriate for everyone. For example, if you have a client with a lot of excess bodyfat, it's likely that you'll take an unreliable measurement due to the large size of the pinch and the inability to pull the skin away from muscle. Try a few random pinches on different areas of the body that may be thin enough to measure correctly so you can establish some sort of baseline. Or try to find a formula that may work with the pinches you can take on that person. Another consideration is that skinfolds need to be taken directly on the skin (not through clothing) and some people aren't comfortable with this. Also, because you'll be pinching the client's skin, this method is somewhat invasive and it can be painful. Make sure you're up front with your clients about what the skinfold assessment entails and then ask if they wish to proceed.

Bioelectrical impedance analysis

In this method, a small electrical current is sent through the body via a device that measures the amount of time it takes for the signal to return to it. Fat tissue doesn't contain a lot of water, making it a poor electrical conductor and providing an impedance to the electrical current. Lean mass is mostly made of water (about 70 percent) and is a good electrical conductor. Bioelectrical impedance assumes that the volume of fat-free mass in the body is proportional to the electrical conductivity of the body. Bioelectrical impedance analysis is a noninvasive and easy method for assessing body composition, and because it doesn't cause any physical discomfort, it can be a better option for some clients.



TIP

Keep in mind that bioelectrical impedance is sensitive to hydration status and the accuracy of this method can be affected by the client's hydration status.

To improve the accuracy of bioelectrical impedance analysis, give your client the following instructions ahead of time:

- » **Don't eat or drink within four hours of the analysis.**
- » **Avoid exercise within 12 hours of the analysis.**
- » **Empty your bladder completely within 30 minutes of the analysis.**

» **For females, reschedule the analysis if you're in a stage of your menstrual cycle where you're retaining water.**

There are various devices available for bioelectrical impedance analysis and instructions will vary based on which one you use. Be sure to follow the instructions specific to the device you're using to improve accuracy and avoid user errors.

Hydrostatic weighing

Hydrostatic weighing (also called *hydrodensitometry*) isn't typically used for body composition analysis in fitness settings and is more common in clinical or research settings. This method is based on the Archimedes' principle, which states that a body immersed in water is buoyed by a counterforce equal to the weight of the water that is displaced. Basically this means that fat mass and fat-free mass act differently in water. Fat mass is less dense than water and buoyant. Fat-free mass is more dense than water and sinks. So, a body with a lot of fat will float and a body with a lot of lean mass will sink.

The process involves getting into a dunk tank while a technician drops you completely under the water and instructs you to blow all the air out of your lungs. The accuracy of this method requires complete cooperation by the person being tested, and finding a facility with a hydrostatic weighing tank can be challenging.

Ultrasound

Ultrasound devices are becoming an increasingly popular alternative to skinfold assessments in fitness settings. You can measure subcutaneous skinfold thickness with an ultrasound device, and unlike skinfold calipers, it can also analyze deeper fat deposits. Ultrasound devices are portable and relatively inexpensive, but there are disadvantages to this method, including reliability of the device (some are higher quality than others). There's also not a standardized testing protocol available yet, meaning that you can't follow the instructions and expect consistent results like you can with a skinfold assessment.

Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA)

DXA works by measuring x-rays as they pass through the body and quantifying three components of body composition: bones, lean mass, and fat mass. DXA technology is typically used to measure bone density in medical and research settings, and because it can predict bodyfat percentage with near perfect accuracy, it's considered the gold standard for body composition analysis, and more medical private practices are offering DXA assessment as a service. DXA isn't feasible in most fitness settings because it's an expensive test (\$100 or more) that requires

specialized training, and DXA scanners aren't widely available for commercial use. Other advantages of DXA are the minimal effort needed from the patient or client — there aren't any instructions they need to follow before the test — and it only takes a few minutes.

Circumference measurements

Circumference measurements (also called girth measurements) are useful for identifying how a person's bodyfat is distributed. This matters because some circumference measurements can predict a client's health. For example, someone with excess fat in their trunk — the technical term being *android obesity*, otherwise known as the “beer belly” — has an increased risk of developing hypertension, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic conditions. You can quantify “excess fat” with a circumference measurement of the waist. Health risk increases when waist circumference is more than 88 centimeters for women and 102 centimeters for men.



TIP

Circumference measurements are also useful for tracking changes in a client's bodyfat distribution. You can estimate a client's bodyfat percentage by plugging various circumference measurements into a translational equation, but it's not very accurate, which is why it's a good idea to also include a body composition analysis in your assessment protocol.

It's also important to include *anthropometric measurements* in the assessment and for you to understand the difference between these and body composition analysis. Anthropometrics will give you information about your client's external proportions — things like height, weight, and circumferences (this is where your tape measure comes in). These measurements won't tell you about your client's internal body composition — like how much fat versus how much lean mass they're starting with. That's why for most clients, especially those with fat-loss goals, tracking body composition is a good idea so you can see what's happening on the inside. But there's still value in anthropometric measurements for a couple of reasons. First, they give you more information about your client than you would otherwise have, and too much information is always better than not enough. You can also empower your clients to monitor their progress by teaching them how to take these measurements accurately on their own. Circumference measurements are helpful because they don't typically fluctuate nearly as much or as often as the scale does.

Including both body composition analysis and anthropometric measurements in the assessment can give your client a total picture of their body's physical state. You can refer to your certification manual for descriptions of circumference sites and instructions for measuring them.

Here are a few additional tips for consistency in your circumference measurements:

1. **Have your client stand in the correct anatomical position with arms relaxed by their sides.**
2. **Ask the client to relax the area to be measured — no flexing!**
3. **Always take measurements from either the right side or the left side of the client's body. Either side works; just make sure you're doing it the same way every time.**



TIP

Practice taking circumference measurements on your friends and family before you start seeing clients. You'll be more comfortable when you know what you're doing and with practice, you'll get better and faster at it.

Assessing Your Client's Fitness

Imagine taking an English class and being tested on, say, how to dissect a frog or how to solve a quadratic equation. You would likely fail the test — and feel pretty rotten to boot.



TIP

In the same way, you have to make sure that the tests you give your clients won't injure them physically or damage their pride. For instance, you may have a 55-year-old female with weak legs whose only recent exercise has been changing the channel on her TV. Knowing that she's deconditioned and has some possible joint problems with her knees, would you administer a step test? Most likely not. How about a walk-run test? No again.

What you *can* do, however, is take what you've learned from the clinical aspects of testing and create your own individualized cardiovascular test just for your client. When you retest her, you'll need to re-create the test exactly as you did it the first time — and that's okay, because the point of testing with most of your clients is to show them that they're improving and getting stronger.



REMEMBER

Most clients won't know what $VO_2\text{max}$ is — and they won't really care. What they *will* care about, however, is how much easier it is for them to perform a five-minute march, how quickly their heart rate comes down, and how they now consider a certain exercise to be a perceived rate of exertion level 3, whereas the first time they did it they rated it a 6.



REMEMBER

When testing your client, apply only the tests that are going to be the most useful for you and beneficial for that person.

Run, don't walk: Testing cardiovascular endurance

A key component to any exercise prescription is aerobic conditioning. Most clients will be concerned about their heart health and overall cardiovascular endurance, and the tests in the following sections will show them where they stand (or walk, or run).

The walk-run test

The walk-run test is a great field test to measure a client's cardiovascular capacity. All you'll need is a stopwatch and a measured mile. Here's how to make it work:

1. **Mark off a one-mile route.**
2. **Have your client warm up for three to five minutes prior to starting the course.**

Your client can warm up by walking at a comfortable pace.
3. **Instruct the client to finish the course as quickly as they can — walking, jogging, running, whatever they can do.**
4. **Give the client a countdown for starting the test, and start your stopwatch with their first step.**
5. **After the client finishes the course, either immediately take their pulse for ten seconds, or use a heart-rate monitor to record exercise heart rate.**
6. **One minute after stopping the test, record the client's heart rate again.**

This number is their *recovery heart rate* and refers to how long it takes for the heart rate to return to baseline following a bout of exercise.



TIP

You can also perform this test on a treadmill, or with a shorter distance if one mile is too long. Just follow the same testing procedures.

The step test

Another great field test, the step test can be done with an actual 12-inch platform step or with any step available — such as a stair in your client's home, an aerobic step, or an outside step (as long as the step is no higher than 12 inches and you use the same one every time you re-test). Here's how to do it:

1. **Explain to your client that they're going to be stepping "up, up, down, down" (up with one leg, up with the other, down with one leg, down with the other) at a pace a little faster than one second per step.**

2. **Have them step to a cadence of 96 beats per minute (or more slowly if necessary) for three minutes.**

You can count cadence if you have a stopwatch by counting on the seconds: “up, up, down, down, up, up, down, down . . .”). You can also set a metronome so that you don’t have to worry about counting at the right pace.

3. **When the client has stepped for three minutes, take their heart rate manually for ten seconds or read the heart-rate monitor.**

This is their exercise heart rate.

4. **One minute after stopping exercising, take their heart rate again.**

This number will be their recovery heart rate.



WARNING

This test isn’t appropriate for everyone and you should avoid using it with people who have back, knee, or hip problems.

Stretch marks: Testing flexibility

A long muscle is a strong muscle — so testing flexibility is important in evaluating your client’s overall fitness. Because the hamstrings are among the most commonly understretched muscles and have a direct impact on the health of the back, it’s a good test to include in your fitness assessment.

The sit-and-reach test

For a lot of beginning clients, touching their toes is out of the question. Although fitness experts have recently debated the usefulness of the sit-and-reach test, it’s an easy test to administer in the field and flexibility is an important component of a person’s overall physical fitness. The only equipment you need is a nonelastitized tape measure and your client. Be sure to perform this test only after you’ve thoroughly warmed up your client (for example, after completing the cardiovascular test). Conducting the flexibility test after your client is warmed up reduces their risk of pulling any muscles. You’ll be able to find guidelines and fitness categories for the sit-and-reach test in your certification manual.



TIP

Getting down and up from the floor is challenging for some people. If you’re unsure about asking a client to get down on the floor because you’re not confident that they’ll be able to get back up, have them sit in a chair instead and follow the same guidelines as you would if they were seated on the floor. Just make sure you document if you use a chair so you’ll remember to use it when you re-test later.

Testing muscular strength and endurance

Let's face it — a lot of personal training is about building muscles, or as Hans and Franz said on *Saturday Night Live*, “We vant [clap!] to pump you up.” As a personal trainer, much of your time will be spent dealing with your client's muscular strength and endurance, which is why it's really important to put some serious time into this portion of the fitness assessment.



TIP

Explaining the difference between muscular strength and muscular endurance as you demonstrate each test will be helpful to your client — no need to overwhelm them with too much detail here, but they'll appreciate understanding why you're asking them to do certain exercises and how they're beneficial.



REMEMBER

Muscular *endurance* is the body's ability to exert a submaximal force for a sustained period of time. Muscular *strength* is the body's ability to exert a maximal force for a very short period of time.

The push-up test

The push-up test is frequently used in the field, because it requires no equipment. Plus, for some clients who aren't strong enough to do sustained repetitions, it can be used as a measure of strength rather than endurance. Refer to your certification manual for push-up testing procedures.



TIP

Remember how some people have trouble getting up from the floor? Good news, a wall works really well for testing these clients. Follow the same procedure as you would for push-ups performed on the floor. You can also use a modified push-up position (from the knees instead of from the toes) if your client doesn't yet have the upper body strength to perform a proper push-up. If push-ups are completely out of the question (say your client has an injured wrist), you can use a set of dumbbells and have them perform chest presses instead. Again, just be sure to use the same protocol consistently for each individual client.



TIP

Don't hesitate to use this part of the assessment to “test” starting weights for exercises you're planning on using with the client. After each test set of 10 to 12 reps, ask your client for a rating of perceived exertion. When your client rates the set a 6 or 7, you've found your starting weight for that exercise.

The weakest link: Uncovering asymmetries and identifying poor movement patterns

Functional movement assessments have been used in physical therapy and by coaches for a long time to assess joint mobility and stability, and to identify any risk factors that a patient or player may have for musculoskeletal injuries. Functional

movement assessments have become increasingly popular in fitness settings in recent years as a way to monitor improvements or problems with clients' movement patterns.

The most common of these, the Functional Movement Screen (FMS), was designed by physical therapists Gray Cook and Lee Burton in the 1990s to predict a person's musculoskeletal injury risk by identifying asymmetries in seven fundamental movement patterns. The FMS is a screening tool with seven individual movement pattern assessments and three clearing tests. Movement assessments are scaled on a scale of 0 to 3 and the total score is then used to determine whether a client should be cleared for exercise or referred to a physical therapist (or other health-care professional) for further assessment. Personal trainers can use the FMS to identify a client's "weakest link" to guide program design decisions and to reduce injury risk by adding load to an asymmetry or training a faulty movement pattern. To learn more about the FMS and how to become certified if you're interested in using it in your fitness assessment protocol (which, by the way, is required if you're going to use it), visit www.functionalmovement.com.



TIP

Doing a movement assessment is a quick and simple way to screen your clients for risk factors that may lead to injuries. They'll appreciate understanding how to get fit without getting hurt!

Discussing the Results with Your Client

After you're done with your fitness assessment, take the time to review your client's results with them. Start by setting realistic goals that can be achieved in one month's time. If you reassess the client's fitness level at the beginning of every month, they'll know when to expect it — and it's extra incentive to stay committed to the program when there's a looming deadline!



TIP

Give your client accurate assessments of normal ranges for people with similar body types, ages, and conditioning levels as theirs. When you re-assess in a month, you can measure progress in percentages improved rather than against the norms.

Referring to a Professional in Your Network if Necessary

As much as I want to encourage you to remove as many barriers as you possibly can for your clients, a lot of situations are beyond your scope of practice as a personal trainer. Some specific examples include diagnosing or attempting to treat

musculoskeletal injuries, medical nutrition therapy, recommending drugs (not even Advil), mental health care, and really anything that requires a medical degree or other higher education. Understanding when to refer a client to a professional for further evaluation or treatment is in everyone's best interest — your client's because you're getting them the help they need, and yours because working outside of your scope of practice is a liability risk and can get you in serious hot water.



TRUE
STORY

I'm really lucky to have an amazing professional network. It's always been important to me to nurture these relationships so I can serve my clients as best I can. My advice to you is to start making connections with professionals in your area right away, even if you don't have any clients yet, and even if you're not even certified yet. My own network includes physicians, the best physical therapists I know, a dietitian, a chiropractor, a massage therapist, an acupuncturist, and more. When you have a strong network, you won't have to "refer out" when a client needs to see a professional. You'll be able to find that client the healthcare or other professional they need and help them to make an appointment with someone you know and trust, and going above and beyond for your clients like this will mean way more to them than your vast fitness knowledge ever could.

- » Considering your client's programming needs
- » Planning your client's program
- » Laying out your client's program
- » Creating methods to measure your client's progress

Chapter 12

Before We Meet Again: Planning the Program

When you're planning out your clients' programs, you of course need to consider how you're going to help them achieve their fitness goals. Sometimes a plan looks great on paper, but as the saying goes, even the best laid plans sometimes go awry. Your programs need to align with your clients' goals, but more importantly, a plan has to realistically fit into the life of the person who is working that plan. Your job is to do everything possible to set your clients up for success, and that includes planning exercise programs that are enjoyable, livable, doable, and achievable.



REMEMBER

Before you start planning a program for your client, you need to have the initial consultation and do the initial fitness assessment, covered in Chapters 10 and 11.

Now it's time for the fun stuff — planning your client's program, which means deciding what exercises your client will do, how many of them, and for how long — the stuff that personal training is all about. So get ready to make your client's fitness dreams a reality!

Get with the Program: Considering Your Client's Programming Needs

If creating an exercise program were based solely on the results of a fitness assessment, prescribing exercises wouldn't be so challenging — in fact, it would be the easiest part of a personal trainer's job. The problem with using data to create a program is that a human being shows up. If your program is too time consuming, too intense, too easy, too boring, too complicated . . . you name it . . . your client probably won't be around for long.

A comprehensive exercise program isn't only about the physiological benefits that your client seeks. You need to consider many other factors besides the results of your client's fitness assessment. Issues such as time availability, where and when your client is planning to exercise, what equipment they'll have available, and what equipment they may need are important parameters to consider. Also, you need to keep in mind intangible aspects like your client's lifestyle, personality, exercise likes and dislikes, motivation levels, and commitment to train.

When you have a strong grasp of all these important parts, you'll be able to successfully piece together a sound (and successful!) fitness formula for each individual client.

Understanding your client's goals

It's the reason your client came to you in the first place — a motivating desire to make a change. Your client's goals become *your* goals — that's why you need to understand your client's goals and why they matter to them. Programming specifically to reach those goals, is key.



REMEMBER

Your client's goal is their “fuel” — it's the driving force that feeds them mentally, keeping them motivated and on track. Your job is to sustain that fuel by prescribing a program that works.

For example, if a client came to you saying that they wanted to run a marathon, would you have them bench-pressing one and a half times their body weight? Probably not.



TIP

As you're planning your client's program, think of ways that you can explain how each exercise or activity contributes to reaching their goals. Your clients will be more compliant and dedicated when they understand the why's of the program.

Location, location, location: Knowing where your client will be exercising

When you sit down to plan your client’s exercise program, you need to know where they’ll be exercising. Each location — such as the gym, home, office, or outdoors — has its own unique set of variables that you’ll need to consider so you can choose exercises accordingly.

Table 12–1 provides a quick overview of the pros and cons of different training locations.

TABLE 12-1 **The Pros and Cons of Different Locations**

Location	Pros	Cons
Gym	Optimal environment for strength training Large variety and selection of equipment	May be difficult to travel to Client may not feel “ready” to train in a gym Can be crowded during peak hours, requiring you to wait for equipment
Home	Can exercise any time Easy and convenient to get to Clients can exercise in the comfort of their own homes	May not be enough space to exercise Limited equipment availability Clients may find exercise easy to put off because of other household responsibilities
Office	Allows clients to exercise during their working hours without having to leave work	Clients may find exercise easy to put off because of work-related responsibilities May not be enough space to exercise Limited equipment availability The client may not be comfortable exercising at work
Outside	Optimal environment to train for aerobic endurance Fresh air, nice views	Pollution, bugs, potential safety issues Very limited equipment availability Weather constraints

Knowing what equipment your client will (or won’t) be using

After determining your client’s exercise location, the next step is finding out what equipment they have access to.

If your client is training in a gym

Gyms typically have the largest selection of equipment — be sure find out beforehand what equipment they have. A good rule of thumb is to be sure you can cover each exercise in the program with at least one piece of equipment or dumbbell movement.



TIP

If your client has hired you to create a program to use in a gym you aren't familiar with, visit the gym ahead of time to see if it's set up to accommodate personal training. Is there enough room for you to coach your client? Will you be able to alternate between multiple exercises without having to compete for equipment or space? If you can, work out there yourself — it'll help you to get a feel for the equipment and make your job a lot easier when it comes time to train your client there. Also, knowing where everything is and how it works makes you look more professional. Your client will appreciate that you took time to do some research.

If your client is training at home or the office

You can design a very effective workout with very little space and very little equipment. If your client doesn't have any equipment to start, you may want to recommend a few key pieces such as:

- » Resistance bands
- » Adjustable dumbbells
- » TRX suspension trainer
- » Gliding discs or fitness sliders
- » Foam roller
- » Foam pad or mat



REMEMBER

Your client doesn't need to have any of this to start — you can actually do a full routine with everyday objects like chairs and stairs and bodyweight exercises. You could recommend starting with one or two pieces, and then gradually add to the collection and diversify the program with new equipment.

If your client is exercising in the great outdoors

Equipment here varies greatly depending on the type of program you're looking to set your client up on — the outdoors is one big piece of equipment! You're limited only by your imagination — from walking or running a hilly course to obstacle-coursing it through the local park.

We've got your number: Considering how many sessions your client has purchased

Another very important factor to consider in your initial program-planning stage is how many sessions your client has purchased. If your client has purchased a small number of sessions (one to three), you need to determine what you can realistically teach in that amount of time. Start thinking about the progression of your sessions — this will help you to determine which exercises you can safely teach someone to do without you within that time frame.

The same holds true if your client has purchased a large number of sessions. Even though you have more time, you still need to determine ahead of time at approximately what points you'll progress the program.



REMEMBER

Be sure not to overwhelm your client with too much information at once. By knowing how many sessions you have to work with each client, you'll be able to break down the exercise progression you're teaching into stages, allowing you to deliver your information in small, easy-to-understand “bites” that allow your client to “digest” the information before moving on to the next session.



WARNING

Just as you wouldn't crush your client under bucketloads of weight in the first session — that's a fast way to lose a beginner — the same applies with how much information you unload on them the first time through. Information overload can be as much of a turnoff as pushing someone way too hard on day one! Educate your clients as you would train them — briefly explain what they'll be doing that day, and then focus on coaching them through the session.

Keeping injuries and medical conditions in mind

When planning out your client's exercise program, don't forget about any aches and pains they told you about, no matter how minor. And always keep at the forefront of your mind any major physiological issues (injuries, chronic conditions, and so on) that were covered during your initial consultation. When you're choosing exercises for a new client, double-check their medical history to make sure that you're not recommending anything that could be potentially harmful.



TIP

If you aren't sure what impact a particular exercise will have on an old injury, err on the side of caution and choose something else. If the client has seen a physical therapist or other rehab specialist, ask for permission to contact the provider for guidance.

Using Assessment Results to Create a Baseline Program

You've already done a good chunk of the work for this part (and if you haven't, you need to). By using your client's fitness assessment results, you can recommend starting weights for their resistance training exercises, training heart rate range for the aerobic program, and corrective exercises to address any imbalances or asymmetries that were identified during the functional movement screen if you did one.

Before you start madly concocting the best gosh-darn exercise program in the history of exercise programs, you need to determine the order of operations for your client's training plan. These factors include the following:

- » Type of exercises for the program
- » Order of exercises for the program
- » Working exercise intensity
- » Session duration
- » Exercise frequency

Your clients' training plans will vary, but the components of the training *session* should not. All comprehensive exercise programs should — at a minimum — address cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular fitness (including muscular strength and endurance), movement skill and exercise competence, conditioning, mobility, and flexibility. Keeping this in mind will lend structure to your exercise training sessions. Current American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) guidelines recommend always following this format:

- » **Warm-up:** Five to ten minutes of low-to-moderate-intensity cardiorespiratory and muscular endurance activities.
- » **Conditioning:** A total of at least 20 to 60 minutes of aerobic, resistance, neuromotor, and/or sports activities. Continuous exercise or ten-minute bouts of various exercises work here as long as the client accumulates a total of 20 to 60 minutes of daily aerobic exercise.
- » **Cool-down:** Five to ten minutes of low-to-moderate-intensity cardiorespiratory and muscular endurance activities.
- » **Flexibility:** Ten minutes or more of stretching exercises after the warm-up or cool-down.

Following this framework, you'll choose exercises for your client based on their:

- » Specific goals and objectives
- » Likes and dislikes of various aerobic activities
- » What type of equipment they have access to
- » How much time they're able to commit to an exercise program
- » Conditioning level and mobility



TIP

The initial consultation is a good time to discuss your client's exercise preferences. Ask them what type of exercise experience they have and what types of activities they prefer. If a client has been sedentary for a long time and doesn't have any preferences yet, that's okay too. Be sure to take detailed notes — they'll come in handy for this part of the process, and when your clients enjoy the activities you recommend, they'll look forward to them and are much more likely to make exercise a priority.

Aerobic Exercise Programming

In personal-training-speak, *cardiorespiratory* endurance refers to how well the circulatory system (heart and blood vessels) and the respiratory system (lungs) can provide oxygen to your body during sustained activity. Any type of activity that uses the body's large muscle groups in a sustained, movement-oriented manner that increases respiration for a prolonged period of time requires sufficient oxygen. Another common term for this is "aerobic" fitness, which makes sense because aerobic literally translates to "with oxygen." Aerobic exercise can either be done continuously or in intervals. Continuous, or "steady state" aerobic exercise is exactly what it sounds like. In a gym setting, it usually involves traditional fitness equipment like a bike or treadmill. Biking and walking can of course be done outdoors too.

You can offer many options for cardiovascular exercise — from traditional fitness equipment, such as a bike or elliptical trainer, to nontraditional methods, such as running bleachers at a local high school or college stadium (when there's no game, that is).



TIP

However, prescribing aerobic activity for your client is more than deciding to use a treadmill or walk outdoors, though that is an important part of it. You need to be able to recommend:

- » **Training mode:** Which activity will they do? Will it be equipment-based (such as the treadmill), or will walking outside be a better option?

- » **Training method:** What type of training method will they be doing while exercising? Will it be continuous training, where they maintain a steady heart rate for a sustained period of time, or will it be interval training where they'll alternate short bursts of high intensity effort with longer periods of recovery, when the client does the same movement at a slower pace?
- » **Working intensity:** Exactly how hard should they be working? Should they be able to gab with a friend on the neighboring treadmill, or will barely be able to carry on a conversation?
- » **Exercise frequency:** How often will your client exercise over a predetermined time period? Will it be four times a month, three times a week, every other day?
- » **Exercise duration:** How long is each exercise session? 20 minutes? An hour?

I cover each of these key questions in the following sections.

Choosing the proper training mode

The *mode* (or type) of exercise you prescribe for your client should be easily accessible and convenient (so extreme skydiving is probably out). It should be an activity that your client likes and a mode that you can *progress* or *regress* — the factors contributing to the workload (typically resistance, speed, and/or incline) can be incrementally increased to provide greater exercise intensity as your client's conditioning level increases or decreased on days when they're overly tired.

On a broad spectrum, equipment-based aerobic activity is preferable for most clients for multiple reasons — primarily because of the ease of use and easy access. You may know a few people who *absolutely love* to do cardio, but they're typically few and far between. The advent of cardio machines such as treadmills, elliptical trainers, and stationary bikes have made the boring task of getting healthy less boring by adding variety. Whereas, back in the olden days, if you wanted to get healthy, you had to worry about getting struck by lightning, tripping over a pothole, or swallowing a bug, now clients can listen to a podcast, watch TV, listen to their favorite music, *and* exercise without fear of being run over! Imagine that!

Table 12-2 provides a quick reference chart of several common aerobic training modes, all of which can be done in any location.

TABLE 12-2

Common Aerobic Training Modes

Activity/ Equipment	Client Level	Pros	Cons
Walking or running <i>Optional equipment:</i> Treadmill or elliptical machine	Beginning to advanced	<p>On machine, multivariable speed and resistance settings can accommodate all fitness levels.</p> <p>The client can control their movements easily — they'll be working on a fixed plane of movement, so there's no choice but to push the machine where it is designed to go.</p> <p>Walking has a low perceived exertion value, meaning clients don't think of it as a hard workout.</p> <p>The intensity level can be modified easily.</p> <p>Walking or running outside gives the client a dose of fresh air and nice scenery.</p>	<p>Can be difficult or unsafe for clients with balance problems or hip/knee/ankle/foot issues.</p> <p>Can be difficult or unsafe if performed outside in unfamiliar territory.</p>
Stair climbing <i>Optional equipment:</i> Stair stepper	Intermediate to advanced	<p>Equipment doesn't take up much room.</p> <p>More demanding exercise mode with higher perceived exertion value, meaning the client thinks of stair climbing as a harder workout.</p> <p>If performed outside, without a machine, the client can easily control the intensity of the workout.</p>	Continuous same-plane movement on a machine, which can place a strain on the lower back, knees, ankles, and feet.
Cycling <i>Optional equipment:</i> Upright bike or <i>recumbent bike</i> (where your feet are out in front of you, rather than underneath you)	Beginning to advanced	<p>Low perceived value of exertion, meaning the client doesn't perceive bicycle riding as a hard workout.</p> <p>Moderately inexpensive equipment to own.</p> <p>Recumbent position takes stress off lower back and hips.</p>	Upright model can place stress on lower back in some people.
Rowing <i>Optional equipment:</i> Rowing machine or upper-body <i>ergometer</i> (bicycle for the upper body)	Beginning to advanced	<p>Offers clients an upper-body aerobic workout.</p> <p>Very challenging.</p>	Clients with neck, shoulder, or lower back problems should be careful on this machine.

Choosing the best aerobic training method

When you've chosen what mode of aerobic exercise your client will be performing, the next step is determining what type of aerobic training method they'll be using. You have a choice of two types of training methods for cardiovascular conditioning: steady-state and interval training. Both options will allow for similar improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness, and you can determine which method is best suited for your clients based on their goals and preferences.

Steady-state aerobic training

Steady-state training is a method of aerobic training that maintains a moderately elevated heart rate for a sustained period of time. As implied by its name, steady-state training does not allow for a rest period during the working phase. Continuous training is well suited for all types of clients — from beginners to elite athletes.

The work is performed at a moderate intensity level (usually 60 to 80 percent of the client's maximum heart rate), and because of its lower intensity level, it can be done every day and for a longer period of time.



TIP

Clients who benefit most from continuous training are those who:

- » Are just starting to exercise aerobically on a regular basis
- » Have cardiovascular disease
- » Are older and have joint issues
- » Want to increase their cardiovascular endurance and stamina

Interval training

Interval training is a method of aerobic training that intersperses short, high-intensity bursts of maximal effort with intermittent recovery bouts. Interval training, such as high-intensity interval training (HITT), takes less time than steady-state training to accomplish the same training objectives, but it's also much more challenging.



TIP

Interval training is best suited for:

- » Clients who can no longer elevate their heart rate into a satisfactory working zone with continuous training.
- » Clients who are more conditioned and who want to increase their maximal oxygen consumption capacity (lung capacity).

- » Athletes who need to train at a maximum aerobic capacity for their sport or competition.
- » Clients who can't sustain moderate cardiovascular activity for long periods of time. Working hard for short periods of time followed by a long recovery period allows them to perform a greater total volume of work.

I cover various ways to incorporate interval training into the program in more detail in Chapter 15.

Determining working intensity

To the client, *working intensity* is how hard they'll work during the aerobic session. To you, it means the heart-rate training zone that the client will maintain during an aerobic session.

There are several methods for calculating working intensity. The most common is the *Karvonen formula*, which is a mathematical formula that uses an estimate of maximal heart rate based on a client's age and resting heart rate to determine optimal lower and upper aerobic training ranges.



REMEMBER

Tracking a client's heart rate during training is an objective measure of intensity, but it's not always the best option, especially for beginners. When a person has been sedentary for a long time, their rate of perceived exertion (RPE) is often much higher than their target heart-rate numbers suggest. You can set a target heart-rate training range, but also recommend a number on the RPE scale. With time, the client's RPE should correlate with their target heart rate.



REMEMBER

Achieving working intensity is the net result of how long the session lasts and at what pace. Other factors, such as resistance and training method, as well as exercise frequency, also contribute to the client's perception of intensity.

Specifying exercise frequency

Exercise frequency (or how often your client exercises) depends primarily on how much time they can set aside each week for exercise. You'll find that some clients will have no problem training three times a week, and others will be lucky if they can get in three times a month. Your job is to make fitness fit into your clients' lives, not the other way around.



REMEMBER

Too often, trainers tell their clients, "You need to be exercising three times a week for an hour," even when a client clearly isn't able to do that. Telling your clients what they *should* be doing is easy — but if they *could* do what they *should* be doing, they wouldn't have hired you in the first place. You're a professional

fitness troubleshooter — your job is to look at and evaluate each client's unique fitness needs and come up with a customized solution that works with their lifestyle. Let's say you have a client who travels every week and squeezing in workouts on the road is difficult. But that person is home on the weekends and can do an intense cardio session once a week. If that's what they *can realistically* do, that's what you prescribe. It's not the textbook three times a week, but at least it's some exercise — and some exercise is better than no exercise.

That said, the American College of Sports Medicine recommends doing cardiovascular exercise at least three days per week. Meet your clients where they're at, even if they can't meet the recommended guidelines. Some activity is better than none and you can always work with your clients to find ways to sneak extra activity minutes into their daily routines.



REMEMBER

Make sure you're taking into account how many other activities your client is participating in outside of their training sessions and include enough rest and recovery.

Designating duration

The *duration* of your client's session, or how long they will be exercising at one time, is ultimately determined by their personal fitness goals, the intensity level you have prescribed for, and how often they're training. On average, you should for having your clients exercising for between 20 and 40 minutes per session.



REMEMBER

The higher the intensity level of a training session, the less time it takes to complete it.

Creating a Strength Program

Putting together a strength program involves more than slapping some plates on a weight machine. You'll need to consider several factors as you're creating the ultimate resistance training workout for your client.

Choosing the exercises

One of the first steps in setting up a weight-training program is choosing which exercises your client is going to perform. You can choose from a multitude of equipment and methods; determining the best one for your client takes some time and effort.



TIP

To figure out which exercises are best for your client, consider the following:

- » **Their fitness goals:** Generally, you train your client in a specific way to produce a specific change or result to achieve specific goals. Keep in mind that only the muscles that are trained will change, and that's why your resistance training program has to target all the muscles that you're trying to change. This approach refers to *specificity of training*. (Did I mention that all this should be specific?) For example, if you were training a swimmer who wanted to be stronger, you would probably choose upper-body exercises for the back, chest, shoulders, and arms.
- » **Training location:** Where your clients will be training will help determine which exercises they can realistically and safely do in that particular training environment.
- » **Available equipment:** Resistance training can be done with little-to-no equipment, but eventually you'll need at least some equipment — whether it's a set of dumbbells, resistance bands, *selectorized weight machines* (a machine that has a stack of plates, where you select the weight by sticking a pin into the plate), or any other equipment that you can use for resistance training (there's a lot). Knowing what type of equipment the client has access to will help you determine which exercises you can include in their program.
- » **Previous exercise experience:** Knowing how much exercise experience your client has saves time and frustration during your sessions. Your number-one goal is to ensure that your client understands the exercise and can perform it safely and correctly when you're not there. If you have a beginning client with no weight-training experience, you may choose to start with machines rather than free weights, because mastering the exercise motion through a fixed-plane mechanism such as a selectorized machine is easier than using free weights, which require more skill and control.
- » **How much time they have available to train:** The amount of time the client has to train affects which exercises make the most sense. If the client is time-strapped, you probably aren't going to focus on exercises like alternating dumbbell curls or single-arm kickbacks — these aren't optimal for a limited-time program. Instead, choose exercises that target several muscles at once (think squats, deadlifts, upper body pushing, and upper body pulling). You'll get more bang for your buck with these.

Specifying how often your client will work out

Training frequency refers to the number of times a client will exercise each week. Training frequency is determined by the client's personal fitness goals, available training time, and other activities such as sports or aerobic activities.

Here are some suggested guidelines for strength-training frequency:

- » **Beginner:** Two to three times per week
- » **Intermediate:** Three to four times per week
- » **Advanced:** Four to six times per week

Less-conditioned clients need more recovery between their workout sessions than more-conditioned clients, who can work more frequently within the week with fewer rest days in between.



REMEMBER

It's a good idea to allow at least one full day of rest before training the same muscle groups again — no matter how conditioned the client is.

Determining the order of the exercises

Deciding in which order your client will do the exercises goes hand in hand with selecting the exercises themselves. You need to keep in mind your client's training goals, previous training experience, and conditioning level.



REMEMBER

Choosing the best exercise order for your client is important. Your goal is to arrange the exercises you're prescribing in a way that matches your client's goals.

For example, if a new client wants to increase upper-body strength, you most likely wouldn't prescribe triceps extensions as their primary movement. To exhaust the client's triceps first would be counterproductive, because the triceps are *synergistic*, or secondary, muscles for multijoint movements such as the chest press or overhead press. These compound movements are more goal-specific for your client because they involve the larger muscle groups of the upper body, and lend themselves to developing upper-body strength — exactly what the client wants!

Table 12-3 provides some suggested guidelines for choosing exercise order based on client goals.

TABLE 12-3 **Choosing Exercise Order**

Exercise Order	Benefit
Multijoint movements first, then single-joint movements, working from largest muscle groups down to small muscle groups	Helps to prevent injury, because larger muscle groups need assistance from smaller muscles to perform the exercise correctly. Great for beginning clients.
Alternating push and pull exercises (for example, chest press [push]; then seated row [pull])	Allows for adequate muscle-group recovery by not allowing the same muscle groups to be used consecutively, reducing muscular fatigue. Good for clients who are deconditioned and can't sustain a progressive multijoint to single-joint method.
Alternating upper-body exercises with lower-body exercises (for example, chest press [upper body]; then leg press [lower body])	Allows clients who can't sustain consecutive upper-body or lower-body work to perform more total work volume by completely resting the upper body while lower-body work is being performed, and vice versa. Great for clients with minimal muscular endurance.



TIP

Check out Chapter 15 for advanced programming techniques. There I provide examples of these types of workouts.

Planning sets, reps, and rest

Okay, you've learned where your client is going to train and decided which exercises they'll be doing, with what equipment, and in what order. Next, you need to determine how much total work they'll do — also known as *volume* — during the session.

Volume is the number of sets and reps you prescribe for your client. A *repetition* (or *rep*, for short) is a single-movement count that, when performed consecutively, makes up a *set* of repetitions. For example, if you perform a squat one time, then rest, that is one rep, making it a one-rep set. If you perform a squat 15 times before resting, that is considered one set of 15 reps. If you perform a squat for 15 reps, rest, then perform 15 squats again, you will have completed two sets of 15 reps each.

Sets and reps depend on your client's specific training goals, training frequency, conditioning level, and recovery between exercises. As a general rule, the training volume directly correlates to the client's conditioning level (see Table 12-4).

TABLE 12-4

Approximate Sets and Reps Based on Fitness Level and Goals

Client Level	Goal	Reps	Sets (per exercise)	Rest (between sets)
Beginner	General fitness	12 to 15	2 to 3	1 to 2 minutes
Intermediate	Muscular endurance	12 to 15	3 to 4	45 seconds
Intermediate	Muscular size	10 to 12	3 to 4	45 to 90 seconds
Intermediate	Muscular strength	8 to 10	3 to 4	1 to 2 minutes
Advanced	Muscular endurance	12 to 20	4 to 6	30 to 45 seconds
Advanced	Muscular size	8 to 12	4 to 6	30 to 90 seconds
Advanced	Muscular strength	6 to 8	3 to 6	2 to 5 minutes

Setting the starting weight

After you've determined the total training volume for your client, have a look at their initial fitness assessment results. Use the results from the assessment exercises to recommend baseline starting weights.



TIP

Looking at your client's perceived exertion rate for each exercise will help you to determine reasonable starting weights. As you go through the actual session with your client, you can adjust the weights based on how they're performing and responding.

- » Preparing your client for the session
- » Warming up your client
- » Stretching your client
- » Exercising your client
- » Cooling down your client

Chapter **13**

Taking Your Client through the First Workout

Finally! It's the moment you've been waiting for. You're up and running as a personal trainer. You've gotten your first client, done the fitness assessment, planned their program, and now you're ready to do the thing that brings in the dough — take your new client through their first full-fledged workout with you.

In the last chapter, you reviewed the format that your training sessions should follow: warm-up, conditioning, cool-down, flexibility. If you've studied for your certification exam already (see Chapter 2), you probably have an idea about how to incorporate the components of a workout session into the session format. However, this chapter is a handy reference that shows you options for each part of the workout. Here, you also see how to communicate with your clients during their training sessions and how to help them stay motivated and moving along toward their fitness goals.

Checking Up So Your Client Doesn't Check Out

Before you hand your client that 20-pound dumbbell, ask a few quick questions to check in. Their response will indicate how ready they are to work with you today and whether or not you'll need to make any—last minute adjustments.

Asking the right questions

The following sections include some sample questions that can help you to read your client's readiness.

How are you feeling today?

If your client has slept well and has had a normal day so far, they'll probably respond with “good,” or something along those lines.



WARNING

Pay attention when a client answers otherwise — anything less than an “okay” response is your indication to do a little digging to determine what's going on. It's normal for people to feel mentally exhausted or stressed after a long day at work. Once they get into the workout, they usually start feeling better. But if a client isn't feeling great physically (didn't get enough sleep, feeling under the weather, and so on) ask if they're feeling up to training today. You don't have to cancel a session every time a client is tired — you'll be cancelling a lot of sessions if you do — but sometimes rescheduling is in everyone's best interest. If a client is running a fever, feeling achy, or if they have visible symptoms of a head cold (runny nose, cough, and so on), you should reschedule the session. Your client will benefit much more from rest than a workout, and you'll avoid catching the crud from them.



TIP

If your client is determined to work out even if they're not feeling great, tell them that you appreciate their diligence and enthusiasm, but working out when you're sick isn't a good idea. The session won't be productive and they'll probably end up not feeling well for even longer than if they had rescheduled and opted to get some rest.

How did you feel after our last session?

This is a good question to ask *every* session, especially if you haven't been in touch with your client since the last session. If your client says, “I was sore for days!” you may want to temper this workout. On the other hand, if they come back with “I felt great — it didn't even feel like I worked out!” it might be time to kick the intensity up a notch.



TIP

Even when a client tells you “I felt awesome after our last workout! You rock!” you may want to ask some direct questions, such as, “Did you experience any unusual pain in your joints and muscles, other than some soreness?” Or if they’re just getting over an injury, ask a follow-up question related to that injury — for example, “Did you have any trouble with your shoulder after your last workout?” Even if it feels like you’re asking too many questions, it’s better than not asking enough. Sometimes a more specific question will get a different answer. For example, maybe the client did experience something unusual after the last workout, and then it passed and they simply forgot about it.

When was the last time you ate?

This question is *tres importante!* If your client hasn’t had anything to eat within the last three to five hours, chances are their energy won’t be great. Worse yet, low blood sugar can cause some people to become dizzy, nauseated, or even faint when they train too hard without enough fuel. This isn’t the case for everyone; some people are fine with exercising on an empty stomach, and that’s why asking about eating habits during the assessment is helpful.



REMEMBER

It’s helpful to remind your clients, especially when they’re new and haven’t been active in a long time, that eating nutritious food consistently will keep their motor running through their workouts.



TIP

Keep a sugary drink or some hard candy on hand to get some quick sugar back into your client’s system if they become nauseated or dizzy because their blood sugar is low. If they faint, call 911, then elevate their feet above heart-level to get their blood moving.

Explaining what will happen during the first session

Imagine that it’s your first time, say, taking a martial arts class. You don’t know how to tie your belt. You don’t know when and how to bow. You certainly don’t know how to block, punch, or kick. You don’t even know how to put on your gi (yes, there is a right way to put on your gi)! You feel lost — and a little scared.

That’s probably how your new client is feeling before their first real training session. Sure, *you* know the gym like the back of your hand, and you know a dozen ways to work every muscle group. But your client doesn’t. They might not even know how to step onto a treadmill without flying off the back end of it, much less what to expect during a training session. That’s why offering an overview of what will happen during the session, before it actually occurs, is important. Your clients will have less “beginner’s anxiety” when they know what to expect.

In the following sections, I cover some things you should explain to your clients before the first training session.

What activities they'll be doing and in what order

For example, you might start by telling your client:

Today, you're going to start your training session warming up on the treadmill. After you're warm, we're going to lightly stretch all your muscles to help prepare them for the work we're going to do with the weights and also to help prevent them from being injured. After you're fully stretched out, you'll be ready to start your strength exercises, which I'll demonstrate to you before you actually perform them. We're doing a full-body workout today, which means you'll do one strength exercise for each muscle group. After you complete your strength training, we'll end the workout with some abdominal work and lower-body stretches that will serve as your cool-down, which will help prevent any muscle cramping and breathing problems. Cooling down helps to return your body to the way it normally breathes — the way it was when you first walked in here, before you started exercising.

What they can expect to feel like during the training session

For example, you might tell your client:

While you're exercising, your heart rate will increase slightly, and your body will become warm — you may start sweating. During your warm-up, your breathing will become faster and heavier, but you shouldn't feel uncomfortable and you should still be able to hold a conversation with me. If you do feel uncomfortable, please don't hesitate to let me know. During the strength exercises, you may experience a light “burning” sensation in the muscle groups we're working. Don't be alarmed — this is completely normal. When you're through with your entire workout, your body will feel slightly fatigued, but not to the point of being exhausted.

What they can expect from you

For example, you might say:

During your workout, I'll demonstrate every movement first, giving you verbal and visual instruction of how to do it. After I've demonstrated what you'll be doing, you'll perform the movement. I'll be giving you pointers as you go through the exercise to help you get the form right.

What you expect from them

You may say something like the following:

While you're training, I'll be asking you to rate how hard you feel like you're working on a scale of 1 to 10. A rating of 1 would be equivalent to you sitting in a chair, whereas a rating of 10 would be the way you'd feel if you were pushing your car uphill in the middle of winter. During this first workout, I *don't* want you trying to perform at a level of 10. That's all-out, maximal exertion and effort, which at this point isn't necessary to reach your fitness goals. Also, this is my first time working with you, and I'm still learning your body and what you're capable of doing. As we work together longer, I'll know you and your body better, and I'll be able to push you harder in a safer manner. For today, the intensity level of your workout will be slightly lower than your normal working intensity. I do expect, however, that if at any point you feel dizzy, nauseated, or uncomfortable in any way, you'll let me know immediately. Also, please don't hesitate to interrupt me or stop me at any time to ask questions. My goal is to make sure that you completely understand what you're doing, and that you do it well.

So Hot It's Cool: Warming Up the Client

Now that your client is clear on what's going to happen during the session, it's time to warm up!

Sometimes clients want to skip the warm-up and get right into the fun stuff. You don't want your client injured during her very first session — that's not exactly motivating! So explain to your eager-beaver client that warming up is very important (and necessary!). If they skip the warm-up, their muscles will need a lot more time to get the greater blood flow they need. Cold muscles with less blood flow don't move as well as warm muscles with increased blood flow — which also increases their risk of pulling or straining a muscle.



TIP

Warming up doesn't have to happen on a machine; that's just one of many options. Whether you're training in a gym with lots of equipment or training in someone's home, try mixing up the warm-up with different activities to keep it interesting.

Showing them what's what

For your clients who will be exercising at least some of the time in a gym, you'll need to show them what to do and make sure they know their way around.



REMEMBER

You'll want to show your client:

- » How to safely get on and off of the machine if they'll be using one
- » How to increase and decrease the intensity
- » How to slow down and stop the machine

Believe it or not, I *have* seen more than one person fly off the back of a treadmill because they started it while standing on it, instead of straddling the machine, turning it on, holding the handrails, and then hopping on.



TIP

When putting a client on a piece of cardio equipment for the first time, show them how to use the machine by first hopping on yourself. Explain what all the buttons do, and where to place their hands and feet. Demonstrate the proper form for that machine — and what *isn't* proper form.



REMEMBER

Never assume that using fitness equipment is intuitive for your clients — what's obvious to you is probably completely new and not obvious to them.



TIP

Lay out each action as a set of steps and verbally describe the action as you're demonstrating it. Most clients will need to hear you say it and see you do it to learn how to do the activity properly themselves.

Here's an example script for teaching your client how to use a treadmill:

- 1. Walk up to the console on the side tracks that run the length of the tread.**
At this point you'll be straddling the tread.
- 2. Start the treadmill.**
- 3. As the treadmill slowly starts, put both hands on the side rails or front hand bar for balance.**
- 4. Lightly step onto the tread, still holding on to the machine for balance.**
- 5. When you're comfortable matching your walking stride to the pace of the machine, take one hand off the treadmill and press the up arrow to increase the treadmill's speed so that the machine mimics your natural walking pace.**

6. When you're comfortable walking at that pace, let go of the handrails.

Make sure that, as you walk, you pick up your foot and extend your leg, swinging your leg from your hip. As your leg lowers and your foot comes down, be sure to land heel-first. Also, be sure to swing your arms in a normal walking motion.

7. To decrease your speed, put both hands back onto the handrails.

8. Holding on with one hand, use the other hand to press the down arrow, which will decrease your speed.

9. When the treadmill slows down, press the stop button.

10. When the treadmill has come to a complete stop, get off the machine.

Be sure to wait for the treadmill to come to a complete stop. As you dismount the treadmill, be sure to hold onto the handrail as you step down. Your body may feel a little strange walking on a nonmoving floor after being on the treadmill.

Providing constructive feedback



REMEMBER

It's okay to correct a client's form — you won't offend them and they'll appreciate learning how to exercise safely and efficiently.

Letting your client do it on their own

Teaching your clients well from the beginning sets them up for success, which is really important because you'll eventually have to let them fly. Ideally your clients will reach a point where they train with you because they want to, not because they need to. As your clients develop the skills and confidence to exercise regularly on their own, your role will evolve too — it's rewarding and a lot of fun to create advanced programs for your once-novice clients. More on that in Chapter 15.



REMEMBER

Every *body* is different and so is the amount of time it takes for clients to warm up before diving into their workouts. For some, five minutes is enough. Others may need 20 minutes to prepare their bodies for work.

HOME IS WHERE THE WARM-UP IS

If you're training your clients in places without a selection of exercise equipment at your disposal, try including some of these options in your warm-ups:

- Walk up and down the stairs three to four times; then do alternating walking lunges with upper body rotations.
- Alternate bodyweight squats with bench push-ups (hands on the bench, toes on the floor).
- Try two to three rounds of this circuit: ten bodyweight squats, ten easy TRX rows, ten bodyweight lateral alternating lunges, ten bench push-ups, ten dead bugs, ten medicine ball rotations.



TIP

You can also take your client through a series of *dynamic mobility* exercises where they'll be moving and stretching at the same time. This serves two purposes. First, any type of movement works for increasing the body's core temperature, which you already know is important. The other reason for dynamic stretching is that it prepares the body for the specific activities that you'll be doing after warming up. I'll cover pre-workout stretching later in this chapter, but to give you an idea of why it's useful, consider a baseball pitcher. Have you ever noticed a pitcher doing arm circles before throwing the ball? They do this to warm up while simultaneously preparing the shoulder to work — a warmup that makes better sense than jogging a few laps around the diamond.

Going for the Stretch

When a client has limited time to train, it's tempting to focus all your time and attention on conditioning, leaving stretching out entirely, or tacking a few stretches onto the end of the training session as an afterthought. Having worked with many busy clients myself, I can certainly relate! If you haven't studied for your personal trainer certification yet, you might not fully understand *flexibility* as a component of health-related fitness. Flexibility in this context refers to a joint's ability to move through a normal and pain-free range of motion (ROM). People with inadequate flexibility often say they feel pain or stiffness in the affected area, making it hard for them to move or to get comfortable when they're sitting or lying down. If a client has limited ROM in one or more joints, be extra mindful of the exercises you prescribe. Limited ROM isn't a reason not to train someone, but it can become worse if you exacerbate it with the wrong exercises. If you're not sure how to proceed, it's always okay to ask for guidance from a physical therapist or even a more experienced personal trainer.

Stretching is the simplest and most common method for increasing joint ROM, and as a personal trainer, you need to understand how and when to work it into your clients' programs.

Before the workout

As I mention earlier in this chapter, you can incorporate dynamic stretching into your client's warm-up. Dynamic stretches are controlled, rhythmic movements that gradually move a joint through its full ROM, ideally mimicking the movements that you're preparing your client to do later (remember the baseball pitcher from earlier?) After the warm-up and before moving into the conditioning component of the training session, a full-body *static* stretching routine is also appropriate for some clients, depending on their flexibility status. Static stretching involves moving slowly into a stretch and holding it at peak tension for 10 to 30 seconds. After you're done with the workout, a more concentrated stretching segment is recommended, because your client is as warm as they're going to be at that point, which is the safest and most effective time for most people to stretch.



REMEMBER

A person's flexibility level is influenced by several factors, including age, sex, and physical activity level. Generally speaking, flexibility tends to decrease with age, women are typically more flexible than men, and active people are more flexible than sedentary people. Be sure to take all these factors into account when you're planning your clients' programs.

After the workout

Here are two techniques for post-workout stretching that can effectively stretch your clients above and beyond the static stretching that you do pre-workout:

- » **Proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF):** This type of stretching is commonly called PNF because the name that PNF stands for — proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation — is a mouthful. In English, this technique consists of an isometric contraction (squeezing a muscle as hard as you can) followed by a static stretch for the same muscle group. PNF increases joint ROM, but the reason why is not well understood. It's possible that PNF stretching triggers a "relax" response from the neuromuscular system, which in turn allows a muscle to stretch further. It could be that PNF stretching simply increases a person's tolerance for deeper stretching.
- » **Passive stretching:** This type of stretching can be done with a prop (like a stretching strap) to slowly move into each stretch. Instruct the client to relax as they move into each position.



WARNING

PNF stretching should only be performed by experienced personal trainers with training in this technique. Without fully understanding PNF, you'll risk injuring the client by overstretching. PNF stretching is intense, but it should *never* be painful. A good rule of thumb is to only use stretching techniques that you understand completely. Also, if your client can't tell the difference between tension and pain with stretching, stop immediately and choose a different method.



TIP

For some great stretches your client can practice on their own, check out *Fitness For Dummies* by Suzanne Schlosberg and Liz Neporent, MA (published by Wiley).

Now for the Main Event: Exercising Your Client

You've probably already decided which exercises you want your client to do based on their fitness assessment results (see Chapter 11). However, the way you present the exercises is just as important as the exercises themselves. After all, when you were in high school, your math teacher didn't teach you algebra by tossing you a book or barking orders, did they?

Strong but not silent: Teaching strength exercises

If you could toss your client an Olympic bar, tell them to do a chest press, and collect your \$100, your job would be simple. But because each client is different and learns in different ways, you need to modify your teaching techniques for each client.



TIP

Here are some tactics for teaching your clients strength exercises. Use whichever techniques work best for the client you're working with:

- » **Use analogies.** Some clients need to have a mental image of the exercise, so try using analogies. For example, when explaining a chest fly, you can tell the client to imagine they're hugging a big beach ball and can't quite get their arms around it.
- » **Demonstrate what you're looking for.** Your client may learn visually, which means you should show them how to do the exercise by doing it yourself, instead of simply by describing it.

- » **Ask your client to do a move while looking in the mirror, and then while turned away from the mirror.** This way they can see and feel how to do the move properly.
- » **Try saying the same thing several different ways until the client grasps the concept.** For example, you can say, “During a seated chest press or a lying dumbbell press, you’re working your chest, so keep your elbows at 90 degrees.” Then you can say, “To keep your elbows at 90 degrees, you have to keep your shoulders down.” That way you’re drilling into the client’s mind that the elbows need to be kept at — guess what? — 90 degrees.



REMEMBER

Spotting your client helps with teaching proper form, especially during the first few training sessions when they’re getting the hang of their exercises. Keeping your hands on or near your client allows you to guide their form in the moment. After a few sessions, you can start taking your hands away more and more as the client gains confidence. Make sure you explain what spotting means and *always* ask permission before putting your hands on a client.



TIP

Be as verbal and descriptive as possible while talking your client through each exercise. Use action verbs such as *pause*, *push*, *pull*, and *lift*. Explain what to do, how to do it, and how much energy to put into it.

Getting feedback

During your session, ask the client for feedback and use it as a guide. Client feedback lets you know how well the client thinks the session is going, how they’re feeling, and whether your programming is on track. Feedback can come in a variety of forms, but here are the two main types:

- » **Verbal feedback:** Grunts, groans, and the always beloved “I can’t believe you’re making me do this!” indicate that your client is working hard. On the other hand, if you get more than the occasional “Do I have to?” or a flat out “No!” you may want to rethink your approach.
- » **Physical feedback:** If your client is breathing hard and sweating, you’re doing something right.



WARNING

Pay attention to physical cues. If the color suddenly drains from your client’s face, they’re probably either working *too* hard or their blood sugar has dropped. If this happens, stop the workout and let your client recover. When they’re ready to resume, try lowering the intensity.



REMEMBER

With experience, you’ll get better at guessing how hard your clients are working just by watching and listening to them.

Cooling Down and Recovering from the Workout

The cool-down is the period of time after conditioning involving similar activities as the warm-up, only now instead of preparing the body for work, you're gradually moving back towards resting status by decreasing the client's heart rate and blood pressure.



REMEMBER

Cooling down should take at least five to ten minutes and longer for higher intensity workouts.



TIP

Whenever possible, I like using the same movements for the warm-up and the cool-down. It's a great teaching strategy for starting and ending every session at baseline. After the cool-down, I like to do a few minutes of PNF or passive stretching. It's relaxing for my clients and I can feel good knowing that they stretched. Remember that stretching shouldn't replace the cool-down; they're two different things with distinct purposes.



TRUE
STORY

Stopping exercise abruptly without cooling down can cause *blood pooling*, which happens when blood pools in the lower extremities and can't return to the heart fast enough. I have seen this happen first-hand when clients are in a hurry and skip the cool-down. One time at the end of a particularly intense 6 a.m. indoor cycling class, I had a client hop off the bike and walk out as we were beginning the cool-down. Without warning, he fell backward onto the floor and fainted. He was okay, but it was scary — and served as a reminder to the entire group not to skip the cool-down!

- » Introducing your client to resistance training exercises
- » Mapping out the program
- » Including progressions and regressions

Chapter **14**

Choosing Exercises and Teaching Your Beginning Client

By now you can see that a personal training session involves more than randomly prescribing deadlifts, pull-ups, and sprints and expecting your client's highly motivated inner athlete to show up. In Chapter 12, I outline the steps personal trainers take to design training programs. In this chapter, I show you how to choose exercises for your clients, when to progress them, and why getting it right matters.



REMEMBER

The key to a successful training program lies in your ability to deliver results.

Program Design Basics

The training program is your step-by-step plan for getting a client from where they are now to where they want to be. And like most things, training is just guesswork if you don't have a plan. Sometimes your best guess isn't wrong, but it might not be the best option, either.

Planning a training program is like using your car's GPS to plan a trip. You might already know several ways to get to your destination, but GPS shows you the most efficient way to get from point A to point B. It also gives you the ETA and re-routes you as information changes or if a better route becomes available. All you have to do is follow the directions.

A successful training program works the same way *if* it meets two criteria: physiologic rationale (simply put, you need to choose appropriate exercises for your client and make changes when necessary) and the client's willingness to follow your directions.



TIP

Choosing exercises is one part of the program design process; the best program is the one your client will follow.

Your program design choices depend on each client's unique needs and goals, and no matter what those are, you should be able to answer the following questions before choosing even one exercise:

- » What is the *main* goal of the resistance training program? Your client can have more than one goal, but what is the priority?
- » What movement patterns does the client need to train?
- » Which energy systems (anaerobic, aerobic, or both) need to be trained?
- » What muscle actions make the most sense for the client (isotonic, isometric, and so on)?
- » If the client isn't currently injured but has been injured in the past, where was the injury and how did it happen?

Beyond the assessment, this is really all you need to know to get started. If you're missing any information, go back and get it before you start plugging exercises into your client's program.

Focusing on your client's goals

Without a goal, your client (and you) won't have direction. Some common resistance training goals include getting stronger, improving endurance, adding muscle, and losing fat. Chapter 12 notes that effective exercise programs start with understanding why your client hired you in the first place. Getting clear about what your client wants to accomplish will guide your program design decisions.



REMEMBER

Always keep your client's goals front and center in your planning. Guide them toward what *they* want, not what *you* think they need.



TIP

All clients have their reasons for starting an exercise program — and you won't know what they are unless you ask. Never design a client's program based on your assumptions!

Also, keep in mind that goals can change and goal setting with your clients doesn't have to be a one-time thing. Some people start out simply wanting to adopt a regular exercise habit and later set their sights on a bigger goal. For example, maybe they love running and decide to train for a half-marathon.

Evaluating your client's progress regularly matters too. You need to determine from the beginning how and when you'll measure progress. If you're not tracking your client's progress, you won't know if (or when) it's time to change the program (cue the GPS analogy). You'll also learn the hard way that people become frustrated and lose motivation if results don't meet their expectations — even if you think they're making significant progress.



TRUE
STORY

Sometimes you need more than one way to measure results. One of my favorite client success stories of all time is of a woman who came to me with a weight loss goal and ended up gaining 5 pounds. At 55 years old, she had never set foot in a gym or lifted a weight in her life. She had lost 30 pounds over the previous year through healthy eating and walking, but her progress stalled, so she asked me to help her lose “the last 10 pounds.” She continued eating healthfully and walking, and she started seeing me twice weekly for full-body resistance training sessions.

Six months later, her energy was through the roof, she had six-pack abs, and she was down *four* clothing sizes, but she was frustrated. She was 5 pounds heavier instead of 10 pounds lighter. Fortunately, I was prepared for this. I took photos of her on day one and recorded circumference measurements every six weeks so I could show her tangible evidence that the scale doesn't always tell the whole story. Muscle doesn't weigh more than fat, but it does take up less space! Fortunately she decided that six-pack abs and smaller clothes mattered more than the number on the scale and that *nothing* mattered more than how strong and energetic lifting weights made her feel.

Considering your client's abilities

Sometimes it's obvious what a client can or can't realistically do. For example, your 5-foot, 6-inch 43-year-old client probably isn't a strong NBA prospect, but he *can* shoot hoops with his friends a few times a week to stay in shape. Or maybe your 65-year-old client with no previous running experience wants to train for a 5K. She probably won't be running her first race next weekend, but she *can* gradually work her way up to completing a 5K six weeks from now.



TIP

Part of your job is helping your clients to set realistic and obtainable goals.

But what do you do when a client has a lofty goal, and even though they're capable of doing what it takes to achieve it, you know it isn't realistic? For example, suppose your client wants to look like a specific celebrity with a very lean physique. They might actually have the fitness level and genetic potential they would need to get ultra-lean, but they also have a full-time job, a family, and a serious taco habit. They might like the idea of looking like a celebrity, but do they realize what's involved? How looking that way is practically a full-time job? And that it's the celebrity's job to rock a ripped physique, which almost always involves a team of people behind the scenes making it possible (personal trainer, personal chef, and so on)? Is the client able *and* willing to do what it takes?

I'm all for dreaming big, but I have also learned from personal experience — and from training a *lot* of clients — how unrealistic goals that require habits nobody can sustain forever (not even celebrities) eventually lead to burnout and frustration. I'm not telling you to discourage your clients from setting big goals — training for a race, getting super lean, whatever — just make sure they understand exactly what they're committing to. And then help them to adjust their expectations if they decide to start with something a bit smaller (also totally okay!). Precision Nutrition has a great infographic on its website that describes different bodyfat percentages and what it takes to achieve them. Check it out at www.precisionnutrition.com/cost-of-getting-lean-infographic.

Movement Patterns

Now that you and your client are on the same page about goals and expectations, let's get into the nitty-gritty of choosing exercises. Keep in mind that a main goal of resistance training usually involves improving musculoskeletal fitness, and that the three primary structures of the musculoskeletal system that we (personal trainers) deal with are bones, joints, and muscles. Understanding how these structures interact to make bodies move should inform your exercise choices. In other words, you need to understand how to choose exercises based on the abilities and limitations of your client's musculoskeletal system.



TIP

If you don't have a solid understanding of anatomy and kinesiology yet, that's okay! There are lots of resources available for in-depth study, including — and beyond — your personal trainer certification. Also, there's Google. The human body has around 600 muscles and it's okay if you can't name all of them off the top of your head. I know I couldn't!

Now's the time when a movement assessment (like the Functional Movement Screen [FMS] discussed in Chapter 11) comes in handy and why I encourage you to include one in your fitness assessments. You'll quickly get a clear snapshot of how a person is moving in their everyday life so you can see what you're working with and where to start with each client. Assessing your client's ability to move properly before choosing exercises is like building your house on a strong foundation. A solid brick house might look strong from the outside, but if you look closer and find cracks in the foundation . . . see where I'm going with this? You can teach your client a bunch of exercises without assessing their movement quality first, but if you do, you'll learn the hard way about any cracks in their foundation.



REMEMBER

When you move well your body is more efficient. And efficiency with exercise means getting more done with less effort *and* you're less likely to hurt yourself in the process.

Movement patterns refer to the various ways that our bodies move through motions. Considering how many muscle and joint actions the human body is capable of — from simple tasks like scrolling through text messages to more complex tasks like swinging a kettlebell — we can create *a lot* of movement patterns. Try doing a quick Google search for “movement patterns” and you'll get about 534,000,000 results (really; I just tried it).

For personal trainers, the main components of movement patterns that we work with are mobility and stability. *Mobility* refers to the body's ability to move freely, and *stability* refers to how well your body can maintain balance *and* support your joints during movements. All our joints can be classified by their primary role (mobility or stability), and it's good for you to know which joints do what, but don't miss the forest for the trees here. Look at the body as a whole structure instead of a sum of its parts. Then start by training fundamental movement patterns, giving extra attention to areas that need work. Repair the foundation before piling on more bricks.

Matching exercises to movement patterns

If you ask ten personal trainers which movements are the most important to master you'll get ten different answers. That's because there's more than one right way to prioritize movement, but I think most trainers would agree that all or most of these five movement patterns guide the bulk of their exercise choices: squat, hinge, push, pull, rotation.



Movement patterns can happen in more than one *plane of motion*, meaning that you can match countless exercises to a few movement patterns. The human body has three anatomical planes:

- » Sagittal plane (right/left)
- » Frontal plane (front/back)
- » Transverse plane (top/bottom)

Check out your personal trainer certification manual for visuals of all three planes of motion and descriptions of the fundamental movements that happen in each one.

Keeping it simple

Here are a few basic guidelines that you can follow to avoid overcomplicating things:

- » Balance your client's movement patterns. If you choose a horizontal pushing exercise (like a push-up), balance it with a horizontal pulling exercise (try a TRX row or a dumbbell row). For each lower-body anterior movement (front dominant exercises, like a lunge), balance it with a posterior-dominant movement (try a deadlift or a bridge).
- » If you're prescribing a full-body workout, choose four to eight exercises that target large muscle groups and emphasize movement patterns that need the most attention.
- » Put bigger lifts (squats, deadlifts, and so on) first while your client is fresh and able to perform them with proper form.
- » Focus on doing a few things well and do them consistently.

Choosing Exercises

Typically for a client who hasn't weight-trained before, you need to condition all large muscle groups in a slow and safe manner before progressing to higher intensity exercise.

By starting this way your client will develop *base-level conditioning*. To accomplish this successfully, you typically start with a full-body workout based on your client's past exercise experience and current fitness level.

Your client's experience level

Training a complete beginner with no previous exercise experience takes a lot of time and patience, but you're also starting with a blank slate. There's nothing to "unlearn" and no bad habits to correct. Experienced exercisers can be some of the most challenging training clients, especially if they're in decent shape but have some bad gym habits. These are typically the "no pain, no gain" folks and convincing them to follow a repetitive program full of basic exercises can be challenging.



REMEMBER

Sometimes unlearning old habits is harder than learning new ones.

For a brand new lifter, start with the most basic exercises possible. Choose exercises that you can explain easily and that your client can perform without thinking too much. This helps your client to grasp what you're teaching without feeling overwhelmed by information overload.

If your new client has some past experience but hasn't worked out in a while, you'll still want to start with basic exercises. The difference is in how you teach. This client will probably be familiar with the names of most exercises and know how to perform them.



TIP

Never assume that someone with previous experience has a lot of knowledge. Sometimes clients know how to perform exercises but they don't know the names of them.

The flipside of this is a client with a lot of knowledge but no recent experience. Choose this client's exercises wisely. These clients typically think they're more advanced than they actually are. They still need to start with a basic routine and you need to explain *why* more than *how* when you're training them.



REMEMBER

Knowledge and experience are two different things. Knowing how to exercise helps but it doesn't replace doing the work.

Your client's fitness level

This might seem obvious but knowing how hard to push a client is an important consideration. You have to take your client outside of their comfort zone to get results. If you want to get technical here, applying the *overload principle* leads to improved musculoskeletal fitness. The overload principle states that you have to continually increase the demand placed on muscles to get results. In other words, if you want to get stronger, you have to progressively lift heavier weights.



“Methods are many, principles are few. Methods often change, principles never do.” This saying is adapted from a quote from engineer and business theorist Harrington Emerson that I keep in a frame on my desk.

Challenging your client is necessary, but pushing someone just for the sake of pushing them isn’t. It’s never a good idea to push a client beyond what they can do safely. That’s a fast way to injure people and not everyone enjoys grueling workouts.

Always meet people where they’re at today. Not last year, ten years ago, or where they want to be tomorrow.

Tailoring the Program with Progressions and Regressions

Over time you’ll find that most beginning clients tend to start with similar exercises that you’ll tailor based on your assessment results. You do this by making an exercise harder (progression) or easier (regression). Some options for modifying an exercise include changing the weight (make it heavier or lighter), change the surface (try moving from a stable surface to an unstable surface), change the tempo (faster or slower), add isometrics (for example, try adding a wall sit into the mix), or you can challenge stability with single-sided exercises like single-leg squat or a single-arm chest press. Some examples of making an exercise easier include doing push-ups on the knees instead of the toes or elevating the upper body on a bench or a wall and using a band for assisted chin-ups.

Sometimes modifying an exercise isn’t enough and you need to be able to recognize when it’s necessary to substitute an exercise. For example, if your client physically can’t do an exercise, choose a different one. If an exercise is painful, stop immediately and try something different. You’ll also need to consider equipment availability (gym versus home) and make sure your client feels confident about doing the exercises you assign on their own. Make adjustments as needed.



A good rule of thumb is to choose exercises that you can progress twice and regress twice. If you make an exercise more challenging twice and it’s still too easy, you might need to try something different. If you make an exercise easier twice and the client still can’t do it, you definitely need to try something different.

- » Helping your clients take their training up a notch
- » Knowing what techniques will get your clients where they want to go

Chapter **15**

Taking Your Client to the Next Level

According to the SAID principle (short for *Specific Adaptations to Imposed Demands*), the body will adapt to overcome a demand that's greater than what it is capable of performing at that time. What does this mean in plain English? Your client may not be able to perform 15 goblet squats with a 30-pound dumbbell *today* — but with repeated training, their body will continually grow stronger until it can achieve that workload. At some point, your client's once-seemingly-weak muscles will inevitably become stronger. And when they do become stronger, the initial programming you designed won't seem as strenuous or challenging.

So, true to the SAID principle, you need to change your client's program to increase demand on the body so that they can continue progressing. The question is, how do you know *when* to progress your client, and exactly *how much* progress is needed?

You may be tired of hearing this by now, but it's true: Each program you create is unique to that particular client's current level of conditioning and specific training goals. So it only stands to reason that your program decisions depend on the client — and what works for one person might not work for someone else. In this chapter, I show you some different methods and techniques you can use to take your clients' programs up a notch.

Taking the Next Step

Progressing your client is a skill and an art — one that's polished over time and with lots of client experience. Each client will respond in their own way to program change. As you gain working knowledge of your client's physiological responses to different workload scenarios, you'll soon be able to masterfully manipulate exercise prescriptions to keep them continually progressing toward their goals.



TIP

In Chapter 14, I offer some ideas for progressions and regressions with your beginning clients. Here are some additional techniques to create change in your client's program:

- » Increasing or decreasing rest time
- » Increasing or decreasing repetitions
- » Adding sets
- » Adding exercises
- » Changing the type of exercises
- » Changing the order of exercises
- » Increasing exercise frequency

In the following section, I show you ways to identify when the time is right to help your client advance and how to come up with next steps in your plan.

Ch-ch-changes: Knowing when to change it up

If you go through a session with a client, only to have them look at you and say, "That's it?" that's usually a sign that it's time for something a little more challenging.

Of course, the signs aren't always that obvious — not all clients love exercise, and not all clients will want to let you know that the workout was less than challenging. Most of the time, you're going to need to look for signs from your client — mostly nonverbal signs — that it's time for a new challenge.



TIP

Here are a few signs that it's time to advance your client:

- » They can easily talk through an entire set.
- » They don't appear to be exerting much effort.
- » Their perceived exertion rate is less than 6.
- » Their breathing doesn't increase.
- » Their heart rate no longer reaches the target training range during a set.

Patience, grasshopper



WARNING

No matter how eager your client is, you need to advance the program appropriately. Improper progression can result in injury, undue fatigue, and an overall unmotivating effect that can lead to your client saying, “No way,” every time you try something new. Your job is to manage your client’s program progression so that their muscles, ligaments, tendons, and cardiovascular system get stronger safely, before pushing the next training level.



TIP

Here are some key points to remember when planning a program progression so that you end up with successful results (rather than a burned-out client):

- » **Always put safety first.** If your client can't perform an exercise with acceptable form, you may want to introduce a different exercise rather than increase the weight or intensity for that one.
- » **Change one aspect of the program per session.** If you were to change the weight, sets, reps, and rest periods for a client all in one session, you could end up injuring your client — and then you're not only not gaining ground, you're losing it. You also won't know what's working and what isn't if you change everything at once. By changing one aspect of the program at a time, your client's body can safely adapt to the new element.
- » **Increase intensity, weight, or duration levels by no more than ten percent.** For instance, you might increase the weight by five pounds for a few sets — but not all of them. Or you can increase the number of reps per set without increasing the weight.
- » **Give each phase of the program at least two weeks before increasing intensity, weight, or duration again.** For example, you may choose to increase their tempo of lifting after increasing reps two weeks earlier.
- » **When advancing a client's exercises, make sure you advance them logically.** You don't want to jump a beginning client who's never worked with free weights before from a machine-based program to a complete free-weight program. Try switching one machine-based exercise to one that uses free weights each time over the course of a few sessions.



REMEMBER

If you're changing exercises from machines to free weights (or vice versa), make sure you're sticking with the same movement pattern. For example, you might try moving from a machine chest press (horizontal pushing) to a dumbbell chest press (horizontal pushing that requires greater stability).

Providing direction for clients you see less often

If your client has purchased a long-term training package and you've been working together on a frequent basis, you'll have the luxury of knowing that client's capabilities well and you can continually monitor and advance the program. Unfortunately, that ideal scenario won't be the case for all clients. For clients you're seeing intermittently, you need to provide direction on how and when to advance their program on their own, as well as set follow-up appointments so you can reevaluate them and make solid recommendations for updating their program.



TIP

For clients you see less frequently, document everything when you're giving them a new program. You can even create a specific form just for program changes, with areas sectioned off to make notes so the client remembers what to do.

Here are areas to cover when prescribing program changes for an intermittent client:

- » **If/then scenarios:** Envision a few possible scenarios and tell your client what to do in each case. For example, you may say, "If this set is too easy, then next time increase your weight by five pounds."
- » **Benchmarks for increasing intensity:** You want to make sure your client doesn't get hurt by being overeager. So you may say something like, "After your third week on this program, raise your repetitions to 15, keeping your weight the same."
- » **Appointment for program change:** You need to tell your client how long to stick with this program before you'll recommend changes. For example, you may say, "We'll need to reevaluate you for a new program in six weeks."
- » **Recording workouts:** It's important that your client records what they actually end up doing for each workout. You'll need this information when you reassess so you can see what's working and what isn't.
- » **Recording intensity level during workouts:** Ask your client to gauge how hard they're working and make a quick note of it. If you see that most workouts were a perceived exertion rate of 4, you'll know that the program wasn't challenging enough.



REMEMBER

Put it in writing! When you make program changes for an intermittent client, you end up giving a lot of information in one session, which can be overwhelming. Most of the time, clients won't remember everything you've told them — put it all in writing so they can walk away with a program they understand and feel confident about following on their own.



TIP

Use the same workout template every time to avoid confusion.

Strengthening Your Strength Techniques

You truly are only limited by your imagination when it comes to advancing your client. In the following sections, I provide some basic programming techniques to get you started. But remember, you're not limited to what you see here — be creative. Your clients will thank you for it!

Strength-training routines

One strategy for taking your client to the next level is to move from total body workouts to training the body in smaller and smaller parts. For example, you might start with a full-body routine and progress over time to a five-day split where the client exercises a different body part each day.

The full-body routine

The full-body routine assigns one exercise to each muscle group. This routine is an excellent format for beginning clients, because it provides a consistent format for creating a strong baseline conditioning level. When you're advancing the client within this routine, you can increase sets, weights, and intensity. This program can easily take your client from beginner to intermediate status. You'll still want to prioritize movement patterns but you can include additional exercises.



REMEMBER

Typically, beginning clients who are training two to three times per week will use this type of programming for *at least* their first three to four weeks of training. You can vary a client's exercises within the full-body-workout format, helping to keep the program fresh and interesting even though you're still training the entire body with the same movement patterns during each workout.

The two-day split

The two-day split is the next logical program progression after a client has mastered the full-body routine. When you're implementing the two-day split, you'll typically have your client devote one workout solely to upper-body exercises, then on the next workout, concentrate on lower-body movements.

By dividing the body into upper and lower regions, you enable your client to increase *volume* (total amount of work completed) per session and per body part without increasing injury risk or overtraining. Alternating the body's regions each workout allows for adequate recovery time before you train the next region again.

The three-day split

The three-day split builds on the premise of the two-day split routine. After a client has adapted to the two-day split, their body will be ready to increase workload volume for more-specific body parts. Dividing the body further and adding an additional session to the program cycle allows the client to devote more training volume to each muscle group worked that session.

You can divide body parts in a three-day-split routine in a few different ways.



REMEMBER

How you choose your client's split depends on their training goals.

Here's one example of a three-day split by body part:

- » **Day 1:** Chest, shoulders, triceps
- » **Day 2:** Back, biceps, core
- » **Day 3:** Legs

And here's another example:

- » **Day 1:** Chest and back
- » **Day 2:** Triceps and biceps
- » **Day 3:** Shoulders and legs

The four-day split

With a four-day split, you can go even further by dividing the body into smaller segments. The intensity of this type of programming is useful for increasing strength and power if that's the primary goal.

Here's a way to group movement patterns for a four-day split program:

- » **Day 1:** Horizontal push and horizontal pull
- » **Day 2:** Quad dominant (squats, lunges)
- » **Day 3:** Vertical push and vertical pull
- » **Day 4:** Hip dominant (deadlifts, kettlebell swings)

And here's another approach if you want to try a four-day split by specific body part:

- » **Day 1:** Chest and shoulders
- » **Day 2:** Back and biceps
- » **Day 3:** Legs
- » **Day 4:** Triceps and abs

The five-day split

The five-day split divides the body into even smaller regions to be worked out one day at a time. This type of routine isn't for everyone, but it can be beneficial for advanced lifters who are short on time.

By dividing the body into even smaller regions, you put more intensity into training each muscle group. Although it might seem time-consuming to train this way, the five-day split actually saves time because you're only training each body part once a week and training sessions become much shorter.

Push-pull routines

A *push-pull routine* (in which you alternate a pushing movement with a pulling movement) can work well for any level client because it allows for adequate muscle recovery. How you manipulate your client's rest and reps is what makes this program challenging.

Push-pull routines are a popular alternative for clients who have plateaued or who have been on a particular program style for an extended period of time. Push-pull training forces opposite muscle groups to work intensely back-to-back and is another way to increase volume.

Advanced training techniques

In addition to giving your client new routines, you can also include advanced training techniques *within* the training routines. Coming up is a rundown of some popular advanced training techniques.

Supersetting

Supersetting is when opposing muscle-group exercises are paired (such as a push-up and cable row) and performed back to back, without rest in between. After your client has performed the two back-to-back exercises, they'll rest, and then perform the same set again.

This type of exercise pairing raises intensity without overloading the same muscle group. You extend the duration of the activity overall without overstressing the active muscle group because one muscle group rests while the other one works.



TIP

This method is great for advanced beginners because it increases their intensity level without over-stressing the musculoskeletal system.

Compound sets

Compound sets are based on the same principle as supersets. The only exception is that same-muscle-group exercises are paired rather than opposing-muscle-group exercises. For example, you may pair a deadlift with a glute bridge.



TIP

This method is slightly more advanced because you're working the same muscle groups for a longer duration without rest. This method isn't appropriate for your beginning clients.

Strip sets

Strip sets are also known as *drop sets* or *breakdown sets*. When you strip a set, you have your client perform all assigned reps in a set. Then you "strip" a certain amount of weight (such as five or ten pounds) and the client continues to perform as many reps as possible. Then you "strip" some more weight off; this continues on until the client can't do another rep, even with no weight. Save this technique for the end of the workout because there won't be any gas left in the tank when you're done!



WARNING

This technique is advanced and should only be used with clients whom you know very well and who are highly conditioned. If your client isn't that advanced, and you would like to try this technique, you still can. Just *don't* take it to failure. Instead, try doing one or two "strips."

Negatives

A *negative* is the eccentric phase (the relax phase of a muscle contraction); typically, it's the easiest part of a movement. Eccentric strength is 130 percent of concentric strength (the lifting part of a movement), which means a client can handle 30 percent more weight with an eccentric action. In other words, can *resist* 30 percent more force than they can *lift*.

Negative training is when you apply manual resistance during the lowering phase of a movement and the client resists the additional force, slowing the return to the start position, or when you help your client lift a weight that's 30 percent heavier than they would normally train with, and then have them resist the weight as they lower it.

See Spot run: Spotting techniques

Spots on your uniform: bad. Spotting your client: good. Any trainer will tell you that a good spot helps your clients to learn good form. It also goes a long way toward boosting their confidence to try lifting heavier weights, knowing you'll be there to help if it's too much. You need to recognize *when* and, more important, *where* to spot.



REMEMBER

A spot doesn't help your client if you aren't in a position where you can help to control the movement.



TIP

The most difficult movements to spot are free-weight and body-weight exercises. To spot free weights:

- » Always spot from a position of strength.
- » Place your hands by (never on) the joint closest to the weight.
- » Make sure you have stable body position.
- » Make sure you can handle your client's weight yourself if they lose control.



TIP

To spot body-weight exercises:

- » Spot from the client's nonmoving body part.
- » Place yourself in a position to protect the client from falling.
- » Watch the client's posture.



TIP

You can use spotting to increase your client's intensity. For example, you can apply additional light pressure to the arm of a machine to very gradually add extra resistance. Or, you might take the momentum out of a movement by slowing the lift at the top. These are all good methods that can gently ease your client into more intense training methods over time.

Let's Get Physical: Progressing Your Client's Cardio Program

Strength training isn't the only piece of a program that needs progression. Your client's aerobic fitness will adapt to training too. Here, I'll show you how to apply the *FITT-VP principle* to bump up the intensity of your client's cardio workouts and how to use interval training appropriately.

The FITT-VP principle

You can make a client's aerobic exercise program more challenging by manipulating the *FITT-VP principles of exercise prescription*. FITT-VP stands for *frequency* (how often), *intensity* (how hard), *time* (how long), *type* (mode of exercise), *volume* (total amount of work completed in a session or during a time period), and *progression* (advancing the program). The FITT-VP principle is a helpful framework for monitoring progress, but make sure you're only changing one thing at a time; otherwise you risk not knowing what worked and what didn't. There's also a good chance your client will end up doing more work than necessary to get the same results. And everyone loves doing extra cardio for the sake of doing extra cardio . . . said nobody ever.

You can also use the FITT-VP principle to challenge new clients who are experienced and already in good shape (like athletes).

Introducing your client to interval training

Interval training uses moderately paced work interspersed with short, high-intensity work periods. Typically, the goal with interval training is to challenge your client's cardiorespiratory system enough to increase aerobic capacity without overstressing them physiologically.

Whereas steady-state cardiovascular training is a common starting point for beginning clients, interval training may be the next program type you want to incorporate into your intermediate client's programming repertoire. There are

two types of interval training: aerobic interval training and anaerobic interval training. Aerobic interval training is when your client works to a level that is harder than what they are used to but not maximal during their interval phase (higher-intensity work). Anaerobic interval training means pushing to the limit during the high-intensity bout.

I'm guessing you're most familiar with *high-intensity interval training* (HIIT), which alternates short bouts of a high intensity anerobic exercise with short bouts of less intense recovery. This type of interval training doesn't allow for full recovery between bouts, just enough to catch your breath before going all out again. HIIT has gained popularity in recent years because it's a very efficient way to increase aerobic fitness. In other words, it's hard work, but it doesn't take much time.

Some people get great satisfaction from pushing their limits and going all out during their workouts — the key word being *some*. Pushing your body above its lactate threshold means going 100 percent all-out until there's nothing left and you have to take a rest . . . not that you *want* to stop, you actually have to stop because you truly can't continue. Most people can push to this level for a few seconds, maybe a minute at most, and it's not a comfortable feeling.



Please don't prescribe HIIT training to clients with little experience or those who have been sedentary for a long time. It's not necessary and you risk turning them off to exercise if they believe this is the only way to get in shape.

Table 15-1 shows a sample interval program on the treadmill, for both an aerobic program and an anaerobic program. Notice that the anaerobic program's speeds are higher, meaning that the client is going to be working harder during those cycles.

TABLE 15-1 **Sample Treadmill Interval Program**

Time	Aerobic Program	Anaerobic Program
Minutes 1:00 to 7:00	Warm-up (Speed 3.3)	Warm-up (Speed 4.0)
Minutes 7:00 to 8:00	Jog (Speed 5.0)	Run (Speed 8.0)
Minutes 8:00 to 10:00	Walk briskly (Speed 4.0)	Jog (Speed 6.0)
Minutes 10:00 to 11:00	Jog (Speed 6.0)	Sprint (Speed 10.0)
Minutes 11:00 to 13:00	Walk briskly (Speed 4.0)	Jog (Speed 6.0)
Minutes 13:00 to 14:00	Jog (Speed 6.0)	Sprint (Speed 10.0)
Minutes 14:00 to 20:00	Cool-down (Speed 3.5)	Cool-down (Speed 4.3)



REMEMBER

Interval training is also great for:

- » Breaking training plateaus
- » Increasing VO_2max (lung capacity)
- » Increasing stamina
- » Boosting metabolism

4

**Growing
Your Personal
Training
Business**

IN THIS PART . . .

It's all about getting big. This part describes everything you need to expand your business. First, I outline the basics on preparing for growth — how to document your systems and automate your processes so everything you need will be in place. Then, I describe all the ways you can expand your business, such as by adding massage services, nutritional services, and group classes; by giving seminars; and by selling fitness equipment.

When you start expanding, you'll likely need some help. That's why I also give you the scoop on hiring and — gulp! — firing employees, including information on placing want ads, conducting interviews, and staying on the right side of employment law.

Finally, I talk about how to build your business culture — that is, how to make the environment and atmosphere of your business conducive to great business, happy clients, and motivated employees.

- » Getting ready to take on staff
- » Creating an organizational chart
- » Writing your employee manual

Chapter **16**

Preparing for Growth: Automating and Documenting Your Workflow

The moment you realize, “Oh my gosh, I need help!” is a defining moment in your personal training career. Needing help typically means that you’re at capacity and can’t take any additional clients on yourself. Congratulations — this is a good “problem”! But before you run and post your help-wanted ad on LinkedIn, consider this scenario:

You hire your first employee. (Find more on *how* to hire your employees in Chapter 17.) You say, “Here’s your staff shirt, your first client is Monday at 9 a.m. Don’t be late.”

How well do you think that employee will fare? Most likely, not too well. Studies have shown that the more energy and time you invest into on-the-job training, the more successful your new employee’s career with you is going to be. So yes,

hiring employees means being accountable for your clients' success and for the success of your personal training team.

In this chapter, I go over the prep work that's necessary to make this important decision a successful one.

Planning for Growth

So how do you make sure that your team of trainers have the tools they need to be successful? You plan for it! You developed your business plan to be a successful business owner, and now you'll need to develop your operating plan to be a successful employer. Your *operating plan* outlines how your employees will carry out their responsibilities, defined by the steps needed to complete each task — the order of operations for your business, also referred to as *workflow*.

Before you even think about hiring some help, you need to have an overall plan of how that employee is going to operate within your business, the role and responsibilities they'll have, and how they'll contribute overall to the growth of your company. Sound like a lot? It is — and making the leap from personal trainer to employer isn't for everyone. Knowing what's involved, including the work you'll need to do up front as you map out your plan, will help you to decide if becoming an employer is right for you.

Thinking strategically

Strategic thinking sounds like a term you would hear thrown around in the Mergers and Acquisitions office of GiganticCo, Inc. Actually, strategic thinking is the process of developing your end vision for how your business will look when it's up and running successfully. It's a tool used by successful entrepreneurs — and no matter how large or small your company is, it's one that you should learn to use well.

Strategic thinking is a technique for framing and solving problems. Your first step is to assess your industry and your business — where you are currently — then identify where and how your efforts can be applied to reach your end goal.

Envisioning the end

If I were to ask you right now, “What is the end goal for you and your business?” would you be able to answer? When you plan for growth, you need to envision your ultimate goal as the end result, then work backward from there, planning what steps you need to take to reach your end goal successfully.



TIP

Break out a pen and paper and write down your ultimate goal for your business. Don't be afraid to describe, in detail, what it will look like. This goal statement will be very useful to you later on as your business changes and evolves, to help keep you on track toward reaching your goal.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you write:

- » What will your business look like? Will you have two employees or 20? Or 200?
- » What type of business structure do you need (LLC, sole proprietorship, and so on)? If your business is already established, will the current structure still work?
- » What type of employees do you need? Personal trainers? Front desk staff?
- » How many employees will you need?
- » What roles will they have in your company?
- » What skill sets do your employees need to have?
- » What types of problems should you be prepared to handle?
- » What types of obstacles will you need to overcome?



TIP

Every four years, the Small Business Administration (SBA) updates its strategy document, a resource that you can access for free to outline your current and future business goals and objectives. You can find it on the SBA website at www.sba.gov/document/support-sba-strategic-plan.

Working backward

Now that you've envisioned your goal for your business, write down the steps you'll need to take to get there. (Does this sound familiar? This process is just like creating your business plan.) Working backward, think of everything you need to put in place to support your end vision. Try doing some free-form brainstorming to help stimulate the old gray matter.

For example, say your goal is to own a 10,000 square foot personal training facility with 20 employees. That means you'll eventually be hiring 20 people. To do that, you'll need to have enough revenue to justify bringing on more staff. To do *that*, you'll need to do enough effective marketing to attract new clients. That's working backward.



TIP

This subject is one that a mentor, or someone who has grown a business before, can help you with and I highly recommend reaching out to SCORE for guidance. SCORE is a network of volunteer business mentors that entrepreneurs can connect with for free. In addition to mentorship with an expert in your field, you'll also have access to a treasure trove of educational content to help you succeed in business. To learn more about SCORE, check out its website at www.score.org.

Follow the Leader: Creating a System for Others to Follow

Now that you've defined your business goal, and you understand the type of support you'll need to get there, you're ready to create the how-to of your business — your business's rules and regulations, as well as the basics of how your company will run with others working in it.

Offering your clients consistent service

You have a special way of doing things — it's *your* way, the way that has worked so well that you now need to bring on other people to handle all the new clients clamoring for your stupendous services. And although you can't work with each client personally, you still want your clients to have the same exceptional experience with your new trainers as they would with you.



TIP

That exceptional experience is the result of your *consistency of service*. Consistency of service is what keeps your clients coming back. You want a team with the same mindset and upbeat, positive attitude for each client. You should also expect your trainers to dress the same way, spot clients the same way, perform initial consultations and fitness assessments the same way, and so on.



REMEMBER

To deliver consistent service, you need to:

- » Consider how you hope clients will perceive your business and make sure your entire team understands it.
- » Document your business's *standard operating procedures (SOPs)* — that is, the exact way and order in which you expect your team to carry out their duties.

Developing your workflow

Without knowing it, you already have workflow systems in place. For example, when you perform an initial consultation or a fitness assessment, you follow specific steps unique to each of those sessions. Each step has a specific order that you execute it in for accuracy and for consistency. Each step and the order you execute it in are considered *workflow steps*.

When your staff performs those activities instead of you, outlining each step of a task, listing the details of how each step is performed, and identifying what happens after each step is important. The way your staff members perform is reflected in your attention to details. It's on you to develop your workflow so you can train your staff to do their jobs successfully and to your standards.



REMEMBER

You want your business to run smoothly as much as you want your clients to receive excellent service. You also need to provide your employees with a good working environment, where expectations are laid out well and they don't have to guess what to do.



TIP

Take a moment to think about the recurring things that you do as a personal trainer. Then list the steps needed to complete each one.

For example, suppose you want to outline for your employees how they should answer the phone and handle a call from a prospective client. Your workflow may look something like this:

Referred callers: The bulk of our clientele is obtained through client and physician referral. Some of these people may want to speak to the referred trainer directly. If the trainer is not available, let the caller know that you have the trainer's schedule and would be more than happy to set up an initial consultation. If they still want to speak directly with the trainer, take their name, number, and ask who referred them. Tell them their call will be returned as soon as possible.

Email inquiries: When prospects find our ad online, they'll typically fill out an inquiry form or email us for information about our services and pricing.

How to reply: Usually, when prospects inquire online about our services, price is the first question. Rather than giving a list of prices for each service, we let them know that we offer several services with pricing starting at \$99/month for unlimited group classes. Then we invite them to schedule a free consultation to learn about what we offer and how we can help them.

Email script: We're a personal training and nutrition company, offering one-on-one and group personal training and nutrition services to clients at our private facility, in your home, or the gym you belong to. To get started the first step is to set up a free initial consultation where we will discuss your goals and background.

We offer several training options and I can help you decide on the right one for you based on your goals and your budget. The consultation lasts from 45 minutes to an hour. There won't be any physical exercising during this session, just discussion. For your convenience, our appointment availability is on our website and you can schedule a time online that works with your schedule. (Slight variations of this are fine; this is the general idea of how we handle new client inquiries.)

Who to book the consult with: If you're on the phone with a prospect, try to schedule the initial consultation before hanging up instead of directing them to the website. You can pull the schedule up online while you're on the phone and book the appointment during any available time slot. If the caller requests a specific trainer, please schedule the consultation with that trainer. If the trainer doesn't have an immediate opening, tell the prospect that you'll ask the trainer to get back to them right away with their availability.

Give directions to the facility over the phone or email directions to the prospect, especially if your location isn't easy to find.

If the prospect doesn't schedule an initial consult, ask if you can email them with additional information.

This is just one example of an everyday situation you should document for your employees. You can apply this approach to other scenarios too, such as:

- »» Booking and rescheduling training appointments
- »» Handling cancellations
- »» Performing the initial consult
- »» Selling a personal training package
- »» Collecting payment
- »» Performing a fitness assessment
- »» Performing a personal training session

Once you've outlined steps for each task that your employees will be doing, the next step is to map out how all tasks and steps integrate with each other in the everyday flow of your business, including who will handle each one.

Mapping your workflow

Try drawing a flowchart of the daily activities in your business and how they integrate with one another. This chart will give you a bird's-eye view of your business so you can spot potential conflicts before you actually have other people following the steps in your plan. See Figure 16-1 for a sample flowchart.

FIGURE 16-1:
A flowchart can help you and your employees manage the day-to-day operations of your business.

Administrative		Trainer	
Opening			
Reception AM		Trainer AM	
1. Check voice mail. —Return all calls and distribute messages. 2.Complete items on to-do report. 3.Confirm next day’s new appointments.		1. Disarm alarm. 2. Turn on lights, fans, radio. 3. Check AND save messages. —Respond to urgent ones.	
Mid-day			
Reception AM—End of Shift		Trainer AM—End of Shift	
1. Validate sessions in schedule. 2. List to-do’s. 3. Face front. 4. Stock bathrooms. 5. Bag towels. 6. Check trash.		1. Pick up cups and towels. 2. Wipe down showers. 3. Wipe down equipment. 4. Stock bathrooms. 5. Bag towels. 6. Check trash.	
Administrative Manager		Head Trainer—End of Team Trainer Shift	
1. Count bank. 2. Approve reception AM leave.		1. Approve team trainer leave.	
Reception PM—Beginning of Shift		Trainer PM—Beginning of Shift	
1. Review and complete to-do’s. 2. Validate sessions in schedule.			
Closing			
Reception PM		Trainer PM	
1. Enter next day’s appointments on daylog. 2. Print out trainer schedules. 3. List to-do’s. 4. Face front. 5. Stock bathrooms. 6. Bag towels. 7. Take out trash.		1. Pick up cups and towels. 2. Wipe down showers. 3. Wipe down equipment. 4. Stock bathrooms. 5. Bag towels. 6. Check trash. 7. Turn off lights, fans, radio. 8. Arm alarm.	



TIP

You can create flowcharts for any system in your business, such as selling, training, hiring, and so on. Simply list out the steps and actions involved, who performs them and when — and you have the meat and potatoes of your operations manual!

Writing Job Descriptions

Now that you have all your systems mapped out, and you know which employee will be doing which tasks, you need to write job descriptions for each position you're planning to hire for.

A job description is important because it defines what the job entails. You'll want to include a transparent description of the work involved and the minimum requirements for applying (education, experience, skills, and so on). An accurate job description is crucial — you need qualified candidates to apply! That, and a clear job description will avert the oh-so-familiar “but it isn't in my job description!”



TIP

A well-written job description provides a concise summary of everything important about the job, such as:

- » **The job title**
- » **Individual tasks involved**
- » **Methods used to complete the tasks**
- » **The job objective:** This statement is generally a summary designed to orient the reader to the general nature, level, purpose, and objective of the job. The summary should describe the broad function and scope of the position and be no longer than three to four sentences.
- » **The purpose and responsibilities of the job**
- » **The relationship of the job to other jobs**
- » **Qualifications needed for the job**
- » **The relationships and roles relevant to the employee's position within the company, including any supervisory positions, subordinating roles, and other working relationships.**
- » **The job location (that is, where the work will be performed)**
- » **The equipment to be used in the performance of the job:** For example, does your company's computers run in a Mac or Windows environment?
- » **The range of pay for the position (include this to avoid interviewing applicants with salary requirements outside of your pay range)**



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that the job descriptions you're creating now are a starting point. They're the base for future employees' job development and training and you'll want to be sure to update them regularly. As your business grows and evolves, so must the team that you rely on to keep it running like a well-oiled machine.



TIP

When writing a job description, keep each statement short and clear. Be sure to structure your sentences in classic verb/object and explanatory phrases. Figure 16-2 shows a sample job description.

Job Description Team Trainer Position

1. Description

The UltraFit Team Trainer (TT) position is a part-time, salaried training position. The TT reports to the Manager.

2. Qualifications

The TT is required to have current personal training certification from one or more of the following certifying bodies: ACSM, NSCA, or ACE. The TT must also maintain current CPR certification from the American Red Cross or the American Heart Association. The TT must have two years of practical experience prior to employment.

3. Duties

The duties of the TT include, but are not limited to:

3A.1 Personal Training/Nutrition—General Duties

Maintaining and promoting client relationships

The TT will provide all clients with an exceptional, five-star training experience. To do this, the TT will:

- i. Be ready 5 minutes prior to all training sessions.
- ii. Train clients no fewer than 45 minutes, or no more than 75 minutes (unless otherwise agreed upon by management).
- iii. Train each client uniquely and specifically for his individual goals.
- iv. Be a positive source of encouragement, education and feedback for each client.

3A.2 Personal Training/Nutrition — Specific Duties

- i. Become completely knowledgeable about the exercise and nutrition methodologies practiced by the company.
- ii. Become completely knowledgeable about each new client's needs, goals, location of training, package purchased, and assessment parameters prior to assessment.
- iii. Provide fitness and nutrition assessment, evaluation, prescription, education, and follow-up to clientele of the company, utilizing company-set protocols.
- iv. Accurately record each workout in client's workbook, providing date of session, session number, exercises performed during session, and weights and repetitions performed per set per exercise per session.
- v. Provide accurate, detailed notes of client progress in client files.

3B. Administrative

Maintain all paperwork critical to the operations of the company

The TT is responsible for all paperwork pertinent to the daily functions and overall health of the company and the company's clientele.

3C. Maintenance

Maintain equipment and fixtures of facility

The TT is responsible for the maintenance of the company's equipment and facilities on a daily basis.

4. Compensation

Compensation for this position is \$64,000.00 annually.

I acknowledge and agree to the above statements and terms:

Signed:

Employee: _____ Date: _____

Manager: _____ Date: _____

FIGURE 16-2:
Have your new hires sign a job description to keep on file in case you ever need to gently remind an employee what your expectations are.

Charting Your Progress: Creating Your Organizational Chart

An organizational chart shows who's in what position and their relationships to one another. The *org chart* shows employees who they report to, who reports to them, and what positions they could advance to within the company.



TIP

When you build your own org chart, you need to make the level of each position clear to your employees. Too often, org charts can become confusing, so keep it as simple as possible.

Here's how to build your own org chart:

1. **Start with yourself — create a box and enter your name and your title.**
2. **Create a row of boxes below yours for all the positions that will report to you; enter the title and position for each one.**
3. **Create connecting lines between your box and those of the people who report to you.**
4. **Create smaller boxes below the row of boxes directly beneath you to demonstrate the positions that report to your subordinates.**

Figure 16-3 shows an example of an organizational chart for a personal training company.



TIP

Here are some tips for creating org charts that will help — and not confuse — your employees.

- » Draw your org chart on paper or create one in Microsoft Word.
- » Make the box sizes correspond to the ranking in the company. Boxes are usually larger for higher-ups, the same size for peers, and smaller for subordinates.
- » Draw all positions, even if you don't have an employee in place for that position yet. Show the position as TBH (to be hired) or TBD (to be determined).
- » For positions that report to you for direction but report to another position primarily, use a dashed line rather than a solid line to connect their boxes to yours.

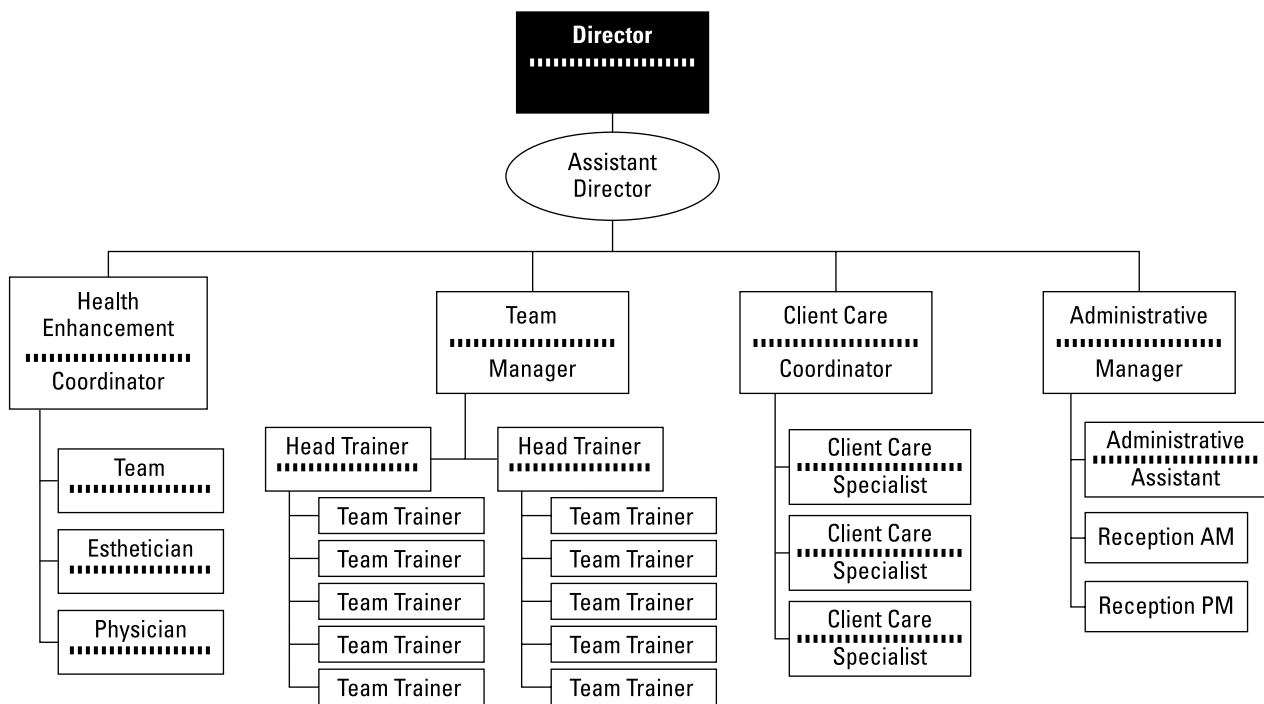


FIGURE 16-3:
An organizational chart helps everyone know their relationship to everyone else.

Creating Your Employee Handbook

An employee handbook will save you energy and effort in the long run. It will also help to protect your business from employees whose conduct could damage the health and reputation of your business.

An employee handbook clearly communicates your company policies, benefits, and expectations. It will also lay out conduct policies and other hard-to-address issues.



TIP

Having a well written employee handbook will:

- » **Save you time.** Most times, new employees will ask you the same questions over and over again. By having all the answers consolidated in a handbook, you'll be able to refer employees to one place for questions about office procedures, and so on.
- » **Improve your on-the-job training.** Your employee handbook will serve as a road map for your employees to do their jobs correctly. The more procedures that employees are officially trained in, the more confidence they'll have in performing their jobs well.
- » **Improve your consistency of service.** If you don't spell out exactly how you want your employees to do their jobs, you can't really expect things to get done the way you want them done. Your employees want to do good work the same way your clients want consistent, reliable service — and it's on you to set the bar and show them how to be great at what they do.
- » **Show your new hires that you're serious about your business.** After all, as they say, "There it is in black and white"!
- » **Reduce employee misconduct by laying out your discipline policies.** This information can also come in handy if an employee ever disputes your rules or policies.



TRUE
STORY

Addressing conflict at work can feel awkward, especially if you haven't made your expectations clear from the very beginning. When I created my first employee handbook, I didn't include a clear dress code policy because I didn't want to offend anybody. That decision came back to bite me when I had to have a difficult conversation with one of my trainers about their attire. The conversation was embarrassing for both of us and could have been avoided if I had clearly explained the company dress code in my employee handbook.

- » Outsourcing to other professionals
- » Hiring trainers
- » Keeping your employees happy
- » Laying off employees

Chapter 17

Hiring Additional Staff

For years, you were probably someone else's employee — working hours you didn't choose for a paycheck that you didn't set. Now it's payback time — time for you to hire employees of your own!

But you'll soon find that there's more to hiring trainers than posting a "help wanted" ad online. You need to understand the employment laws in your state, learn how to find the best trainers, and understand how to keep employees whistling while they work. That's what this chapter is all about.

Even if you aren't hiring other trainers, you probably *are* hiring other professionals like accountants and attorneys. In this chapter, you discover how to find the best professionals for your business.

Outsourcing Is In: Hiring Professionals

Even if you don't need employees, you need employees. Does that make sense? Well, let's put it another way: Even if you don't plan on hiring other personal trainers in your business, you need to outsource certain tasks to professionals.

You can take the time to master the skills needed to handle these tasks yourself, but your clients probably aren't looking to hire a personal trainer/lawyer/painter/tailor just like you're probably not looking to hire a jack or jill of all trades to keep

your business on the up and up. Your clients want a personal trainer who knows their stuff inside and out, so focus on being the best professional personal trainer you can be and leave the rest to the other professionals.



Consider hiring the professionals listed in the following sections. For more information on hiring an attorney, accountant, and insurance agent, check out Chapter 6.

Graphic designer

As you find out in Chapter 8, you can create your own logo and build your online presence yourself. But if you want to look truly professional, I recommend hiring a designer as soon as your budget allows to create (or update) your logo, website, and any other branding materials you will use to promote your business.

To find a designer who can create graphics that will have clients flocking to your doors, try these suggestions:

- » Look online at fitness websites and blogs (yes, blogging is still a thing) to get an idea of what you like. Usually if you look at the bottom of the homepage, you can find out who designed the website and you can contact them to see if they're a good fit for your business.
- » Ask other small-business owners and personal trainers who they use.
- » Search your LinkedIn network. You'll find more information about the graphic designers you're considering and you can see who other professionals in your network recommend.
- » Do a Google search for "graphic designer" — just be prepared to sift through a massive list of options.



Can't afford a designer? Try these tips:

- » **Barter your services for the services you need.** If you're just getting started and don't have a lot of cash, you might be able to find someone who's interested in trading personal training sessions for professional design services. Think carefully about bartering before doing it though. Some states consider bartered hours as taxable income, and you need to make sure you understand your state's rules so you don't get yourself into a bind at tax time. I'm telling you about bartering so you know it's an option, but I don't recommend making a habit of it. Your business needs revenue to survive and you can't live off of bartered time.

» **Contact a design school to find designers-in-training.** Students are usually willing to charge less than full-time professionals to gain experience and credentials. You can also find freelancers who charge less on Fiverr or Upwork.

SEO specialist

Hiring a designer to build your website won't pay off if nobody can see it. A *search engine optimization* (SEO for short) specialist can identify strategies for increasing traffic to your website by *optimizing* it for search engines. In other words, this person can make your business appear closer to the top of search engine results pages when a prospective client searches online for personal trainers. That being said, I recommend starting with some very basic steps that won't cost you anything before working on SEO. Make sure your business is set up for Google search and set up a Facebook business page.

Social media manager

If your website is your virtual business card, think of social media as your online living room. Being active on social media is necessary for building your online presence, and more important, you can use it to interact with current and prospective clients. If trying to figure out how to use all the different social media channels feels daunting, you're not alone. It seems like there's a new one to figure out every day, and just when you think you're getting the hang of one, it's not relevant anymore. Not only that, but posting regularly to social media and engaging with your audience can be a full-time job, and it actually is a full-time job for a *social media manager*.

Hiring a social media manager will free you up to run your business without having to worry about managing your online presence. They'll put your business on several social media channels and can manage them for you. This means posting regular content, but more importantly, they'll be your online voice. They can respond to comments on your posts, reply to messages, and they'll keep you informed about what people are saying online about your business.

Handyperson

If you own your own facility, what happens when the air conditioning breaks or you need someone to assemble your new equipment? You don't need to have a professional waiting in the wings, but knowing who you can contact to fix things and build stuff from time to time will save you from lots of headaches down the

road. Ask friends, family, or your clients for referrals. You can also search for help on Thumbtack, a website where a variety of local service providers advertise their services. Searching for services on Thumbtack is free.



REMEMBER

Find a good handyperson and build a good relationship before you actually need them.

Internet service provider

If you plan to have a website, send out an email newsletter, or answer email inquiries, you need an internet service provider (ISP) to keep you connected to the web. Depending on where you live, you'll be able to shop around for the best ISP for your business. Some areas have more options than others and you can ask around or check online to see what your options are.



TIP

Many ISPs also offer phone and cable TV service and you'll save money if you bundle services with one provider. It's worth your time to shop around a bit to find the right fit for your business.

Payroll service

A payroll service cuts checks or manages direct deposits for your employees' pay and also handles tax withholdings. You can find payroll services online, or ask other business owners for referrals. You can also use QuickBooks to manage payroll yourself if you don't want to use an outside service, but if you do, I strongly recommend hiring a bookkeeper to help. Even if you only have one employee, keeping your financial records current and paying your employee on time is time consuming. And you need to pay your employees on time, no exceptions. A part-time bookkeeper can do this for you and at the same time keep your financial records organized — which your accountant will appreciate when tax-time rolls around.

Pumping Up Your Ranks: Hiring Other Trainers

So you're ready to expand your business and take on more trainers. Congratulations! This is what many trainers dream of. You can't add more hours to the day, after all, so hiring help who will let you serve more people (and make more money) than you can by yourself is almost always a boon.

Don't write that want ad just yet, though. First, you need the scoop on hiring, dealing with, and (gulp!) firing employees.

Uncovering where trainers hide out

Unfortunately, walking into the local gym and shouting, "Who wants to quit this dump and come work for me?" is bad form. But I have the scoop on how you can find trainers who would be happy to join you and pave the way toward your goal of world domina — um, your goal of a healthy world for all:

- » **Post your job opening on LinkedIn.** Be sure to outline exactly what you expect so your network can refer the right candidates. For example, if you want someone with a four-year degree and CPR certification who can work a 40-hour workweek, say that in your job description.
- » **Use word of mouth.** Your clients know you well and can suggest people who will fit in with your culture. Some of your clients might even want to be personal trainers, and considering that they chose to pay you, they're on board with what you do and they're familiar with your training methods and your gym culture.



Sometimes the best trainers aren't trainers at all. One of my best-ever hires was a Starbucks barista who I convinced to give personal training a try. Every morning, I would watch her greet her regular customers by name and have their drinks ready without them having to tell her what they wanted. One day, she mentioned to me that she was thinking about becoming a yoga instructor, and I asked if she had ever thought about becoming a personal trainer. The rest is history, and not only did the barista give personal training a try, she went on to build a successful personal training business that she still owns today. Always keep your eyes open and ears peeled for people who you think would be great personal trainers because you can teach someone with a great personality how to train clients, but you can't give a boring personal trainer a new personality.

Evaluating a trainer's potential

In a perfect world, you'd be able to pull random trainers off the street and they'd be model employees. But alas, the world is not perfect — so if you want good employees, you have to do some research on the people who are applying to work with you.

I have always sought out people with personality and a positive attitude above all else, even if they didn't have personal training experience, and I had a simple two-step process to help me understand everything I needed to know about a potential trainer before hiring them.

Step 1: The phone screen

Before scheduling an interview, I would schedule a 30-minute phone call with a candidate. Talking on the phone first allowed me to gauge their enthusiasm — and how my clients might perceive this person.

If the candidate was an experienced personal trainer, I didn't ask anatomy and physiology questions to test their knowledge. Instead, I asked them to describe how they would handle typical situations like a client showing up late for a training session or not following their program. Their answers to these questions told me a lot more about their character than their practical knowledge ever could.

After the phone screen, I either scheduled an interview or let the candidate know they would not be moving forward to the interview.

Step 2: The interview

During the interview, I ask the typical questions (more on that later). Candidates with prepared answers indicate to me that they are serious about making a good impression. I also ask them why they would be a good fit for our team, and if they talk about our core values and training philosophy — information freely available on my website — I know they had done their research. Attention to details and showing up prepared are key attributes I look for in personal trainers and I use the interview to determine whether the candidate already had these qualities or if trying to instill them would even be worth my time and energy. I give you more information about interviews later in this chapter.

Being your own human-resources officer

Major companies have human-resources officers who hire employees and make sure that everything regarding the hiring and firing of employees is on the up-and-up. You don't have this luxury, so it's up to you to hire and fire employees, do interviews, and understand employment law. In the following sections, I show you how.

Understanding labor or employment law

Labor law and *employment law* are the same thing — statutes found at all levels of government, from county to federal, that determine the rights and obligations that arise out of an employment contract. Labor law regulates everything from the initial hiring process and benefits to job duties and termination of employees, and protects employees from discrimination and unfair labor practices.

DOING BACKGROUND CHECKS

If you've ever tried renting an apartment, you know that the landlord does a background check to make sure you're not some sort of psychopath (and that you can afford the rent). In the same way, you may want to do some sleuthing into your applicants' criminal backgrounds before you hire them.

You generally have the right to access arrest and conviction records that are public information, but whether you can use such information for hiring decisions varies from state to state. Some states allow employers to discriminate based on criminal convictions but not on arrests. Other states apply varying rules depending on the position or industry the candidate is applying for. Check with your lawyer to find out what the rules are in your state.



REMEMBER

Your lawyer (see Chapter 6 for tips on finding one) can help you understand labor law as well as write up employment contracts and other contracts and forms you need in your business relationship with an employee.

Knowing the costs of hiring others

Think that wages are your only employee-related cost? Think again. You also have to pay for workers' compensation insurance, unemployment tax, and Social Security tax:

» **Workers' compensation insurance:** Workers' compensation insurance (or as the cool kids say, *workers' comp*) covers your employees if they get sick, injured, or even killed on the job. The benefits they receive include medical expenses, lost wages, vocational rehabilitation, and death benefits. Workers' comp doesn't protect just the employee — it also protects the employer (that's you). Before workers' comp existed, a serious injury to an employee could put you out of business. Now, all the lost wages, rehab, and so on are paid by the insurance, no matter who's at fault.

Workers' comp requirements vary from state to state, so check with your state's insurance commissioner's office for more info (you can find contact information online). Your insurance agent can also help you with the details.

» **Social Security and Medicare taxes:** Social Security (also known as FICA) taxes provide for benefits for retired workers and the disabled and their dependents. Medicare taxes provide medical benefits for certain people when they reach retirement age. Not only are you required to withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes from your employees' paychecks, you also have to match their contributions. So if the employee owes \$7,000 in Social Security

and Medicare taxes, you deduct half of that from the employee's paycheck and pay the other half yourself as the employer. (You may have noticed that if you were self-employed, you would have to pay the whole \$7,000 yourself.)

» **Federal unemployment tax:** Most employers have to pay federal unemployment tax, though if you're a sole proprietorship or partnership, you don't have to pay the tax on your own compensation.



WARNING

Before you start putting out want ads, you should know that all these taxes and benefits can cost you an additional 20 to 35 percent over and above an employee's gross wages.



TIP

I could write another book just to explain all the taxes and other costs associated with hiring employees! Contact your accountant for more detailed information.

Identifying when an independent contractor is really an employee

You may find hiring independent contractors (sometimes called *freelance trainers*) more convenient. But the government sets strict rules on who is an employee and who is an independent contractor, and the distinction is important because it determines how you handle taxes and what laws govern your relationship with the person you hire. For example, if the person you hire is an independent contractor, you don't have to match their Social Security and Medicare contributions. That might look good on paper, but you should also know that an independent contractor has more autonomy than an employee. Simply put, this means independent contractors don't have to follow your company policies the same way an employee does.



TIP

How do you know if the person you hired is an employee or an independent contractor? Independent contractors:

- » Are in business for themselves
- » Make quarterly federal and state income-tax payments
- » Pay the entire contribution for Social Security and Medicare taxes
- » Provide their own insurance and benefits
- » Are not subject to wage and hour regulations
- » Have no employer-employee relationship with you



REMEMBER

If you're confused about whether someone you've hired counts as an employee or an independent contractor for tax purposes, consult your lawyer or accountant.

Interviewing Potential Employees

So many times you've been interviewed for jobs, and now it's your turn to put someone in the hot seat. But it can be just as nerve-racking to be the person on the other side of the desk. Here I tell you everything you need to know about planning for and conducting interviews.

Arranging and setting up interviews

Set up the interview in a place you're comfortable in. You can interview applicants:

- » In your home (make sure you have a desk and chairs set up)
- » At your gym
- » At a cafe — as long as you pick up the tab!



TIP

As for what time to conduct the interview, try to be accommodating; many people have full-time jobs and can't get away during the 9-to-5 workday. If finding a time becomes too challenging, consider conducting the interview over Zoom or other online video platform either before or after regular business hours.

Conducting the interview

When you're interviewing a potential employee, it's okay to be nervous, but you need to be confident! Here are tips that will help you conduct a great interview and make the right hiring decisions for your business:

- » **Dress for success.** Wearing business-casual attire or your training uniform for interviews makes you look professional and reflects the dress code policy in your employee handbook.
- » **Write out your questions.** You won't be reading from them like a robot, but having your questions in front of you will help you remember what to ask and will ensure that you ask all applicants the same questions so you can compare apples with apples. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." (More on what questions to ask — and not ask — is later in this chapter.)
- » **Make a mental note of your first impression.** How is the applicant dressed? Did they have a firm handshake? Do they smile and sound enthusiastic about the job?

- » **Put the candidate at ease.** Try some friendly small talk to break the ice. A good way to do this is to share your company's background and details about the job the candidate is applying for.
- » **Ask your questions, and give the applicant time to formulate answers.** Ask follow-up questions such as "Why did you do that?" and "How did that happen?"
- » **Take notes during the interview.** After the dust clears, remembering whether it was Applicant A or Applicant B who said such-and-such can be difficult. A big advantage of doing a Zoom interview is that you can record it. You can go back and listen more intentionally when you don't need to take detailed notes.
- » **Near the end of the interview, ask the applicant what questions they have for you.** This gives the applicant a chance to clarify details about the job and it shows you who's done their research. Does the applicant ask questions about things they should already know (such as what client population you service), or do they ask intelligent questions about your training process? There's a big difference between the applicant who asks, "I noticed on your main competitor's website that they offer in-person and online training. Have you considered offering online training?" and the one who asks, "How many vacation days do I get?"
- » **Let the applicant know what to expect. When (and how) will you let them know if they got the job or not?**

What you should ask

They're what make an interview an interview — the questions. But how do you know what to ask? Here are some suggestions:

- » What made you choose personal training as a career path?
- » What experience have you had training people?
- » Tell me about a mistake you made with a client and how you handled it.
- » What interests you most about this company?
- » What is your greatest strength? What's one thing you could be better at?
- » Tell me about an accomplishment in your last job that you're proud of.



WARNING

What you should never ask

In a nutshell, you can only ask about the applicant's skills and experience as they relate to the job. Other questions can be considered discriminatory — as you probably know, strict laws prohibit discriminating against job applicants based on sex, race, disability, religion, marital status, and so on. Here are some questions that are taboo:

- » **Do you have any disabilities?** Ask this question, and you can run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- » **Do you plan to have children?** Although it's true that parents sometimes have to take time off to care for their kids, basing a hiring decision on this fact is considered discrimination.
- » **Are you married?** If you ask this question, it can be interpreted that you discriminate against married or unmarried employees.
- » **How old are you/what is your date of birth?** Age discrimination is another no-no. However, if you're interviewing a teenager, you can ask if the candidate is at least 16 years old.
- » **Have you ever filed a workers' compensation claim or been injured on the job?** This question is considered a disability-related one.
- » **What is your sex/race/creed/color/religion/national origin?**
- » **When were you discharged from the military?** Discriminating based on military duty is illegal.
- » **What is your maiden name (for female applicants)?** This is just another way of asking whether the applicant is married and is just as illegal.
- » **Are you a U.S. citizen?** However, you *can* ask if they can legally work in the United States.
- » **Have you ever been arrested?** You may, however, ask if the person has been convicted, as long as the question is accompanied by a statement saying that a conviction will not necessarily disqualify an applicant for employment. A safer option is to require a criminal background check, which is particularly important if your employees will be interacting in any way with minors.

Payday! Dealing with Compensation

The best things in life may indeed be free, but those people you hired will expect something from you besides a hearty "Good morning!" and the occasional pat on the back. It's called money. Here, I tell you how to develop a payment plan that will tickle your employees pink without putting your business in the red.

Developing a pay/commission schedule

Determining what to pay your employees can be difficult. You want to be fair and for them to make a decent living — and at the same time, you don't want to go broke yourself.



REMEMBER

Your business plan (see Chapter 5) will help you make a decision. According to the plan, what are your overhead costs? What are your taxes and other expenses? Figure out exactly what your overhead costs are — meaning, how much of your total monthly revenue does it take to keep the doors open and the lights on? Then you need to factor in taxes and other expenses (like money for emergencies, savings, and your own salary). Looking at what's left, you'll be able to figure out what you can comfortably pay your employees.



TIP

Find out how much other personal trainers are charging clients and paying employees. You should have a range of numbers. Where do you want to land on that scale?

Have you ever noticed how you can walk into certain stores and the sales clerks are all over you like ants on a donut crumb? And the sales clerks make sure you know their names when they help you? These employees are working on commission — they get a percentage of every sale they make. The good news is that commissions can motivate your employees to work harder, and you pay only for results. The bad news is that working on commission can be stressful for employees and annoying for customers. Also, determining how to pay commissions can be difficult. If a trainer sells a \$2,000 package and collects only \$1,000 before the client quits, do you pay commission on the \$2,000 or the \$1,000?



REMEMBER

Your accountant and mentor (see Chapter 6) can help you decide whether to pay commissions, and if so, how to do it.

Motivating employees

A client walks in, and the trainer, after finishing a conversation with another trainer about the latest *New York Times* bestseller, saunters over and greets the client with a grunt. That's one unmotivated employee.



REMEMBER

Unmotivated employees — employees who don't feel valued, appreciated, or challenged — are usually unhappy employees, and unhappy employees equal unhappy clients.



TIP

Believe it or not, motivation isn't only about money. Even if you pay your employees sky-high rates, if they're working in a toxic environment or if you let clients treat them badly or you don't praise them for a job well done, they'll quickly lose their motivation to do their best. Read on to find out how to keep your employees engaged and productive.

Rewarding employees with perks and benefits

Which employer would you work harder for: the one who offers a paycheck and that's it, or the one who rewards you above and beyond the expected paycheck for doing a good job? If you're like most people, you'd prefer the job with the rewards.



TIP

Here are ways to motivate your employees through perks and benefits.

- » **Offer extra paid time off, such as an extra 30 minutes for lunch or a paid day off.**
- » **Offer benefits like a 401(k) plan and health insurance.** Talk to your accountant and insurance agent for more information.
- » **Give praise.** Employees appreciate knowing they're appreciated. A thank-you note or even a simple "You handled that situation really well!" can go a long way toward keeping an employee motivated.
- » **Give employee discounts on products you carry.**
- » **Give gift cards for local businesses.**

Creating sales incentives

Many businesses, both personal training and otherwise, motivate employees with sales incentives. For example, the employee who sells the most personal training packages may get a cash bonus or other prize.



WARNING

Based on my own experience, I don't recommend sales incentives. The personal training industry is sales-driven enough as it is, and sales incentives can turn your employees from caring trainers into hard-sell machines whose goal is not to recommend what their clients need, but instead to sell them the biggest personal training packages and the most products.



TIP

Ask your employees what they want. They might actually prefer a sales bonus over extra paid time off. You won't know if you don't ask!

Offering flexible and part-time schedules

If you can swing it, offer part-time and flexible schedules to trainers who love working with you but don't love the hours. For example, if one of your trainers is a single parent or has a second job, they may appreciate being able to work odd hours.



TRUE
STORY

I once hired a trainer who had recently retired after working for years as an executive for a large company. She wanted to only train part-time and no early mornings. I decided to give her a shot, and she was one of the best trainers I ever hired — she loved her work and she was happy because she could work on her own terms. If I could have had ten clones of this woman working only part-time rather than five other people working 40-hour weeks, I would have.

Providing a happy place to work



TIP

A toxic work environment will lead to unhappy employees. Would *you* be motivated to go to work in a dank, smelly gym full of rude coworkers? If you have your own workspace, follow these tips to keep it pleasant for your employees (and your clients).

- » **Keep it clean!** Make sure the equipment and other surfaces are dust-free, that the bathrooms are clean and sanitized, and that the air is fresh. Everyone (even you) has to step up here, but staying on top of day-to-day cleanliness just takes a little effort from everyone. For deep cleaning, unless you want to do it yourself, I recommend hiring a cleaning service to come in after hours as soon as you can afford it. Depending on the size of your facility and how many people are using it every day, you might be able to get away with only having it cleaned a few times each week, especially if everyone is doing their part to tidy up during business hours.
- » **Make sure the equipment is in good shape.** After all, what trainer wants to train clients on equipment that's rusty or falling apart?
- » **Keep a small fridge stocked with water and healthy snacks for everyone to share.**
- » **Make sure employees have a breakroom or other space they can go to eat lunch and take breaks in private.**
- » **Set the tone for the environment that you work in.** If you want the atmosphere of your facility to feel fun and upbeat, try playing background music with a good beat.

» **Celebrate birthdays and have fun together.** Everyone deserves to be celebrated on their birthday and it means a lot when your coworkers remember your special day. Consider taking the entire team out to lunch to celebrate birthdays. I hosted an annual holiday party at my house for my team and we all looked forward to it every year. We enjoyed good food and wine together and had a white elephant gift exchange. The best white elephant gift I ever got was a shake weight. Remember those?

Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow: Firing and Laying Off Employees

Downsize, lay off, pink slip — no matter how you say it, it's an unpleasant task. But reality is, at some point you may have to fire an employee. Maybe they had disciplinary problems, like showing up late for sessions, or maybe your job training isn't sticking and they're less competent than you would like (though if you read the earlier section on hiring the best employees, you may improve your chances). Here, I show you how to make the process as painless as possible.

Understanding the law

Before you take on an employee, you explain the job requirements and make a deal: "You do X for me and I'll pay you Y dollars per month." If the person is not able to do X, you're not obligated to keep that person on the payroll; you're entitled to find someone else who can do the job.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Under the *at-will* employment doctrine, either the employee or the employer can terminate employment at any time, for any reason, except for reasons involving illegal discriminatory action. Talk to your lawyer for more information.

If you implied or expressed job security for a certain amount of time (that is, you gave the employee reason to believe they would have a job for a certain length of time — for example, you said the job would last one year), you need proper justification for letting the employee go sooner. Examples of proper justification are neglect of duty, dishonesty or unfaithfulness, misuse of trade secrets, and theft.



REMEMBER

As always, consult your lawyer, who can help you draw up employment contracts and make sure you're staying on the right side of the law.

Documenting disciplinary actions

Remember when you were in high school and your teacher threatened to put a negative note in your permanent file? Well, now that you're a personal-training-business owner, you too must create a paper trail when it comes to disciplinary actions. If you don't record your employees' violations and the actions you took as a result, you have no way to justify the steps you took to avoid firing that person. And if you're sued for wrongful termination, it's your word against theirs if you can't produce a written timeline of events.



TIP

Make sure you have a plan for handling employee violations. For example, consider using a three-strikes policy like this one (you can modify it however you want):

- » **Strike 1:** The employee gets a verbal warning, which lasts for 30 days.
- » **Strike 2:** The employee gets a written warning, which goes into their permanent file.
- » **Strike 3:** The employee gets paid time off — or *decision-making leave*. The employee is to use this time off to either choose to change the problematic behavior or to leave the company. If the employee leaves, it's voluntary. If they stay on, they'll be required to sign an agreement stating that their employment will be terminated immediately if the problem behavior happens again.

Making the break



TIP

It's time to do the deed — you just can't keep that employee on any longer, and you need to let them go. Here's how to do it with as little emotional (and legal!) trauma as possible:

- » **Think hard before you do it.** Remember that even a very weak job performance can be brought up to snuff with enough effort, especially if the person is eager to learn. Remember also that firing someone can have a traumatic impact on your staff and exposes you to potential lawsuits. Do you really need to fire this person?
- » **Give the person a chance to change.** Don't fire someone out of the blue — make sure you give them every chance to improve. If you do and they don't, you're less likely to be hit with a lawsuit. If you document all employee violations and disciplinary actions, they won't be surprised when you show them the door.

- » **Talk to your lawyer.** If you have any doubts or questions about firing someone, talk to your lawyer. It may seem like a hassle, but compare that to the hassle of a lawsuit!
- » **Plan what you're going to say, and stick to it.** Believe it or not, if you offer kind words about the employee's performance to soften the blow, you open yourself up to potential lawsuits. After all, if you liked the employee's performance enough to compliment it, why are you firing them? Plan what you're going to say — and don't even hint at anything positive regarding the employee's performance.
- » **Stay cool.** Soon this person will be gone from your business forever, so don't let them get to you if they lash out or become verbally abusive.
- » **Be nice.** Although you shouldn't say anything positive about the employee's job performance, that doesn't mean you have to be cruel. Being fired is a traumatic experience for most people. Be kind.

- » Leading by example
- » Taking responsibility for your business
- » Managing micromanagement
- » Understanding and communicating your mission
- » Training your employees

Chapter **18**

Establishing Your Business Culture

Business culture — it sounds like your personal training company is traipsing around European museums *oohing* and *aahing* over Picassos and Matisse. But really, your business culture is everything that makes your business what it is — your leadership skills, your mission, your attitude, your team. It's your beliefs and values, the unwritten rules in your company, the “way we do things here.”

In this chapter, I show you how to establish a business culture that keeps clients and employees — and yourself! — happy and excited to come to work.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Realizing that the health and well-being of your entire business — including your clients, your employees, and yourself — rests squarely on your well-conditioned shoulders can be scary. Your business will succeed or fail based on your own behavior.

Your employees may love you, they may adore your business — but if your company were to go belly up, they'd simply find different jobs. They don't have as much invested in the business as you do. That's why you need to take responsibility for your business — because nobody else is going to do it for you. For example:

- **If an employee continuously makes mistakes, fails to follow up with clients, or comes in late, you need to take quick action to put a stop to the bad behavior and to reinforce the behavior you want.** You can't just let it slide, hoping the problems will go away. They won't. And when other employees see what one staff member is getting away with, they may decide to try it for themselves.
- **If sexual harassment occurs in your workplace, you may be held liable if you knew about it and didn't take steps to stop it.**
- **If clients continue to make the same complaints — for example, that your training space is too hot or that they don't like one of your policies — it's up to you to fix the problem if you want your clients to keep coming back.**
- **If an employee is out sick, you need to make sure that the tasks they usually do are taken care of by someone else (even yourself if it comes to that).** Yes, this means you have to take out the trash sometimes.

This doesn't mean that you have to do everything yourself, from cleaning the toilets to plotting your business growth. Later in this chapter, I give advice on delegating tasks to your employees.

Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way

Guess who your employees are looking to for leadership? Don't look around like that — of course I mean you. Now that you have a business and employees, you're a leader. You've got the power!

No one can really define what leadership is, but they know it when they see it and they miss it when it's not there. In the following sections, I help you become a leader employees will want to follow.

Envisioning your vision and philosophizing on your philosophy

Most people say they'll follow a leader who stands for something, who has good values and a good business philosophy. Think about why you're in business, where you want to go, and how you hope to help people. You may even want to break out some paper and write this down.

Maybe the vision of your business is "to educate clients through hand-tailored exercise and nutrition prescriptions while improving their lives through successful lifestyle-modification strategies." Who wouldn't stand behind that? A philosophy to go with this might be something like, "Success happens with hard work, integrity, and knowledge. We believe in educating our clients so that they feel empowered to make well-informed, positive lifestyle decisions."



REMEMBER

The key is to write a vision statement and philosophy that works for you and your business.

Living your core values

We're all driven to some extent by our beliefs and ideals. Your *core values* are your deepest beliefs. They're the root of who you are and how you see the world—and how the world sees you. Defining your company's core values will help you to explain your vision, and more importantly, you'll have a guiding set of principles for every decision you make. Whenever there's conflict, you can run all possible solutions through the filter of your core values to find your answer. Your company core values will probably reflect your personal core values, and this makes sense because you're the heart and soul of your business. Check out *Dare to Lead*, by Brené Brown (published by Random House) for more on defining your values and understanding the behaviors associated with them. Here's a list of commonly held values to get you started: <https://brenebrown.com/resources/living-into-our-values>.

Leading by example

If your employees see you doing something, they'll do it too. If they see you snapping at clients, forgetting to follow up, and cutting corners, guess what? They'll probably do the same. If, on the other hand, they see you providing service with a smile, acting like a professional, and putting all your energy into doing a good job, they'll be inspired to do the same.



TIP

Here are some ways you can lead by example:

- » **Dress the way you want your employees to dress.** Your employees will hate wearing that yellow company polo shirt if you show up every day in jeans and a T-shirt that reads, “Born to fish.”
- » **Eat right.** No snacking on candy bars while on the job!
- » **Don’t call in sick if you aren’t actually sick.** Yes, they *will* find out.
- » **Show up on time.** Why should employees bust their rear ends getting to work on time if you always saunter in at 9:30?
- » **Treat people well.** Put on your best smile and show your employees, by example, how you want them to treat clients and each other.

Communicating effectively

Leaders (that’s you, remember?) must to be able to communicate clearly. They have to say what they want done and expect that it will be done.



REMEMBER

Most people think of communicating as a one-way process. One person talks, and then when there’s a pause, the other person talks. Where’s the listening? When someone talks, you need to listen. Don’t think about what you’re going to say next or wait impatiently for a pause so you can jump in. Actually listen to what the other person is saying and ask for clarification if you need it.



TIP

Your body language says a lot about you. For example, if you’re tapping your finger on the desk, chances are you’re feeling impatient or combative. If you’re leaning forward, you’re seen as open and engaged. That’s why it’s important to make sure your body language matches the message you want to give. For example:

- » **When talking with someone, make sure you look directly into the other person’s eyes.** (But don’t stare — that’s just creepy.) Wandering eyes signal wandering attention.
- » **Mirror the other person’s body language, which keeps the two of you in harmony.**
- » **Don’t cross your arms or lean away from the other person.** Either of these behaviors indicates hostility or that you’re rejecting what they’re saying.
- » **Keep your hands open with your palms showing to signal openness and warmth.**

You can also decipher other people's body language to figure out how they're really feeling.



REMEMBER

If you don't know the answer to something, say so; people will respect your honesty. On the other hand, if you fake it, people will think you're, well, a fake.



TIP

To make sure you're understanding what the other person is saying, say it back to them in your own words — for example, “So, if I'm understanding you correctly, what's concerning you is that we don't have heavy enough kettlebells. Is that right?”

Try to understand and address how the other person is feeling. For example, “It must be frustrating for you that you need the day off on Thursday but no one can stand in for you. I appreciate the fact that you're missing the log-toss competition to be here today.”



TIP

Asking questions shows that you're listening and heads off problems before they happen. Questions also offer great learning opportunities — after all, if you don't ask, you'll never know! Here are some tips on asking (and receiving!):

- » **Try to ask questions before stating your point.** You may discover something that changes what you planned to say.
- » **Don't just stick question marks on the ends of statements.** Think about what you can find out from someone or from a situation and formulate questions accordingly.
- » **Question, don't interrogate.** Make sure you're asking because you want to find out more, not because you want to attack or cast doubt on someone's idea.

For more information on improving your communication skills, check out *Communication Essentials For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (published by Wiley).

Considering what other people want

Some really hard-core trainers just don't know — or care — where their employees and clients are coming from. They think, “If I can do chin-ups why can't my clients?” (Maybe because they've been injured?) Or, “If I can arrive at 6 a.m. and work until 10 p.m., why can't the other trainers?” (Perhaps because the other trainers have lives?)



TIP

Bulldozing your way to what you want isn't the way to build a positive business culture — or to be a good leader. To get the most from your employees and clients, you need to find out what they want and figure out how you can reconcile that with what you want.

For example, if a client tells you that they love yoga and hate lifting weights, you probably shouldn't design a "heavy weight lifting only" program for them. Instead, come up with a "yoga focused" program that incorporates a variety of resistance training exercises and explain how they'll help the client reach their goals *and* become a better yogi.

Or say an employee wants the evening off to watch the season finale of *Shark Tank* and you're short-staffed. You can ask the employee to find a replacement, let the employee take a dinner break while the show is on, or offer to record the show because you just can't give them the evening off.

Now, isn't that better than telling a client, "Just lift the weights, yoga is dumb!" or saying to your employee, "Look, we're short-staffed. You'll be here and you'll like it"? A little empathy goes a long way, and it's an important skill for building and maintaining a positive culture. It's also what a true leader does, instead of bullying people to get what they want.

Managing micromanagement

If you haven't had time to think about where you want your business to go because you're too busy trying to get the copy machine to work, if you view excessive employee supervision as "mentoring," if you check up on your employees on an hourly basis, you may be the dreaded micromanager. A *micromanager* is a business owner who has to manage every aspect of the business, from bringing in the mail to writing the business plan, even though they've hired employees to take on some of the work.

You may have several reasons for micromanaging your employees:

- » **You didn't hire right.** If your employees can't do the job, then you'll have to do it for them.
- » **You don't trust your employees.**
- » **You feel you can do a better job yourself.** After all, it *is* your business.
- » **You're used to doing everything yourself because you didn't used to have employees.**
- » **You're afraid that something will go wrong if you're not there to fix it.**



WARNING

Keeping a close eye on your business is a good thing, but micromanaging your team goes beyond keeping an eye on things and brings several risks:

- » **You can stunt your business's growth.** After all, you can't do strategic planning if you're busy taking out the trash and tracking your employees' every moves.
- » **You'll eventually burn out.** Running a business all by yourself is tough!
- » **Your employees will feel unmotivated.** How would *you* feel if your employer didn't trust you to do your job?



TIP

Follow these tips for delegating work to your team — so you have the time and energy to attend to growing your business:

- » **Appreciate people's strengths and accept help.** Your goal should be to surround yourself with exceptional people and train them to be even better than you! Think about it. If you can identify where everyone's strengths lie, you can play to them and delegate tasks accordingly. Your team will be more eager, committed, and loyal when they know you appreciate them. Make sure everyone understands their role and how the business is great because they're all bringing their best.
- » **Create a vision.** Determining goals for the future, making plans for new products or services, and setting sales targets will help you see where your talents are needed the most — so you can stop mismanaging your time and skills. As you delegate more and more, you can start looking at the company's future needs rather than running around putting out fires.
- » **Hire the right people and pay them well.** Even if every cell in your cost-conscious brain is telling you to hire cheap — don't do it. Remember that you get what you pay for. Don't consider it spending money on an employee — instead, consider it investing in your business. Because skilled employees free you up to do the things that generate more income for your business, they're worth every dollar you pay them. (You can find more on hiring employees in Chapter 17.)
- » **Make a list of every task you don't want to do, and then write out the steps required to accomplish each task so you can delegate.** The resulting policies-and-procedures checklist will help you let go, because it's a guide for employees on how to handle the small things — so you don't have to.
- » **Trust your employees.** After you've trained your employees, trust them to do what needs to be done. Take comfort in knowing that you hired good people and the business won't crumble if you're not doing everything yourself.

Higher Education: Encouraging Your Employees to Grow

What would happen if experienced personal trainers stopped learning about the personal training industry? Chances are, they'd miss out on all sorts of important developments and would also be way behind on their skills and knowledge. That's why personal training business owners need to foster a learning environment in the workplace.

Having a growth mindset

Having a *growth mindset* means you believe that your skills, talents, and even your intelligence are qualities that you can improve. You're willing to try new things that challenge you. If you try and fail, you say to yourself "I can't do that . . . yet." When someone with a *fixed mindset* tries something new and fails, they say "I can't do that because I'm not smart enough . . . or talented enough." They don't try again because to the person with a fixed mindset, intelligence and talent aren't things you can change. You either have them or you don't. There's nothing wrong with being a beginner! Even the best personal trainers in the world were beginners once, and I can almost guarantee you that they didn't get to where they are now simply by being smart enough. Your success depends on your willingness to learn and grow — not on how much you think you already know.

Staying certified

As I mention in Chapter 2, most certifying organizations require trainers to keep their credentials up to date by earning continuing education credits (CECs). For example, to renew and maintain ACE personal training certification, trainers must earn 20 CECs every two years through ACE-approved courses or professional activities. That's about ten hours of continuing education each year.



TIP

Be sure that your trainers have what they need to stay certified. For example, you can:

- » **Find out about the certification standards for each of the certifications you accept in your business and include this information in your employee manual.** This way, your employees will be kept up to date on what they need to do to maintain their certifications.
- » **Encourage your employees to attend professional activities that will count toward their CECs.** Give them time off to do so, and better yet, consider hosting continuing education courses at your facility if you have one.

- » **Keep a list of upcoming professional activities, such as seminars, and post it somewhere where employees will see it.**
- » **Make sure your employees keep their CPR certifications current.** They'll need to send proof of their current CPR certification along with their CEC certificates to their certifying body when it's time to renew.

Creating a learning atmosphere



TIP

If you expect your trainers to continue to grow, you should be committed to fostering a learning environment at work. For example:

- » **Subscribe to fitness-industry and science magazines and loan them out to employees.**
- » **Keep health books, fitness books, and business-management books on a shelf that employees can access.**
- » **Keep health and fitness magazines available for employees to read.**
These can be a great way to glean useful bits of information about content your clients might be curious about. No fitness professional should pick open one of these magazines and see something they didn't already know, but they do offer insight into the type of content readers (like your clients) are interested in. Such magazines include *Shape*, *Men's Health*, *Runner's World*, *Prevention*, and any others you like.
- » **During staff meetings, encourage your team to share things they've learned since the last meeting.** Other trainers (and their clients) may benefit from knowing this information.

Continuing your own education

Not only do you need to keep your own certification up to date, but you should also continue learning as much as you can about business management. Here are some ways to keep the learning going:

- » **Subscribe to small-business magazines like *Inc.* and *Entrepreneur*.**
- » **Read small-business-management books like the following:**
 - *Small Business For Dummies* by Eric Tyson and Jim Schell (published by Wiley)
 - *The E-Myth Revisited* by Michael Gerber (published by Harper Collins)

- *Built to Last* by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (published by Harper Business)
- *The Ultimate Small Business Guide: A Resource for Startups and Growing Businesses* (published by Basic Books)

» **Take continuing education classes in business management and entrepreneurship online or at your local college.**



REMEMBER

Be sure to tell your employees about all the continuing education you do yourself. You'll set a good example and may inspire them to do the same.

Training Your Employees

Training your employees — and training them well — is the best business investment you'll ever make. Most people want to do good work and are happier when they know what's expected of them and how to do their jobs — and clients are happier when they're looked after by well-trained, competent personal trainers.

Creating a training manual

Imagine taking a six-hour course on how to run a dentist's office. At the end of the six hours, how much do you think you'd remember about filing, reception, answering the phone, handling patients, filling out insurance forms, cleaning, and handling receipts? Not much, I'd wager.

That's why having an employee training manual that spells out your business procedures is so important. This is a separate manual from the employee handbook, which is designed to teach employees the specifics of their role. The training manual is where details about the day-to-day operation of your business are housed. Whenever a trainer (or any employee) has a question about how to maintain a piece of equipment or fill out an assessment form, they can just flip open the training manual and find the answer.



TIP

Writing out all the procedures in your business will show you where they may be lacking. For example, maybe you don't have any procedures in place for handling declined credit cards, or maybe you'll discover that you need some sort of chart that shows who's responsible for cleaning what.

Here are some of the procedures you'll want to include in your training manual:

» **Instructions on filling out forms:** Personal training requires a lot of forms, and remembering who fills out what when, as well as what you do with the

forms after they're filled out, can be difficult. Along with the instructions, you should include copies of each form.

» **Client retention information:** This is information about how to keep clients happy. For example:

- How to handle an unsatisfied customer: Do you offer a free session? Call in the supervisor?
- When and how to follow up on clients: This includes check-in phone calls as well as thank-you notes, special offers, and so on.
- How to keep clients motivated.
- How to update a client's training program.

» **Client-service details:** This is information on how to interact with clients, and includes the following:

- How to answer the phone: Do you want your employees to answer with "Good day, Perfect Personal Training. This is Janet speaking. How may I help you?" No matter how you want people to answer the phone, write it down.
- How to take money: Do you accept cash, checks, credit cards? How many sessions do clients pay for at a time? What happens if a check bounces or a credit card is declined?
- How to fill out a receipt or invoice.
- How to answer potential clients' questions about free trial sessions, prices, and so on.

» **Equipment maintenance:** This is information on how and how often to "tune up" equipment. It includes answers to the following questions:

- Who is responsible for maintaining equipment?
- How often does it need to be maintained?
- How are different pieces of equipment maintained, where are the manuals for each piece of equipment kept, and where are the tools kept?

» **Cleaning procedures:** This gives details on how to clean everything that needs to be cleaned, from floors to equipment, and includes the following:

- Who is responsible for cleaning? Do trainers take turns?
- How often does cleaning need to be done?
- What gets cleaned — equipment, floors, the bathroom? What are the procedures for cleaning?
- Where are the cleaning supplies located?



The training manual ensures that everyone on your team is consistently trained the same way and treated fairly. Include a document that acknowledges receipt of the training manual and keep a signed copy in each employee's file.

Getting your employees up to speed

Training your employees involves more than showing them what you want and then throwing them out onto the gym floor. In the following sections, you'll find suggestions for getting your employees up to speed.

Throw the book(s) at them

Remember the employee handbook from Chapter 16? Make sure each new employee gets — and reads — a copy. It's not exactly a *New York Times* bestseller, but it will help your employees get a grasp on your business and what's expected of them. Give every employee a copy of the employee handbook and a copy of the employee training manual.

Identify their skills

An important step in working with new employees is identifying the skills they're lacking so you don't waste time focusing on what they already know.

Role-play

By *role-play* I don't mean to don a wig and hit the singles bar. Role-playing means that you and the employee being trained will act out different situations that are likely to happen in a personal training business. For example, you can pretend to be:

- » **A disgruntled client:** How can the trainer soothe your sore feelings?
- » **A potential client who has just walked in the door:** How can the trainer make you feel welcome and explain your options — *without* the hard sell?
- » **A client who doesn't comply with the trainer's exercise prescription:** What does the trainer do when he's bombarded with excuses from a client who's not improving?
- » **A client with an injury:** What exercises should the trainer avoid, and at what point should the trainer refer the client to a health care professional?
- » **A client with a health issue, such as high blood pressure:** Again, what exercises should the trainer avoid, and how do they know when to ask for a physician's clearance?



TIP

Acting out various scenarios helps the new trainer work out solutions before they're in the situation. It's also your opportunity to give feedback.

Monkey see, monkey do



TIP

Let the new trainer *shadow* (follow around and observe) a more experienced trainer (even you) to see how things are done. Let them ask questions afterward to make sure everything is clear.

It's show time: Starting new employees in their jobs

Now it's time to let the trainer fly alone — but make sure you're close by and available at first if any questions come up.



REMEMBER

Frequently observe your trainers to make sure everything's going smoothly. If you see them taking shortcuts or making mistakes, pull them aside later and give them feedback. If you see them doing something great, you should say so. Always praise publicly and correct privately.

Continuing the training long term

The training process should continue throughout the employee's career with your company. Encourage your employees to continue learning about the business so they can help make it grow and stay competitive.

5

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART . . .

Every *For Dummies* book has a Part of Tens, and this one is no different. In this part, I give you ten ways to add more services and products to your business, ten pieces of equipment every personal training business needs (they're not all what you think!), and ten ways to wow your clients by being the best personal trainer this side of the Mississippi.

With this section, I draw the curtain on *Becoming a Personal Trainer For Dummies*. I wish you (and your clients) much health, wealth, and happiness!

- » Looking for products to sell
- » Adding group sessions, specialty training sessions, workshops, and seminars
- » Offering massage services
- » Providing corporate wellness services

Chapter 19

Ten Great Ways to Expand Your Services

It's inevitable — when the entrepreneurial bug has bitten you, you see things in a whole new light as a business owner. The day will come when you've mastered the art of the personal training session — and that will no longer be challenging enough for you. You'll ask yourself, "What else can I do to offer my clients more — and increase my revenue?" Or maybe you'll be talking with a client and realize there's a need outside of personal training that you can fulfill. However it happens, here are a few suggestions to help quench your entrepreneurial thirst — and, oh yeah — expand your services to grow your bottom line.

Adding Nutrition Services

Healthy eating and exercise practices go hand in hand, so this seems like an easy add-on to your existing menu of services, right? It is . . . but there's a catch. You need to be *knowledgeable* about nutrition if you're going to talk about it. Unless you're a medical doctor or a *registered dietitian* (RD), you can't diagnose medical conditions or prescribe diets to treat symptoms of medical conditions. But you *can* talk to your clients about healthy eating if you know what you're talking about. For example, you can encourage clients to eat lean protein and colorful veggies. You

can also share simple and healthy recipes and you can educate clients about the benefits of healthy eating. There are several nutrition courses and certifications available for non-RD fitness professionals who are interested in offering nutrition coaching services. Check out the additional resources for my recommended nutrition courses and certifications.



TIP

Check with your lawyer and your state's regulatory agency to find out what you can (and can't!) do legally in terms of giving nutrition advice in your state.

Selling Supplements

Meal-replacement bars, protein powders, vitamins, and other nutritional supplements accompany personal training and nutrition services well. But make sure stocking your shelves with supplements makes good business sense before you do it. Depending on your state's laws, these types of items may be considered taxable goods, and you may have to apply for a resale tax certificate to sell them legally.

Adding Group Sessions

If you do it for one person, why can't you do it for a whole group of people? If you have the space, group classes can be a great way to extend your services to those who may not necessarily be able to afford you one-on-one.

Or you can offer group classes as an add-on service for your personal training clients, where you take five to eight people through a preset workout. This is a great option for getting your clients into the gym more often. It's also a lot of fun and you'll find that people tend to push themselves harder than they would on their own.

Giving Workshops and Seminars

In the same vein, giving workshops and seminars is a great way to add extra income. Just realize that they can take quite a few hours to plan, market, and execute.

If you're working in a gym, check with the manager about using their group exercise room for an hour or two to hold the seminar or workshop. Or, try your local

hospital — hospitals typically have room available for lectures and presentations. Or try your local community college.



TIP

Contact local high schools and ask about giving seminars there. Parents are always willing to shell out a little coin to get a sports scholarship for their kid or just to help them improve in their sport. And working with kids can segue into training the parents.



TIP

In planning the topics for your lecture or workshop, think through the most common issues with clients. Better yet, ask them what they would be interested in learning more about.



REMEMBER

In preparing for your lecture or workshop, you'll want to outline your speech or presentation and prepare written materials to hand out afterward. Be sure to include your name and contact information so if anyone in your audience wants to work with you, they know how to get in touch. See Chapter 8 for more information on giving seminars.

Adding Massage Services

Another very synergistic service is massage therapy. Unless you're a licensed massage therapist, you'll need to hire or contract with one. Or if you have an extra room in your facility, you could rent it out to a massage therapist.



TIP

If adding a massage therapist to the payroll isn't for you, consider creating a dedicated R & R space in your facility. It's not an add-on service, but investing in a massage gun and some foam rollers for your clients to use after their workouts adds value to your existing service. And it's the small stuff you do to add value that will set you apart from your competition.

Selling Fitness Equipment and Apparel

A great and easy way to make extra money is to sell fitness equipment to your clients. Sooner or later, most of your clients will want some type of fitness equipment to use at home, when they're traveling, or just so they can exercise at their leisure.

You can go about selling fitness equipment in a few ways. One way is to sell the equipment directly, where you become a vendor for a manufacturer and sell their products to your clients. This way definitely requires that you have a resale license

and requires a little more work come tax time; for example, you have to pay quarterly taxes on the equipment that you sell, and you need to charge your clients sales tax as well.

Another way to sell fitness equipment is to team up with a local fitness-equipment store and help them sell their products to your clients. Work out a deal where you receive a commission on whatever equipment you help to sell to your clients. This way is a little cleaner, because you don't need to worry about inventory or sales tax.

Your clients will also need to replace their workout clothes and shoes from time to time, or they'll forget to pack their socks or an extra T-shirt, or maybe they just want a new T-shirt . . . whatever the reason, why not carry a few of your favorite brands so you can turn a profit?

Typically, to become a reseller for fitness apparel, you need to provide the clothing company with proof of:

- » A valid federal tax ID number
- » A valid tax reseller's certificate
- » A bank account with your company name on it

You may also need to place a minimum order of up to \$1,000 to open your account with them.

You can also earn money online by directing clients to the products and apparel you want them to buy through *affiliate marketing*. An affiliate link is a unique URL that you can post on your website, blog, or social media, and anytime someone clicks on your link and makes a purchase, you earn a commission. If you're interested in trying affiliate marketing, I recommend The Amazon Associates Program because you can create your own storefront on your website with links to all your recommended items. It's easy to use and because most of your clients are probably already shopping on Amazon, they'll be comfortable with making their equipment and apparel purchases there.

Providing Corporate Wellness Services

Corporate wellness, also known as *worksites wellness*, is providing health and fitness programs for employees of companies. With healthcare costs rising, more companies are turning to fitness to help reduce their costs. A solid worksite wellness program can:

- » Lower healthcare costs
- » Reduce employee absenteeism
- » Increase employee productivity
- » Reduce employees' use of healthcare benefits
- » Reduce workers' compensation/disability claims
- » Reduce employee injuries
- » Increase employee morale and loyalty



TIP

Here are a few ideas for different services you can provide to a company for corporate wellness:

- » Sell fitness equipment to businesses and corporations to set up their worksite fitness facilities.
- » Train employees how to safely use the fitness equipment.
- » Provide weekly workout classes



TIP

For more information on worksite wellness, visit the Wellness Council of America's website at www.welcoa.org.

Running Challenges or Contests for Members and Non-Members

Challenges or contests are fun for your clients and they're a great way to get prospective clients in to check out your programs. The possibilities are endless, but I particularly like challenges that encourage people to get to the gym more often. For example, you could challenge members (and prospective members) to attend two group classes each week for a month and everyone who completes the challenge is entered into a drawing to win an iPad. All they have to do is show up.



TIP

Encourage non-member participants to schedule an initial consultation before the end of the challenge.

Offering Training Programs Without Training Sessions for Advanced Clients

Some of your clients will come to you as complete beginners, but others will be advanced and simply looking for a new program to follow. Designing advanced training programs is fun, and as you become more experienced, it won't take a lot of time.

I personally only offer program design without personal training sessions for established or previous clients. This way I know where to start and I'm aware of any injuries or limitations the client might have so I can prescribe appropriate exercises — and avoid anything that could increase their injury risk. This is my policy and it's up to you to decide what works best for you. If you're wondering what to charge, I recommend charging your hourly or session rate. For example, if you're hourly rate is \$85, you'd charge the client \$85 for a DIY training program.

Offering Other Services

Y'know, this is *your* business — and you can offer any type of service you feel would benefit your clients! If you have your own place, you can even offer a shoe-shine service or car detailing. Services that save clients time while they're training with you are called *value-added services*, and as I have said before, it's those little things that keep your clients sticking around.

The moral of the story here is that no one can say what's right or wrong for you to offer with your personal training services. Only *you* will know what works best for your business!

- » Identifying equipment that isn't equipment
- » Knowing which equipment really *is* equipment
- » Keeping the right attitude

Chapter 20

Ten Helpful Tools

As I stress throughout this book, you wear many hats in your role as a personal trainer. You're a salesperson, scientist, friend, coach, motivator, teacher, employer, bookkeeper, and business owner, to name just a few. To be successful wearing any of these hats, you need to be well equipped — and that means you need to have the right tools in your toolbox — literally and figuratively speaking.

As you've discovered by now, your “tools” as a trainer won't always be big, heavy pieces of workout equipment! Read on for ten pieces of equipment — some essential, all helpful — to start filling your personal trainer toolbox.

Your Mindset

There is unlimited equipment available to help you be a successful trainer: mobile apps, software programs, free weights, machines, ropes, bands, suspension trainers, kettlebells, medicine balls . . . The list goes on.

But make no mistake, no matter how many tools you have (or how expensive or cutting edge they are), it won't matter if you don't have the most important one: the right mindset.

Important factors for having the right mindset are:

- » **Honesty:** You need to be honest with yourself about what you realistically can and cannot do; this flows through to your clientele as well.
- » **Determination:** Not every day is easy; you won't always have a full book, and sometimes those slow days end up being weeks. Pushing ahead and staying on track when the going gets tough takes determination and focus.
- » **Willingness:** You must be willing to change if your original course of action isn't producing the results that you want. You also need to keep an open mind and be able to set your ego aside when a client isn't happy with your services. Willingness means being flexible and doing whatever it takes to be successful — and it's not always easy. Sometimes becoming a successful personal trainer means doing things that you don't *want* to do.

Your Certification

Your certification is your personal trainer badge of honor — it tells everyone who works with you, from employers to clients, that not only do you *say* you know what you're doing, but you can also prove it. You have your sheet of paper that states, “I studied, I tested, and I passed — I know what I'm talking about here!”

Certification demonstrates to your clients that you've undergone stringent studies and testing protocols to figure out what to do and what not to do as a personal training professional — so that you can help them reach their fitness goals.

Certification is also a means of qualifying your credibility. Have you ever seen a trainer quoted online or on television who was introduced with “an *uncertified* personal trainer, John Q. Smith, states that exercise is . . .”? Most likely not! Being certified gives you the credibility you need for other professionals and clients to take you seriously. Certification helps you to build a solid rapport with the people you will be doing business with, such as:

- » Employers
- » Clients
- » Mentors
- » Media contacts

- » Physical therapists and other healthcare providers with whom you have a referral relationship

In other words: If you're not certified yet, it's time to get on it!

Your Online Presence

Whether you're using the internet to market your brick-and-mortar personal training business or to share your fitness knowledge with a broad audience, you need to be online. Establishing — and monitoring — your online presence is more important than ever because most people turn to the internet for information.

Keep in mind that your potential clients will probably already have formed a first impression of you before meeting you in person. It's a good idea to Google yourself regularly to see what the world wide web has on you. You'll need to be mindful about how people perceive you on social media too. It's one thing to share fitness tips with your audience — people love free advice, especially from an expert like you — it's another thing entirely to post a half-naked photo of yourself online with the hashtag, *#AbsAreMadeInTheKitchen*. Sure, you'll get people's attention, but probably not the kind of attention you're after. Before you post a photo online, ask yourself if you would want your grandma to see it. If the answer is no, well, I hope you get the idea.



REMEMBER

Make sure that your online presence reflects everything you want people to associate you with — professionalism, integrity, quality, and trustworthiness, and temperament. Getting into heated arguments with random people on social media will probably scare off potential clients. And you never know when you're going to meet a potential client, business associate, mentor, or referring health-care provider — use the internet to make a good first impression!

Tape Measure

The tape measure can be used for many different things, like recording your client's *anthropometric measurements* and tracking circumference changes (inches lost or gained). If you surveyed all the personal trainers in the world and asked them for the number-one reason clients come to them, the unanimous answer would most likely be "to lose weight." You know, however, that if a client loses fat and maintains muscle, the number on the scale might not change much — and it

could even go up. You'll be able to show your client consistent results by tracking inches lost no matter what the number on the scale says. You can also measure degrees of flexibility and how far your client can reach in the sit-and-reach test (see Chapter 11).

Foam Roller

Foam rolling is a simple form of self-myofascial release therapy, and with regular practice, it can help your clients to relieve tense muscles and improve overall mobility. Foam rollers are widely available and there are many inexpensive options to choose from. To learn more about foam rolling, check out *Foam Rolling for Dummies*, published by Wiley.

Smartphone

A smartphone isn't a must-have for personal trainers, but once you use one, you won't want to be without it. Any mobile phone works for managing contacts so you can call or text your clients from one place. But with a smartphone, you can also email your clients, schedule appointments online, offer video consultations or training sessions, take progress photos, keep notes, download training apps, accept payments, and so on.

Resistance Bands

A solid alternative to dumbbells, resistance bands are easy to travel with because they weigh practically nothing. Resistance bands are inexpensive and typically come as a set, with different bands providing different levels of resistance — light, medium, and heavy. There are two general categories of elastic resistance: minibands (great for working all functions of hips muscles) and longer resistance bands with or without handles (for working larger muscle groups).

Bands are great for just about anybody, and they're a good long-term option for clients who may have problems with their wrists, hands, or fingers and may not be able to grasp a dumbbell. Another bonus is that almost all free-weight movements can be duplicated with them.



You can buy resistance bands at most sporting goods stores, big box retailers (like Target or Walmart), and online. You might also want to pick up a door anchor for using bands at a client's home. You can find these on Amazon for less than \$10.

Adjustable Dumbbells or Kettlebells

Dumbbells and kettlebells are, in my humble opinion, the best investment you can make when it's time to invest in resistance training equipment. Sure, you can start with bodyweight exercises and resistance bands, but at some point, you'll need to increase the weight on your clients' lifts as they progress and become stronger. This is a good problem! Adjustable dumbbells or kettlebells are a perfect solution, even if you have the space and budget for a full set of free weights. Adjustable free weights save space, they're versatile, convenient (easy to store and you can transport them), and the weight can usually be adjusted in smaller increments than a full set of weights. Dumbbells and kettlebells are typically rounded in 5-pound increments, and with an adjustable set, you can adjust by 2.5-pound increments — this is especially helpful for beginning clients and smaller people.



To get the most bang for your buck, invest the most versatile set of adjustable free weights that you can afford. You'll save money in the long run when you're not constantly upgrading them and they'll be suitable for more of your clients. Choose a set with a high weight range (at least 50 pounds) so you can use them for compound exercises like squats and deadlifts and make sure you can adjust them in small increments (no more than 2.5 pounds).



My first big equipment purchase for my personal training business was a set of adjustable dumbbells. I didn't have enough space to store a full set of dumbbells, and even though I was on a tight budget and considered buying a starter set of adjustable weights, I saved up for a more expensive set with a weight range up to 52.5 pounds and 2.5-pound increments. That was in 2007 and I still use the same set of adjustable dumbbells today.

TRX

Chances are you're familiar with suspension training, even if you haven't yet swung through the air on a TRX suspension trainer. TRX suspension training is a type of bodyweight training that involves suspending from an anchored strap and changing body positions to increase or decrease the weight for each exercise. TRX

suspension training was originally created by a Navy Seal for training his troops in remote parts of the world and has since become popular among elite athletes and beginning exercisers alike because of its versatility.

The TRX suspension trainer is the original and the one I recommend, even though there are now many cheaper knock-offs to choose from. The TRX suspension trainer is a lightweight and portable tool that anybody can benefit from, regardless of fitness level or physical ability. To learn more about TRX suspension training, check out www.trxtraining.com.



TIP

Make sure there is a sturdy place to anchor the TRX if you're using it in a client's home. You need to be 100 percent certain the setup can hold more than 100 percent of the client's body weight.

Stretching Strap

Also referred to as a yoga strap, a stretching strap is another lightweight and versatile tool that every personal trainer should have. A stretching strap is used for holding stretches with proper form and can be used to mimic partner-assisted stretching. This is particularly helpful for clients with tight hips or shoulders who might not be able to safely get into and hold stretches without assistance. A good stretching strap should be made of a durable, non-stretchy material (like nylon) and have multiple loops. You can find one for as little as \$5 in stores that sell exercise equipment or online.

- » Safeguarding your reputation
- » Putting forth your best self
- » Understanding business etiquette
- » Avoiding burnout

Chapter **21**

Ten Ways to Be the Best Personal Trainer You Can Be

Personal training is a competitive field. Big George's Deep Discount Personal Training down the street would love to take your clients away from you — and if you don't give your clients what they're looking for, they just might give George a try.



REMEMBER

Your clients want more than just a good workout. They want a personal trainer who motivates them, cares about them, and sets a good example.

That's why I give you this chapter. When all else is equal, your professionalism, your attitude, and your knowledge of business etiquette will put you ahead of the pack. These ten tips will help you be the best personal trainer you can be.

Stay In Your Own Lane

You're having a conversation with a new acquaintance at a dinner party and they start talking about the works of Umberto Eco. Instead of saying, "Who in the ever lovin' world is Umberto Eco?" you nod along, pretending that you're deeply familiar with *The Name of the Rose* and the other works of whatshisname.

C'mon, you know you've done this before. We all have.

Although you may get away with this tactic at a dinner party, you won't get away with it as a personal trainer. If you give false information (for example, confusing personal training with physical therapy and advising a client on how to work through an injury) because you don't want to look stupid, you can do more than get found out — you can injure the client.



TIP

Scope of practice refers to the services that a practitioner is competent to provide. Clearly defining personal trainer scope of practice is tricky because the prerequisites and qualifications required to become certified vary widely depending on which certification you pursue. Generally speaking though, if a client needs a service that your personal training certification didn't prepare you to deliver, it's probably beyond your scope of practice. Unless you're also a medical doctor, licensed counselor, registered dietitian, chiropractor, physical therapist . . . you get the idea . . . stay in your own lane and refer your clients to the appropriate professionals in your network when you need to.

Reserve the Right to Improve

Everyone makes mistakes. A key difference between a good trainer and a bad trainer is that the good trainer admits when they were wrong, and the bad trainer tries to sweep the evidence under the proverbial rug. It's also okay to acknowledge that you did the best you could at the time, and now you know better, so now you do better. "Reserve the right to improve" is some solid advice I once received from a friend and mentor in the fitness industry that has always stuck with me.



TRUE
STORY

Sometimes doing better has nothing to do with exercise knowledge. Thinking back on my early personal training days, I didn't understand then how hard it was for so many of my clients to prioritize exercise. Especially the working moms. It's cringeworthy to admit how unwilling I was to adjust my expectations to meet their needs, even if I was doing the best I could at the time. Now I know better, and now I do better.

Be There for Your Clients

Being there for your clients doesn't mean trailing them in the gym with cold water and fresh towels. Being there means giving your complete and undivided attention to your clients during their training sessions.

Don't ever take your eyes off your client during a session; have you ever seen a trainer at the gym staring off into space rather than watching their client? Don't be that trainer. Your clients are paying you for a service and they deserve your full attention when you're on the clock.



REMEMBER

Your job is to be a motivating and enthusiastic trainer for your clients. Always show up with a good attitude, even when you're not feeling it. Your clients really don't care if you're having a bad day — it's not about you.

Respect Boundaries

You have your personal self, and your professional self. Your professional self does not offer relationship advice, does not eat candy bars in front of the client, and does not make comments about the client's home or its contents.

Personal training is just that — personal. Your client may come to think of you as a friend. That's a good thing, but it also invites unprofessional behavior. If a client starts, say, complaining that her husband doesn't pay attention to her, you need to draw that boundary line. Say, "I hear you, that sounds difficult," but don't offer advice or tell her what a jerk her husband is. If a client asks you to train her for an extra half-hour free of charge, or to drive 15 miles outside your regular area to train her daughter, tell her you can't do it. If you do, the client may come to expect this from you all the time — and it can hurt your business.

Under Promise and Over Deliver

When you tell someone you'll do something, you should do it. Sounds simple, right? Well, it's a challenging concept for many personal trainers, but probably not for the reasons you would think. Personal training is a helping profession and personal trainers are notorious for spreading themselves too thin. Trainers think they're helping their clients, but the reality is that a single person can't be everything to all people. Offering to help your clients beyond their training sessions isn't a bad thing, but make sure you follow through with your promises, and only take on as much as you can realistically handle.



REMEMBER

The best way to keep your word is to be prepared, to always be on time, and to follow the tips in this chapter about getting your bag and files ready ahead of time.

Show Clients You Care

Care is more than just a four-letter word. It also stands for “Clients Are Really Everything.” You may know everything there is to know about personal training, but you couldn’t exactly be a personal trainer without your clients. Clients can make or break your business. That’s why you have to show them you care.



TIP

Here are some tips for showing clients that you care:

- » Return calls, texts, email, and direct messages promptly.
- » Follow up with your clients to make sure the sessions are working for them.
- » Send your clients thank-you cards for doing business with you.
- » Send clients holiday and birthday cards.
- » Always express empathy for your clients’ concerns.
- » Keep your records on each client up to date so you can track them and create the most personalized programs for them.
- » Follow the rest of the suggestions in this chapter!

Always Be On Time

Imagine having a weekly appointment with someone at 4 p.m. What if the other person always showed up at 4:15, or even 4:05? It may not seem like much, but over time, the other person’s tardiness would probably irritate you.

Being late shows a lack of respect for the person who is waiting. Not only that, but if you have a personal training session and you show up late, what are your choices? You can either cheat the client out of a few minutes of training so you’ll be done at 5 p.m., or you can run late — which is annoying for a busy person (and who *isn’t* busy?) and for your next client who you will also be running late for.



TIP

If you're always late, ask yourself why and come up with a solution. Do you get stuck in traffic? If so, find alternate routes or leave earlier. Do you have trouble getting yourself out the door? Have your bag, your client folder, and everything else you need ready by the door early in the day so you can grab it and leave when the time comes.

Do you just dread working with a particular client? Then you need to think seriously about whether that client is right for your business, or whether you're the right personal trainer for that client. See Chapter 9 for information on how to appropriately part ways with a client.



REMEMBER

Always keep your phone with you so that if you're late despite these tips, you can call or text your client to let them know.

Dress Professionally

Which trainer inspires more confidence — a personal trainer wearing clean athletic apparel that fits properly, or one dressed in a revealing, skintight spandex top? Even if you look and feel great in spandex, consider the image you want to portray. You need to look professional if you expect to be taken seriously.



TIP

Here are some dress-for-success tips:

- » I'll say it again — no skintight spandex or revealing clothing when you're on the clock!
- » Make sure your clothes aren't too baggy either. You need to be able to move comfortably and your clients need to be able to see you demonstrating exercises.
- » Keep jewelry to a minimum. Long, dangly jewelry gets in the way when you're demonstrating an exercise or spotting a client.
- » The same goes for long, loose hair. If you have long hair, you may want to pull it back.
- » I recommend finding a uniform that you look and feel confident in. If you don't like wearing polo shirts, don't wear one. Athletic apparel that fits you properly and isn't revealing is appropriate personal trainer attire too. Several brands offer a fitness professional discount and you can find a list of some of my favorites in the resources section at the end of this book.

Never Stop Learning

As the saying goes, “when you’re green, you grow; when you’re ripe, you rot.” This means that to keep growing as a personal trainer, you need to keep learning. Become complacent, and you’ll be, well, a rotten personal trainer.

You can’t be an expert in everything, but some topics that personal trainers should have current working knowledge about include medicine, fitness, business, and even psychology and nutrition. These fields are constantly changing, and researchers are uncovering new information every day.



TIP

Here are some ways to keep learning:

- » Attend continuing education courses.
- » Talk to other personal trainers.
- » Go to conferences and workshops.
- » Read industry magazines.
- » Read medical journals.
- » Read health, fitness, and business magazines (many are available at the local library).
- » Talk with doctors and other healthcare professionals.
- » Study successful businesses outside of the fitness industry.
- » Only learn from other lifelong learners — a piece of advice I received many years ago from a mentor.

Do What You Love, Love What You Do

When you love what you do, it shows. Your enthusiasm is contagious and your positive outlook motivates your clients.

Unfortunately, though, personal trainers do burn out. Burnout happens when you take on more than you can handle and start neglecting your self-care. You can avoid burning out by eating healthy food, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, taking regular time off to recharge . . . all the same advice you give your clients. If you do start feeling burned out, do yourself — and your clients — a favor and take a time-out. Sometimes you just need a couple of days to rest and

focus on something other than work, or maybe it's time to take a week-long vacation to relax. You'll learn over time what you need to do (or not do) to feel your best.



TIP

Here are some ideas beyond taking a break for changing up your work to avoid burnout:

- » Try working in a different environment, like corporate wellness.
- » Write a fitness book.
- » Write magazine articles on fitness.
- » Conduct group sessions.
- » Work with a new client population.
- » Go on sabbatical to study for a certification to learn something new.
- » Take classes in nutrition or another field related to fitness.



TRUE
STORY

When I became self-employed, I learned about burnout the hard way. I had already been working full-time as a personal trainer, group fitness instructor, and personal training manager for six years when I decided to start my own business. I hadn't taken a vacation in several years and didn't take any time off before going out on my own. I loved my new-found freedom, but I ran myself into the ground with too many early mornings and late nights in the studio. I felt like an employee with the worst boss ever! After three years of self-employment, I was exhausted and quickly losing my passion for the work I had always loved.

I decided to close the studio for a month during the summer when several of my clients would be away and used the time to re-evaluate my career. It turned out that I still loved my work, but it took stepping away from it to realize that I had to take better care of myself if I wanted my business to survive. After that, I started working either early mornings or late evenings, taking a full weekend off every month, and eventually hired more trainers to work with me in the business so I could meet my clients' needs without burning myself out. Sometimes we have to learn hard lessons before we can improve, but burnout didn't have to be a part of my experience. Hopefully my story will inspire you to work hard, play hard, and rest plenty.

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About the Author

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Dedication

To all past, present, and future personal trainers, and to my wonderful clients, family, and friends.

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