

Chapter 1

Introduction To Personal Training

This is an exciting time to be an entrepreneurial personal trainer. The opportunities for qualified fitness professionals who also understand how to run a business are virtually unlimited.

Take a look around. Obesity is an epidemic. Many people of all ages are spending too much time in front of computers and televisions, and this increasingly sedentary lifestyle is taking a tremendous toll on their health. Fast food restaurants serve up calorie-dense meals and regular restaurants offer massive portion sizes.

As people decide to do something about their expanding waistlines and finally get in shape, fitness professionals are well-positioned to help. Whether it's baby boomers wanting to regain some of their youthful vitality or parents looking for ways to provide positive role models for their children, they are turning to trainers. As well, doctors and managed care organizations have recognized that diet and exercise are an important part of keeping people healthy and avoiding unnecessary health-care costs. Even companies are realizing that healthy, fit employees are more productive.

So it's no surprise that personal training is one of the top professions of the 21st century and a fast-growing segment of the fitness industry. With rare exceptions, personal trainers love what they do. After all, they're not working on a production line or sitting in front of a computer—they're helping people get and stay healthy and fit. And for their efforts, they're earning \$40 to \$150 or more per hour.

"The industry is continuing to grow," says Tony Ordas, former director of certification for the American Council on Exercise (ACE). "There has been a steady increase in growth in the number of health and fitness facilities. More and more clubs are in dire need of personal trainers." While some of those clubs want their trainers to work as employees, many others are hiring independent contractors or contracting with personal training companies to meet their needs—and that means opportunity for you.

Just how many health clubs are there nationwide? According to information from the International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), as of January 2007, there were more than 29,000 U.S. health clubs and 42.7 million health club members. There was a total of \$17.6 billion in health club industry revenue in 2006, reports IHRSA.

WHAT DO PERSONAL TRAINERS DO?

Personal trainers work with clients who need instruction and coaching in the areas of exercise physiology, kinesiology, nutrition, supplementation, fitness assessment, exercise programming, sports conditioning, flexibility techniques, and more. More often they train with individuals one-on-one, but sometimes also train couples and small groups.

Typically, personal trainers begin their work with a particular client by doing an assessment. Through conversation and by completing forms, they gather information about the client's health and medical status, lifestyle, expectations, and preferences. Then they are able to establish realistic and measurable short- and long-term goals and develop an exercise program.

As they work with each client, personal trainers teach safe and effective exercise techniques; they monitor, record, and evaluate progress; they make adjustments in the program as necessary; and they provide support and motivation to help their clients stick to the program and reach their goals. Personal trainers may also serve as consultants when their clients are setting up training equipment in their homes or offices.

Every Stripe And Shape

So what do personal trainers really do? Some of the services typically offered by personal trainers include:

- ▲ Fitness assessments
- ▲ Individual exercise programs
- ▲ Individual weight/fat-loss programs
- ▲ Nutrition consulting
- ▲ Strength and endurance training
- ▲ In-home or in-office personal training
- ▲ Personal training for teenagers and children
- ▲ Personal training for seniors
- ▲ Sports conditioning
- ▲ Wellness coaching
- ▲ Stress management programs
- ▲ Cardio respiratory programs
- ▲ Flexibility exercises
- ▲ Individually designed high- or low-impact step and aerobics programs
- ▲ Individual or small group training
- ▲ Seminars and classes on fitness

Research Insight

Just how many calories your client burns during exercise depends on a number of factors, including how much muscle mass they're using. For example, because of the upper-body involvement, running burns more calories than biking. Also, weight-bearing activities expend more calories than weight-supported pursuits—so your client will spend more calories running than swimming. According to a 2000 compendium in *Medicine and Science in Sport and Exercise*, a 180-pound person will burn (per hour) 1,023 calories running at an 8 minute per mile pace, 982 calories cycling at 16 to 19 mile per hour, and 818 calories swimming vigorously.

Personal trainers who have studied nutrition may also offer nutrition and weight management counseling. Trainers who are group fitness instructors may incorporate popular group fitness trends into small group training sessions. For example, your clients may not want to participate in a crowded class at the gym but may want you to lead very small classes in areas such as yoga, kickboxing, and body sculpting for themselves, their families, and friends.

Some personal trainers work with people who have suffered an illness or injury and need assistance transitioning back to a physically active lifestyle. This is an area known as “clinical exercise” and is an important part of the rehabilitation process. Trainers work in conjunction with their clients’ medical doctors and physical therapists to establish an appropriate exercise program; then they instruct the client as necessary to implement the program.

Trainers work with amateur and professional athletes to help them maintain their conditioning during their off-season and be prepared for in-season competition. They work with performers who may or may not be celebrities, but who need to stay in top physical form.

Jennifer Brilliant’s Brooklyn-based company offers one-on-one training, as well as group training in exercise and yoga. She and her trainers work in homes, offices, schools, and gyms.

Lynne Wells, in New York City, works with clients in their homes and in the gyms located in residential buildings where the clients live.

Bill Sonnemaker owns Catalyst Fitness in the Atlanta area, and employs three full-time trainers and two part-time trainers. He’s the recipient of the 2007 IDEA International Personal Trainer of the Year Award and the 2007 National Academy of Sports Medicine Pursuit of Excellence in Health and Fitness Award. One of the keys to his success, he says, is his time as an intern and employee of other trainers. “I had access to good coaches with good exercise technique, and

Stat Fact

According to a report from the U.S. Surgeon General's office, 60 percent of American adults exercise only once in a while and 25 percent never exercise.



learned proper form and proper program design,” he says.

Personal trainers are not simply exercise instructors and supervisors—in other words, there’s more to being a personal trainer than just knowing your anatomy and exercise physiology and the sciences behind exercise. Trainers are confidants, role models, and sources of support and encouragement. And when you have a busi-

ness offering personal training services, you’ll do even more than that—handling everything from marketing to selling to accounting to employee relations.

WHO IS YOUR MARKET?

Successful personal trainers agree that there is no such thing as a “typical” client. More and more people, regardless of their level of fitness or exercise expertise, are turning to personal trainers as a practical and affordable means of becoming and staying healthy. Hard-core strength trainers and body builders are only part of the overall clientele of personal trainers.

Brilliant’s clients include businesspeople, stay-at-home mothers, and people recovering from injuries and illnesses. “Some people are striving to get into better shape, whatever that means for them,” she says. “Some are into maintenance, so they’re not really trying to improve, they just want to stay where they are. Some people want to learn something new for variety.”

How long do clients typically stay with a personal trainer? It can range from just a few sessions to years. Some trainers carefully seek out long-term clients; others choose a niche where they educate a client about fitness, or work them through a short-term problem, then move on. Brilliant says her clients stay with her an average of three to five years.

Some clients want frequent sessions with their trainers, as many as two and three a week. Others opt to see their trainers less often, perhaps just to do periodic fitness testing, measure their progress, and update their program. Wells says she typically sees her clients one to three times a week, and most have been with her for more than three years.

Realize that not everyone who has an interest in fitness is a potential client; many dedicated fitness buffs prefer to do their own thing. Along the same line, not everyone who needs a personal trainer is going to be willing and/or able to hire one.

IS THIS BUSINESS FOR YOU?

There are two key aspects to owning a personal training business. The first is being a personal trainer, and the second is being an entrepreneur.

Good personal trainers are passionate about fitness and eager to learn the latest information about exercise, nutrition, and healthy lifestyles. They enjoy helping and teaching others about fitness and exercise. They are caring, giving, patient, and empathetic. They absolutely love the idea of spending ten hours per day working with people in a gym or other setting, guiding them through exercises, and helping them reach their fitness goals.

As a trainer, your job is to motivate your clients, improve their techniques, and keep their workouts fun and effective. You need to be friendly, enthusiastic, and have great communication skills to do this. It also helps to be personable, genuine, and truly sincere—you're not trying to sell anything; you're helping people, and for that, you get paid.

Successful entrepreneurs have the ability to step beyond doing the service their company offers and deal with the process of building and running a business. To own your own personal training business, you'll need strong management, administrative, and marketing skills—or you'll need to recognize what you don't have and then cultivate them in yourself or be willing to hire people who can provide those skills.

As Sonnemaker says, "Being good at your job as a trainer is completely different than being a good marketer or good business owner . . . So finding your strengths and weaknesses is important."

Brilliant was a dancer for many years before she became a personal trainer. For her, the appeal of personal training was "sharing and helping others." Brilliant says, "It's a profession where people are giving, and with that generosity, people are successful." But she knows she has to do more than just work with clients. "The part of the business that's challenging is the day-to-day things you have to do, all the details of running a business—the bookkeeping, handling phone calls, keeping records straight," she says. "It's surprising how much time running the business takes."

CREDIBILITY AND CREDENTIALS

There are no professional licensing requirements for personal trainers. That means anyone can call himself a personal trainer and open up a business. But

Bright Idea

If you're not sure how you'll do at running a personal training business, try working as an independent contractor first. You'll get a taste of being self-employed and can decide from there if you want to go further.



consumers are becoming increasingly savvy, and most will ask about your credentials before they hire you. That's why certifications and professional affiliations are critical.

"The big difference between licensure and certification is that certification is voluntary, whereas licensure is mandated by the state," says Ordas. "Certification is a credential that states you have a certain level of knowledge and skill."

There may be more than 300 organizations offering certification programs—some general, others very specialized—for personal trainers (although it doesn't

appear that anyone keeps an official count). Most are for-profit, but a few are nonprofit. The majority of these organizations also offer education programs leading to certification, although several merely administer tests to determine competency. Some of the education and certification organizations also function like a professional association, providing individuals who have completed their programs with a range of ongoing support services. And then there are professional associations, which are just that—an association of personal trainers and other fitness professionals. A number of these organizations

Smart Tip

Even though certification is not required at present, it's always possible that legislation requiring some sort of licensure or certification could be passed in any state at any time. If that happens and you're not certified, you're out of business. So get certified. And insist that the trainers who work for you be certified as well.



are listed in the Appendix; you can find even more by doing a search on the internet or visiting your local library.

With such an abundance of choices, it makes sense to recognize that you can't belong to every fitness organization out there. That's an expensive and counterproductive approach. Study the organizations and choose the one(s) that meet your requirements and will give you the tools you need to succeed.

When deciding on the organization(s) you'll work with to obtain your credentials, consider these issues:

▲ **Accreditation:** Check to see if the certifying organization is accredited, and by whom. It's a good idea to also check into the accreditation agency to determine how they set standards and what sort of reputation they have. Although there are hundreds of personal training certification organizations, only a handful of nationally recognized organizations are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. This is the accreditation body of National Organization for Competency Assurance, which sets quality standards for credentialing organizations.

▲ **Club requirements:** If you are going to contract with a club or spa to provide

It's Official!

Some of the certifications you might want to consider obtaining include:

- ▲ Aerobic Fitness Trainer
- ▲ Aqua Fitness Specialist
- ▲ Certified Fitness Advisor
- ▲ Certified Personal Trainer
- ▲ Clinical Exercise Specialist
- ▲ First Responder/First Aid
- ▲ Fitness Therapist
- ▲ Golf Fitness Trainer
- ▲ Group Fitness Instructor
- ▲ Health Fitness Instructor
- ▲ Lifestyle and Weight Management Consultant
- ▲ Neonatal/Postpartum Exercise Specialist
- ▲ Wellness Coach
- ▲ Performance Nutrition Specialist
- ▲ Personal Defense Specialist
- ▲ Rehabilitation Exercise Specialist
- ▲ Senior Fitness Specialist
- ▲ Specialist in Fitness for the Physically Limited
- ▲ Specialist in Martial Art Conditioning
- ▲ Sports Conditioning Specialist
- ▲ Strength and Conditioning Specialist
- ▲ Water Fitness Trainer
- ▲ Youth Fitness Trainer

their personal training services, they may require that you and the trainers on your staff be certified through specific organizations. Find out what they prefer before investing in a program they won't accept.

▲ **Your goals:** Be sure the certification is something you can use and is in line with the goals and aspirations you have for yourself and your company.

▲ **Your market:** The certification should be appropriate for the market segment you want to serve.

▲ **Your educational needs:** Some certifying organizations offer only testing programs that determine skills and competency; others offer training programs that lead to certification. Your own needs will determine which you choose. For more information on how to evaluate a certification organization, see Chapter 8.

Beyond industry-related certification, many personal trainers have college

Dollar Stretcher

If you live near a medical school, take advantage of their medical libraries, which contain textbooks and journals that are more expensive to buy or subscribe to than most personal trainers can afford. These are your best sources for timely, accurate information. You should also check out pubmed.com, which allows you to search academic journals based on keywords—abstracts are free, and many journals are now making full-text articles free, as well (some require a delay of up to a year after publication before giving free access).



degrees in health/exercise sciences or related fields. These degrees demonstrate your knowledge and commitment to the field.

A sampling of some of the trainers we interviewed reveals the value they place on maintaining qualifications. In addition to two certifications from the American Council on Exercise (ACE), Brilliant also holds a fine arts degree in dance. Sonnemaker's credentials include work as a research chemist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a pending master's degree in exercise science, and certifications through the National Academy of Sports Medicine, the National Strength and Conditioning Association, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), and ACE. Wells is certified through ACE, has a certification in Lifestyle and Weight Management Consulting,

and two certifications in Hatha yoga. Richard Cotton holds a certification through ACSM, as well as a master's degree in physical education with an emphasis in applied exercise science. If you choose to pursue a degree, Richard says, "physical education, kinesiology, and exercise physiology (all with an applied emphasis as opposed to research emphasis)" are helpful courses of study for this field.

Continuing Education

Once you receive a certification, the organization will likely require you to earn continuing education units (CEUs) on a periodic basis to maintain that credential. Most offer a wide range of classes and seminars for a fee, so it's easy to choose sessions that are of interest and appropriate for your particular operation. Before signing up for a class, be sure to confirm how many CEUs you'll earn and what sort of documentation is required to be sure you get proper credit.

Whether it's required or not, you should always be educating yourself on the latest trends and discoveries in the fitness industry. New products and techniques are constantly being introduced, and you should be familiar with them so you know when to use them with your clients. In fact, a great place to take seminars is at the various trade shows and conventions where equipment vendors are displaying