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4 Keys to Becoming a Successful Trainer in Any Economy

By Brenden Dilley – NASM CPT

The purpose of this article, is for those individuals who are either currently working in the fitness industry or who are thinking about entering it and desire to become successful, despite the current economic climate. Day in and day out, I observe trainers struggling to make a sustainable living and to maintain a steady clientele. In many ways, the poor economy has been a blessing to the personal training and fitness fields. It has eliminated many of the more disingenuous and unethical trainers from the industry, simply because disposable income for clients has dried up. Clients are now savvier and more conservative with their money than ever and I say, "Good for them". No longer does the big gym (used car lot) sales approach work on members. With the availability of products such as P90X, Insanity Workout and a whole host of other 'do it yourself' training sessions, consumers are well aware that they can get results on their own and at a much lower cost. Again, I say, "Good for them"! No longer do we have 'Salesmen' posing as personal trainers, inside of our gyms. The old school corporate business model for fitness is fading fast and Personal Trainers everywhere are asking "How do I survive?" Without further ado, I give you the keys to being a successful Personal Trainer in any economy...

Key #1 – Why are you here?

This is a critical question to ask when entering the fitness industry. If you're here to simply make an easy buck and prey on people's insecurities, then you're in for a rude awakening. However, if you're becoming a trainer because you genuinely enjoy helping people, like having a flexible schedule to spend more time with your family and can't stand the monotony of a typical 9-5 job, then I say "WELCOME" to Personal Training. Notice, the first thing I listed was **helping people**. If you run your PT (personal training) business with this as priority #1 at all times, it will only be a matter of time until you've achieved success as a trainer.

Key #2 – Setting Your Expectations

I can't stress enough how important this particular key is to having a successful personal training business. First, you must set realistic expectations for yourself as a trainer. In all likelihood, you're going to have to start out part-time as a trainer, unless you're supplementing money somewhere else. Rarely does someone enter this business and have a full schedule (25 hours of training + per week) after just thirty days. (At this point, I would also like to mention that this article is being written by someone who owns his own personal training company and DOES NOT WORK IN CORPORATE FITNESS. Obviously, working for a big chain does have its



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benefits and one of them is that they constantly feed you a steady stream of potential clients to do consultations with for \$8/hour). It's going to take you some time to build a book of business and there is no greater way to do this than by providing positive results for your clients. Satisfied clients are your greatest resource for advertising and referrals. If you can't get your clients steady, consistent results... you CAN NOT SUCCEED in this business long term!

The second part of 'setting your expectations' includes the expectations you set up for your new client. If you promise them the moon in the beginning and they come out of the gate slowly and with limited results, I can almost guarantee you that they will not re-sign with you. So, you will have made a few hundred dollars for a month or two and then be right back to zero, looking for a replacement for your dissatisfied client. When I start out with a new client, I always tell them, "There are three parts to the equation to obtaining the body/health that you desire. Two of those parts are constants, ME and the Science behind what I teach. I will ALWAYS be here and the science of what I teach is proven to yield good fitness results. The only variable in our three part equation is YOU." This immediately lets the client know that the onus is on them to be responsible for themselves. Their willingness to change and become better is the single item that will dictate the speed of their results. There is no doubt that if you train someone long enough, they will eventually get results. However, the sooner your client *buys into what you're teaching and adopts your ideas as their 'new belief system for fitness,'* the sooner they will get the fitness results they desire. You're only as good as your client's success. Don't ever forget that. It starts and ends with them.

Key #3 – Create Value

If you KNOW you DON'T KNOW much about fitness, then I would advise you NOT to charge excessive amounts for your training. There are three factors to consider when deciding how much you're going to charge for your new service.

- 1) How much knowledge and or experience do you have in getting people fitness results? If you're fresh out of college, with your brand new shiny kinesiology degree but have less than 1000 hours of ACTUAL personal training time under your belt, you might want to think twice about charging people more than the local YMCA. When people are shopping for personal trainers, your 'official credentials' are only a small part of the equation for them and their decision making process. In my 11 years as a personal trainer, I've had exactly ONE person ask to see my NASM Certification. The knowledge and education means virtually nothing if you don't know how to apply it in the real world.



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- 2) Where do you live? If you live in an area that you KNOW is struggling financially and doesn't have much in regards to disposable income, you must adjust your rates. If you live in Lodi, California for instance, you should NOT be charging the same amount as trainers in Beverly Hills or San Francisco. I mean, you CAN, but good luck building and sustaining a reliable and steady book of business.
- 3) What are your competitors charging and how are you different from them? Unless you can differentiate yourself right away (which you probably can't), you're going to have to stay pretty close to what other trainers are charging for similar services. At the end of the day, it's about the dollars for most clients. If they don't feel that you can adequately justify charging them significantly more than your competitors, they will leave and there goes your referrals with them.

My general rule of thumb for my business is this... The cost for my training (2xs/week) per month should be less than the average car payment for someone in my city. Do you want to make a lot of money in a short amount of time and NOT be able to keep a client long enough to get them to their goal, or would you rather charge a more reasonable amount and assure that you've given yourself the time necessary to get them to their desired fitness goals?

It should also be noted that GIVING away personal training can be very detrimental to your business and your client's results. You won't be making an income and the client won't have anything invested in their results which will ultimately lead to more cancellations and less likelihood of their continued success. There is a psychological benefit to clients when they invest money in themselves for weight loss. Your average new client's self-esteem is typically low and so just the act of them spending money on themselves, for the purpose of looking/feeling better, is already a huge step in the right direction.

Key #4- Sincerity

This industry is littered with disingenuous, meat-heads and cardio- bunnies that are so disconnected with the general, sedentary public that their clients struggle to make a connection with them. Obviously, you should look the part of a health and fitness professional. However, in order to inspire immediate and long lasting results, it's critical that you develop some empathy and humility. The emotional canyon that divides human beings is crossed with a bridge called 'empathy.' You've got to be able to hear your client's issues and goals and be able to convey an attitude that says, "I know you've been through a lot but I'm going to help you transform your life." It's your sincerity, as well as your vulnerability and self-confidence that will allow you to inspire transformation in each of your clients and also to succeed long term as a business person.



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In closing, I would like to Welcome you to one of the most noble and real professions in the 21st century. This profession takes a truly unique person who is willing to not only give physically but spiritually and energetically to the world. I assure you that if you implement the keys I have listed, you will not only see success personally, but the lives of those who purchase your services will be enriched and changed forever.

About the Author: Brenden Dilley is an expert author in the areas of health and fitness, as well as self-help and business. He currently resides in northern California with his wife and two daughters. He spends his time running Hublife Fitness and sits on the board of directors for Empower You Now Publishing. Brenden also assists gyms as a hired consultant educating and organizing the Personal Training and Sales Departments. For more information about Brenden please visit: www.hublifefitness.com