

A NOTCH ABOVE THE REST

Strategies For Success

BY ANGIE MILLER, MS

How do you raise the bar in the fitness industry, stand out among a sea of instructors, and ultimately earn the respect and recognition you desire?

Whether you're new or a 20-year veteran, you know that certifications only skim the surface of what it takes to be a successful instructor. The fitness industry is dynamic and constantly evolving. And being at the top of your game requires a lot of dedication and hard work. Fitness instructors need to adopt strategies that will spotlight their talent and put them in demand. The following are 13 practical, informative strategies that will help instructors do just that.

Approach each class prepared, excited and eager to share your passion.

Preparation takes place at home. It includes music selection, designing, practicing, memorizing choreography and selecting appropriate, professional attire. The more prepared you are, the smoother your instruction, cueing and transitions, and the more "in the moment" you'll be. You'll walk in confident and secure knowing you are ready to give a great workout!

Be punctual, and greet participants as they arrive.

Arriving early allows you the opportunity to greet every participant and to answer any questions. You can ease the anxiety of new participants by introducing yourself and welcoming them. Don't forget to spend a few minutes after class addressing any issues or concerns. It's a great way to get some one-on-one time and let clients know you're there for them.

Never underestimate the power of a captivating introduction that builds excitement and sets the tone for the class.

Introductions are critical to creating a welcoming, accepting and energetic environment. They get the participants excited and give you the opportunity to sell yourself.

Begin by introducing who you are, the name, type and level of the class, and then providing an overview of what the class entails. Direct clients to any equipment they will need. Add any other special announcements.

Take this opportunity to create a community. Share one or two short, meaningful events about a participant's life, per their

approval. This encourages bonding and fosters a sense of belonging. Class numbers go up as a sense of community develops.

Get to know participants' names, and refer to them by name before, during and after class.

This is tough if you work at multiple facilities. Write down names as soon as you learn them, and describe the person in your notes as well as which class they attend, and at which facility. It's motivating when you address them by name and it creates a very personal feel to the class.

Establish eye contact with every participant during class.

You can do this by facing them and instructing mirror image. It's much more personal and effective when you face the class directly. Another method is circulating the room which allows you to offer direct reinforcement and personalized feedback, and it keeps them on their toes.

Adopt your own style and feel free to be yourself.

Feeling comfortable in your own skin will allow your personality to shine through and your approach to remain genuine. Avoid comparing yourself to other instructors—all instructors have strengths and weaknesses. It's okay to pick up some moves or techniques that you feel are effective, but using your own personal style and flair will make them more authentic. Participants will reward you with their loyalty and commitment.

Build your professional language to build your credibility.

The more you understand anatomy, kinesiology and exercise science, the more you can articulate and describe movements and how they affect the body. You will be able to educate participants, keep them up to date about the latest research in the industry, and help them to understand what they're doing, why they're doing it, and how they'll benefit.

Take command of your class.

This isn't to suggest that you should come across as bossy and demanding. Rather, it

implies the need to be confident and well prepared. At times there will be demanding participants, however, a strong sense of who you are as an instructor builds confidence. Projecting a positive self-image is critical to your success.

Never underestimate the "7-38-55 Rule."

This is the rule of communication:

Seven percent of communication consists of the words that you say.

Thirty-eight percent is the way you say those words.

Fifty-five percent is body language.

"It's not just what you say, it's how you say it." It's also the image your body is portraying as you are saying it. This is especially important in our role as group fitness instructors. Our actions and our demeanor speak loud and clear. Clients don't always hear everything you say, but they watch everything you do.

Empower your participants.

As an instructor you are there to teach, motivate and encourage, but you are not responsible for their workout. Ultimately, what they put into it they get out of it. The more you help them to realize what a critical role they play, the more ownership they will take. This allows them to appreciate their bodies and their capabilities. It's very empowering!

Avoid taking yourself too seriously.

Being able to laugh at yourself, make light of your mistakes, and generally shake off the small stuff will go a long way in endearing participants to your style and personality. They come for a great workout, but they also come to share in your energy and enthusiasm. If you make a mistake, don't apologize; brush it off and move on. Remember that group fitness is fun, energetic and dynamic, so keep it light.

Create a theme class to mix it up.

Theme classes are a great way to breathe new life into a class that needs a pick-me-up. They draw attention and generate excitement. It may be your same Monday night Step class, but once it becomes Disco

Step, even for one night, you have created a whole new animal. Plan ahead and make sure there's sufficient time to get the word out. Hang up posters, pass out flyers and really create hype. This spotlights you as an energetic, creative instructor who is willing to go the extra mile. What better advertising could you ask for?

Continue to seek professional growth opportunities.

Never stop learning! Passionately seek knowledge and education inside and outside of the fitness industry. The more you continue to advance as a professional, the more you have to offer. As you become more diversified, you become more marketable.

When you read a book or an article, or go to a convention or a workshop, you learn and grow. Ultimately you take this knowledge and share it with your participants; you have something fresh to offer and they recognize that. This builds your credibility and makes you a more interesting, engaging instructor. You become the total package: Smart, Educated, Motivating and Energetic!

Once you adopt these strategies, all you have to do is to prepare for standing room only classes, the attention of management and the loyalty of participants. All your hard work will pay off.

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