



Building a Full Schedule

These five techniques will help you get busy and stay that way.

Obtaining a full client load is a crucial aspect of a personal trainer's job, but getting those clients can often seem the most laborious and difficult task of all. Whether working the floor at a large, full-service gym or striking out as an independent contractor, each trainer must find a way to attract new clients or all the hard work and dedication put into earning his title will be for naught. However, with a bit of grunt work, a dash of creativity and very little selling, a steadfast trainer can develop a full schedule in no time.

The "Ask the Trainer" Booth

The floor of a large fitness facility can be an intimidating place for any trainer, especially one who is new to the business. Unless you're naturally extroverted, heading out among the pec decks and Smith Machines to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger can be a frightening proposition. The good news is that the floor offers a built-in consumer base. But how can a timid trainer break through his fears and make first contact?

Don Bahneman, MS, CSCS, fitness and spa director at John's Island Club in Vero Beach, Florida, suggests getting customers to come to you. "Sometimes new trainers have a hard time walking up to members and introducing themselves," he says. "To get over that hurdle, set up an 'Ask the Trainer' booth and announce to members that you will be available to answer questions for the next half-hour." This method can be beneficial for a variety of reasons, according to Bahneman. For example, placing a table between the members and yourself provides a psychological "comfort zone" that can help ease tensions. Also, members always have fitness-related questions, and allowing them the opportunity to speak with a pro-



fessional adds value to their membership—and is an excellent way for you to gain visibility on the floor. "The more people you make contact with, the better your chances of building clientele," he says.

If you don't have access to a gym, partner with a local health-oriented grocery store or other heavily trafficked location and spend an hour answering questions. Take marketing materials, such as brochures and business cards, and offer to send supplemental information to those who provide an e-mail address, so you can follow up and maintain contact.

The Teleseminar

Tom Terwilliger, co-owner and chief executive officer of Terwilliger Fitness in Denver, says one of the most valuable yet underutilized methods of marketing available to trainers today is hosting teleseminars. "I have had tremendous success with this," he says. "The second-best thing to being in front of prospects is having them hear your voice."

Google "free teleconference lines" and hordes of available organizations will pop up. Then choose the one that best fits your needs, and you will be given a telephone number, an access code and appropriate instructions. Inform your contacts of the teleseminar via e-mail or

postcard and provide them the information needed to participate. Always let contacts know that they may invite a few friends or family members to join the presentation, so you continue to broaden your reach. "This is a great way to position yourself as an expert and to grow your list of contacts," he says. But resist the temptation to spend the 30 minutes dishing about your services and why you are better than the competition; make sure you keep the experience strictly educational. At the end of the seminar, suggests Terwilliger, offer something else of value, such as an outline of the presentation or further information on the subject. "All the listener has to do is send an e-mail to receive it," he says. "And now you've got their contact information."

The Free Report

Terwilliger believes that education is the best salesman. Today's consumers are faced with a dizzying barrage of "buy this" and "you need that," and Terwilliger is certain that if you offer an alternative to the norm, consumers will take notice. A method he uses is what he calls a "free report." At www.terwilligerfitness.com, users enter a name and an e-mail address to receive a free report titled "How Not to Get Screwed When Hiring a Personal Trainer." This 12-page document,

written by Terwilliger, provides curious prospects with tips and techniques on what to look for, ask about and request when shopping for a personal trainer.

"I believe that, in some cases, people are motivated by an 'away from' objective," he says. "Because there has been bad publicity in personal training, people are afraid. I want to tap into those uncertainties." By pulling back the curtain and offering potential clients protection against false promises and questionable business practices, he positions himself as an authority *and* someone people can trust. "Having a good report makes you an expert, and this can be a great way to get information as well," he says.

Once a prospect has provided an e-mail address, Terwilliger makes contact several times within 3 months to offer more advice and education. "If a person has downloaded the report, that means she's probably shopping. If you continue to provide her something of value, you will gain her respect and just might gain a client."

The Write Path

What's a great way to reach a large population of people without spending thousands of dollars on marketing campaigns? Dust off that pen and start writing! Bill Sonnemaker, PES, CES, CSCS, founder of Catalyst Fitness in Atlanta and the 2007 IDEA Personal Trainer of the Year, finds that writing for a local publication is a sure-fire way to gain visibility within a community. "Anytime you get an opportunity to write is always good," he says. "When people see your name in a publication, they automatically assume you are an expert. And the more times people see your picture, your name or your business name, the better off you will be."

Getting published isn't as difficult as you might think. As a contributor to both local and national publications, I've found that the key to getting published is to know your audience. If you can prove to an editor that your piece is relevant to those who read her publication, she'll be more likely to print it. Also be aware that editors tend to be extremely busy people with lots to read on a daily basis, so keep things succinct and relevant and *never* send out a blind query.

The Public Talk

As previously mentioned, Terwilliger believes that the best technique for attracting

how to find your focus

Many years ago I moved to San Diego from my hometown and gained employment as a teller at a small credit union. Pushing money back and forth across the counter seemed the antithesis of my life's goals, but I sucked it up for a few years until a more promising opportunity crossed my path. Despite my disdain for the teller job, it was there that I discovered something that would become infinitely useful as a personal trainer.

Most introductory courses, mentors and colleagues tend to advise new trainers to focus on working with a specific population. Easier said than done, right? If you've had the opportunity to work at a job in which you interacted with

others, you may already have the clues you need to help you specialize.

As a former bank teller—a position that requires relating to people from all walks of life—I found that I developed greater rapport with women in their late 30s or older than I did with other groups. I didn't realize it at the time, but for some reason I was better able to communicate with these women, and they seemed comfortable with me. It's no surprise that the majority of my clientele fits into that bracket today.

Think back to your days working at a clothing store or a restaurant and see if you can recognize the types of people you worked with the best. If you found yourself

at ease with older adults or loved spending time with teenagers, you may have already found your niche. If you aren't sure of your niche, Trina Lambe, owner of Train by Trina in Toronto, says trial and error may be your best bet. "Think about the clients who get you excited as opposed to those who don't. Focus on those who get you excited, because you will be better able to help them." Not only will this make it easier to determine whom you should work with, according to Lambe, but it will also elevate our industry. "We need to make sure we're helping people the right way and not just working with certain people because we feel we have to," she says.

prospects is to get in front of them. "Getting in front of people and giving a talk is scary," he says. "But it can be one of the most powerful ways to market yourself." To help new trainers gain visibility, Bahneman will often send them, along with more seasoned professionals, to assist with wellness seminars at eldercare facilities (John's Island Club's membership consists largely of older adults). If you choose to forge your own path, Terwilliger suggests looking through the phone book or searching online for community groups such as the Kiwanis or Rotary clubs. "These organizations are always looking for speakers. They typically won't give you a lot of time, so you'll have to keep things to the point," he advises. Choose a variety of topics that are timely, basic and of interest to the organization in question (avoid selling your services), and put them together in a package, along with your biographical information. Send your query to the person responsible for securing presentations, and follow up a few days later if you don't receive a quick reply.

Be sure to practice the presentation in advance with friends and family you can trust. Ask them to provide you with honest feedback so you can polish your speech before stepping in front of the organization. On the day of the presentation, offer supplemental information, such as a free report that audience members can receive via e-mail. Again, increasing your contacts list is one of the primary objectives in gaining exposure and clients.

Expose Yourself!

As you will have deduced by now, exposure is the name of the game when growing your client base. Whether you are giving a talk at a medical clinic, writing an article for the local weekly newspaper or hosting a teleseminar, the more potential customers see your face and learn your name, the greater your chances are of achieving success. ■

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