



FEATURE

How to Hire the Ultimate Personal Training Staff

By Jason Baer

A successful personal training business requires trust and respect between the client and the trainer. Similarly, the relationships between the trainers and the training business employing them must be based on the same trust, respect and understanding of the business' core values. Positive relationships attract, retain clients and increase the profitability of the business.

Contrary to popular belief, running a successful personal training operation requires a different set of management skills than running a successful club. If you want your personal training operation to be profitable, whether it is a business unit in a larger health club, or a studio, you must have the proper PT staff. Owners and managers who focus on memberships, marketing and bookkeeping don't always understand what is involved to effectively run a successful PT program.

So, how do you put together a winning program? It all begins with the hiring and training your personal training staff. This article will detail how to properly hire the right training personnel, the marquis of your personal training operations.

Hiring a certified trainer does not always mean you are getting an experienced and professional trainer. The trainer should be well-versed in dealing with many different populations and posses strong people skills. Knowledge on techniques and equipment is important but creating a connection with your clientele is imperative.

First you want to create the largest pool of candidates. Start with word of mouth to your existing staff. Other successful approaches are to place classified ads in the local paper or to work with certification groups and local colleges.

Next you MUST receive and review the applicants resume before scheduling an interview, this will save you lots of time in interviewing candidates that aren't suited to your organization. Two years minimum experience training is generally recommend (not just working out by themselves) and they should be certified by one the several national certification programs. A bachelor's degree in exercise science or physiology is nice but not necessary, many excellent trainers are certified but do not have a bachelor's degree.

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Beware of things on resumes like gaps in employment, or hopping from one facility to another. Also ask for references to be forwarded at the time of the resume, this will speed up the hiring process. You are looking for personal trainers who want to make at least a two year commitment to have a career with your facility.

Once you have received and reviewed the resumes, pick your top 6 candidates and invite them in for a first interview. Conduct the first round of interviews in your office. Schedule each interview for 30 minutes. Allow 20 minutes for the interview and 10 minutes for follow up notes and checking references if you determine they are candidates for a second interview.

When conducting a first interview, ask open ended questions and listen. Avoid putting words into the candidate's mouth or leading into an answer you are looking for. Many times you will come away liking a candidate because they are like you or dislike one because they are different from you. Determine what qualities are best for your organization. Maybe your existing trainers are very social and therefore adding a trainer who is more analytical would appeal to clients are also interested working with someone who is also highly analytical. When candidates answer a question, ask them for examples of situations they have been in.

Remember, first impressions are very important. Note if they on time, how they are dressed, their personal hygiene, smile, level of comfort, language they use (positive or negative)? If someone has a sloppy or disheveled appearance, or instantly has the wrong answers, cut the interview short, so that you are not wasting either of your time. Trust your instinct. Most likely you will know within the first 3 minutes (or less) if this is the right person for the position.

Candidates need to be able to express themselves verbally. If they can not explain to you why they would make an excellent addition to your operation, how are they going to explain an exercise or piece of equipment to your clients? If your facility services a diverse population, then you need a trainer that can work with all of people who are seeking fitness training.

“Must Ask” Interview Questions

1. Tell me specifically why you chose to become a personal training business?
2. What is your greatest achievement in the Health and Fitness Industry?
3. What was your worst experience in your health and fitness career?
4. What are your greatest qualities as a health professional?
5. In what areas do you feel you need the most improvement?
6. What do you hope to achieve in this new position?
7. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
8. If I were to ask your last employer to describe the job you did for them and the qualities you possess, what would they say?
9. Describe to me what you believe the role of a personal trainer in this organization is?
10. Tell me what you know about our organization?
11. What populations (demographics) do you have experience working with and do you have a favorite or specialty?
12. What is your greatest weakness and how is that an advantage?



If the candidate seems promising, view the job description, salary, probation period, references and the need for signing a non-compete agreement at the end of the first interview.

Ideally three prospects will make it on to the second interview. If not, you should call in 2 or 3 more from your initial list. Once three qualified candidates make it to the next round, invite them to the gym and train with you for a half hour session. Shoot to schedule the second interviews within one week of the first round.

During the work out demonstration, present yourself as someone who is just getting started with resistance and cardio workouts, and wants to firm up and lose some weight. If this is not what your clientele generally wants then pick a scenario you see at your facility. Have the candidate chart the workout to give you an indication of their thoroughness and attention to detail. Follow the work out with a second 30-minute interview where you discuss your facility's philosophy and goals. Welcome trainers to bring their own experience to the plate, but make sure they are within safe guidelines and are consistent with your training philosophy.

Trainers also must be team players. Even though personal training is an individual activity, there must be harmony and respect (not rivalry) among the trainers. There is no room in any organization for mavericks. Typically trainers share in chores and other duties, and if someone isn't pulling their weight, they won't last long. So it's imperative to weed out those candidates ahead of time. Ask the candidate to give you two experiences in the work place that requires team work.

In the meantime, check all references for the candidates who make it to round two. Talk to their clients and former employers. When making reference calls be honest and present yourself as a personal training studio or fitness club owner, looking to hire this person to your PT staff. If someone does not check out, go back to your pool of candidates. If there isn't a good fit based on their qualifications and personality, start the process again. You will be investing heavily in the person you choose, so choose wisely and don't feel rushed or that you need to pick the lesser of the evils.

As the owner-operator of the personal training facility, you should conduct the interviews. In some cases it may be appropriate for the general manager or staff manager to conduct interviews. It is not appropriate for another trainer to conduct the interviews, though your existing training staff is a great place to get recommendations for new candidates.

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New Hires

Once you have hired high quality trainers it is time to integrate them into your system. All new trainers must sign a non-compete agreement prior to employment. This protects your facility when trainers are terminated or leave the company, as to not take clients that you provided to them.

To ensure continuity and consistency from your training staff, trainers need training. The client will find comfort and success if your staff has a unified approach. They need to understand the specific protocols and procedures that your facility is promoting. These include: program design, specific exercise instruction, nutritional advice and other fitness related questions. Consider teaching your trainers special pre-structured training routines, motivational techniques, and verbal cuing. The result is a positive experience by all which leads to an increase in your member retention rate.

Finally, each new hire should go through a 30 day probation period. This useful tool gives management and the new employee time to ensure the arrangement is working out. For instance if a trainer frequently arrives late, receives negative feedback from clients or isn't putting in the hours, the probationary status allows for an easier termination. Or if the employee isn't happy, it's a good "out" for both parties. Schedule a review after the first month for each new employee.

By implementing an organized and consistent hiring process, you bring on the best trainers for your operation. I implemented these protocols into my organization over 10 years ago; our average trainer has been with us for seven years. This longevity for our trainers ensures very high client retention rates, thus hiring is the first step in developing a top notch personal training staff.

Jason Baer, owner-operator, founded *Personal Training Professionals (PTP)* in 1998 to meet the growing demand for personal training and personalized health services. Mr. Baer has a bachelor's degree in exercise science. He received the 2006 Business Advisory Council's National Leadership Award and is an Honored Member of the United Who's Who among Executives and Professionals.

He offers his business model as a franchise and provides consulting services to larger fitness clubs. He can be reached at trainptp@aol.com, 866-97-PTP4U or www.PTPFranchise.com.

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