

5 Ways to Show that You Are Different...and Better

By Jon Goodman prepared for the
Personal Trainer Development Center



www.thePTDC.com

Why I Wrote This

There are a lot of bad personal trainers out there. I can tell you're not one of them because you are reading this E-Book. The problem is that the bad trainers ruin it for everybody else. They give our industry a bad name and create horror stories and mistrust. 1,000,000 good experiences don't make up for a single bad one.

Many potential clients will come to you on the rebound from a bad personal training relationship. You have a small window to prove that you are different. You want to genuinely help them reach their goals. You care. You're not going to cheat them. After all, your success as a trainer hinges on their success as a client.

So, how do you quickly prove to a new client that you're cut from a different cloth? How do you prove that you want to develop a relationship with them and help them succeed? Lastly, how do you show a client that you're passionate about education and fitness and will do whatever you need to in order to help them?

Follow these 5 key principles to set yourself apart. Apply these 5 principles in new meetings with potential clients and watch your sales go up:

1. Be Fully Prepared
2. It's more than Just Words
3. Showcase Your Education
4. Put Yourself in Their Shoes
5. Listen

Principle #1

Be Fully Prepared

Arm yourself with knowledge. Before the client steps into your office for an initial consultation, do your homework. What is their exercise background? Have they worked with a trainer before?, Have they had previous good/bad experiences? What are their goals?, Do they have any potential barriers?

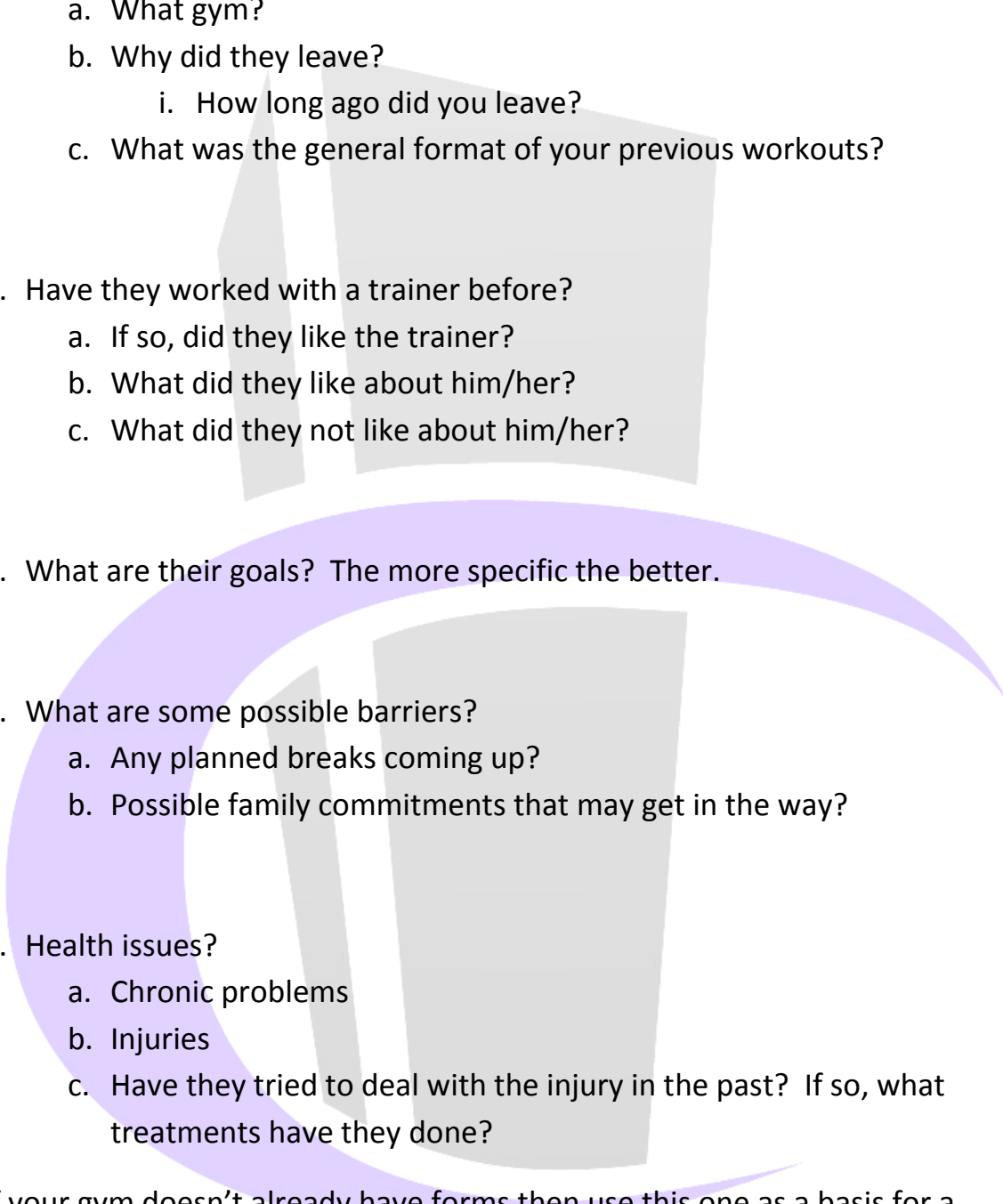
How do you get all this information before you meet the client?

There are two paths that will bring a client to your office for an initial visit.

1. They “walk-in” off the street or through advertising and your gym’s salesperson decided to have them meet with you.
2. They are a referral from one of your previous clients.

If the client was sent to you via your gym’s salesperson, that salesperson should gather the info during the initial meeting. In a gym, everyone should work together as a team. Likely the salesperson’s income depends on how much training that client buys so it is in their best interest to help you as much as possible. Give the sales staff a list of the information you need them to gather before setting up any consults with you. The list should include:

1. Name, gender, age
2. How they heard of the gym (was it through another member who you may know?)
3. Interests / possible topics of conversation. Possibly a type of book, sports etc.

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4. Were they a member of a gym before?
 - a. What gym?
 - b. Why did they leave?
 - i. How long ago did you leave?
 - c. What was the general format of your previous workouts?

 5. Have they worked with a trainer before?
 - a. If so, did they like the trainer?
 - b. What did they like about him/her?
 - c. What did they not like about him/her?

 6. What are their goals? The more specific the better.

 7. What are some possible barriers?
 - a. Any planned breaks coming up?
 - b. Possible family commitments that may get in the way?

 8. Health issues?
 - a. Chronic problems
 - b. Injuries
 - c. Have they tried to deal with the injury in the past? If so, what treatments have they done?

If your gym doesn't already have forms then use this one as a basis for a template. Go the extra 10% and show it to your manager to demonstrate that you are trying to make the gym better. If the potential client is a referral you can gather some of this information from the referring client. I like to sit down with my client for 5 minutes to ask questions about the person they're referring.

Sometimes they will be willing/able to answer your questions and sometimes not, but they won't mind being asked. Although it is still important to be prepared for a referred potential client, you do not need to worry as much about breaking the ice because your reputation will precede you.

The key is to gather as much information about a new client as possible BEFORE you meet them. In the meeting you will still ask some of the same questions, even though you already know the answers. The difference is that now you're PREPARED. With the information you gathered earlier, you will have devised a game plan and anticipated all concerns and objections. You will be able to impress with suggestions for a tailored program and/or address concerns that might be rooted in a prior bad experience.

Take the example of a client that had a previous bad experience with a trainer who left the gym 2 months after the sessions began. They bounced around 2 different trainers before leaving their previous facility.

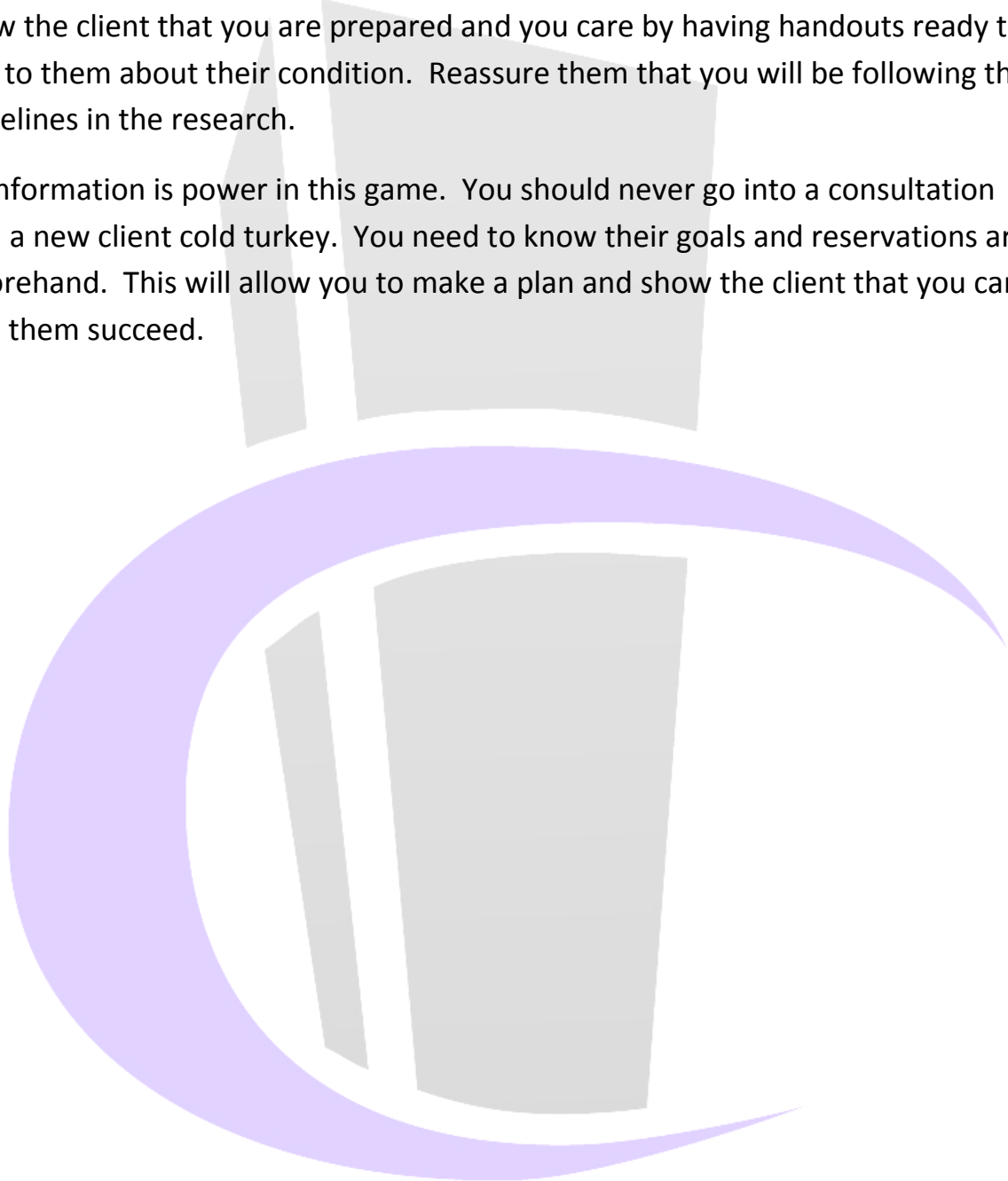
It may be a good idea to show stability here by volunteering information about how long you've been at the gym and your long term aspirations in the personal training industry. Because you're prepared, you will close the objection door before the client has a chance to open it. (For an in depth discussion on how to close objection doors look out for my book "Build a career in Personal Training, and get Rich Doing it..." to be released September 2011).

Armed with the client's age, past fitness habits, goals, and injuries, you can draw up a preliminary plan. You will impress the client if you can discuss at a first meeting the type of workouts you intend to design and the path that will lead them to meet their goal. Educate them on how you plan on programming in any planned breaks they have coming up. If possible, have handouts ready. You'll get bonus points!

I like to provide my female clients with articles extolling the benefits of weight training for optimal body composition. I go into consultations with women prepared to debate the myth of women bulking up by using weights.

If you are aware of an injury that the client has, you will impress if you're prepared to speak with them about it. If you aren't familiar with the condition then do your research before the meeting. Understand the anatomy, symptoms, common rehabilitation treatments, and how you can specifically help them. Show the client that you are prepared and you care by having handouts ready to give to them about their condition. Reassure them that you will be following the guidelines in the research.

Information is power in this game. You should never go into a consultation with a new client cold turkey. You need to know their goals and reservations are beforehand. This will allow you to make a plan and show the client that you can help them succeed.



Principle #2

It's more than Just Words

Body language conveys confidence, capability and energy. These are crucial when you're selling yourself. Remember that you are the product.

First impressions are critical. New clients are usually tentative and the quicker you make them feel comfortable the better. If possible, meet the client at the door with a big smile and handshake. Don't allow them to be shown to your office or meeting room by the receptionist. The extra 10% will go a long way.

The first step in conveying positive body language is to believe in yourself. You can't fake confidence, and since you are the product, you must believe in yourself. In the following section, take 5 minutes and reflect. Write down 3 skills that make you unique. Be specific. On that same piece of paper write down whatever specialties you have. This is what makes you a special and valuable product.

Write down 3 skills that you have (ex. Organized, educated, passionate etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are your specialties (low back rehab, cardio rehab etc.)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now that you are confident in the abilities you bring to the table, it is time to convey that to the client. Never stop smiling and be positive.

Often the client will put themselves down. They may say something like “I’ve been overweight my whole life and don’t really think anything can be done about it”. Your response should always be looking forward to the future. In this instance it might be, “everything you’ve done before is behind you. I’m going to make sure that you’re working hard, staying consistent, and eating right. Don’t dwell on the past; let’s look forward to the future”. With this one statement, you acknowledge the clients emotions and give hope for progress. Best of all, you’ve turned a negative conversation into a positive one.

Here are examples of positive non-verbal communication traits to adopt:

1. Positive face
 - a. Smile, laughter, head nod, eye contact
2. Positive voice
 - a. Caring, soft/empathetic, warm, empathetic, bubbly, cheerful, laughing
3. Positive body
 - a. Open arms, attention, forward lean

As I mentioned earlier, first impressions are key. A major aspect in making an effective first impression has to do with aesthetics. You should be well-groomed at all times and practice what you preach by staying in shape. Be a good example to new clients so they have the confidence you’re the right person to help them.

Greet the client at the door, give them a good handshake, smile, look them in the eye, and look the part. It may seem obvious but a lot of trainers lose out on clients by not doing it.

Principle #3

Showcase your Education

A growing concern in the personal training industry is confusion over certifications. Due to lack of regulation and lenient guidelines, there are a myriad of different certifications and educational options for trainers. Some are better than others, but that discussion is for another day.

Extensive public information is readily available for potential clients selecting trainers, and they are armed with it. In the club I train at, potential clients are starting to actually ask about the certification of the trainers they are considering working with. That said, widespread knowledge concerning the difference between certifications is still a ways off. Also, some trainers may opt to avoid getting lots of certifications and go the self-study route. (I go into detail of this phenomenon in my book “Build a career in Personal Training, and get Rich Doing it...” to be released September 2011).

If you have worked hard and spent the money to obtain a high level certification, educate your clients on its advantages. Let them know why you chose the certification(s) you have, the commitment involved in obtaining it (them), and the advantages.

It's important not to put other certifications down when describing your own. Bad-mouthing people, organizations, certifications etc. will only make you look bad. Educate yourself on the major organizations and be able to spell out a couple of advantages and disadvantages of each certification. Be prepared to direct the potential client to further sources of information about your certification.

Take this example: You hold a high level certification and 4-year kinesiology degree. A client approaches you saying that their previous trainer held a certification that requires a weekend of study and a couple of hundred dollars. They don't know the difference. Don't immediately put down their previous

trainer's designation. Your best course of action would be to gather information about the client first. Then follow by selling the advantages of your certification specific to their needs.

Explain what you studied and for how long. Explain the courses that you feel were particularly helpful for your career as a PT. Then explain how you are particularly suited to working with this client specifically.

If you attend workshops, symposiums, and, conferences make sure that your clients know that you have a profile in the fitness industry. It's not arrogant to show off that you regularly invest in your education in order to provide them with better service.

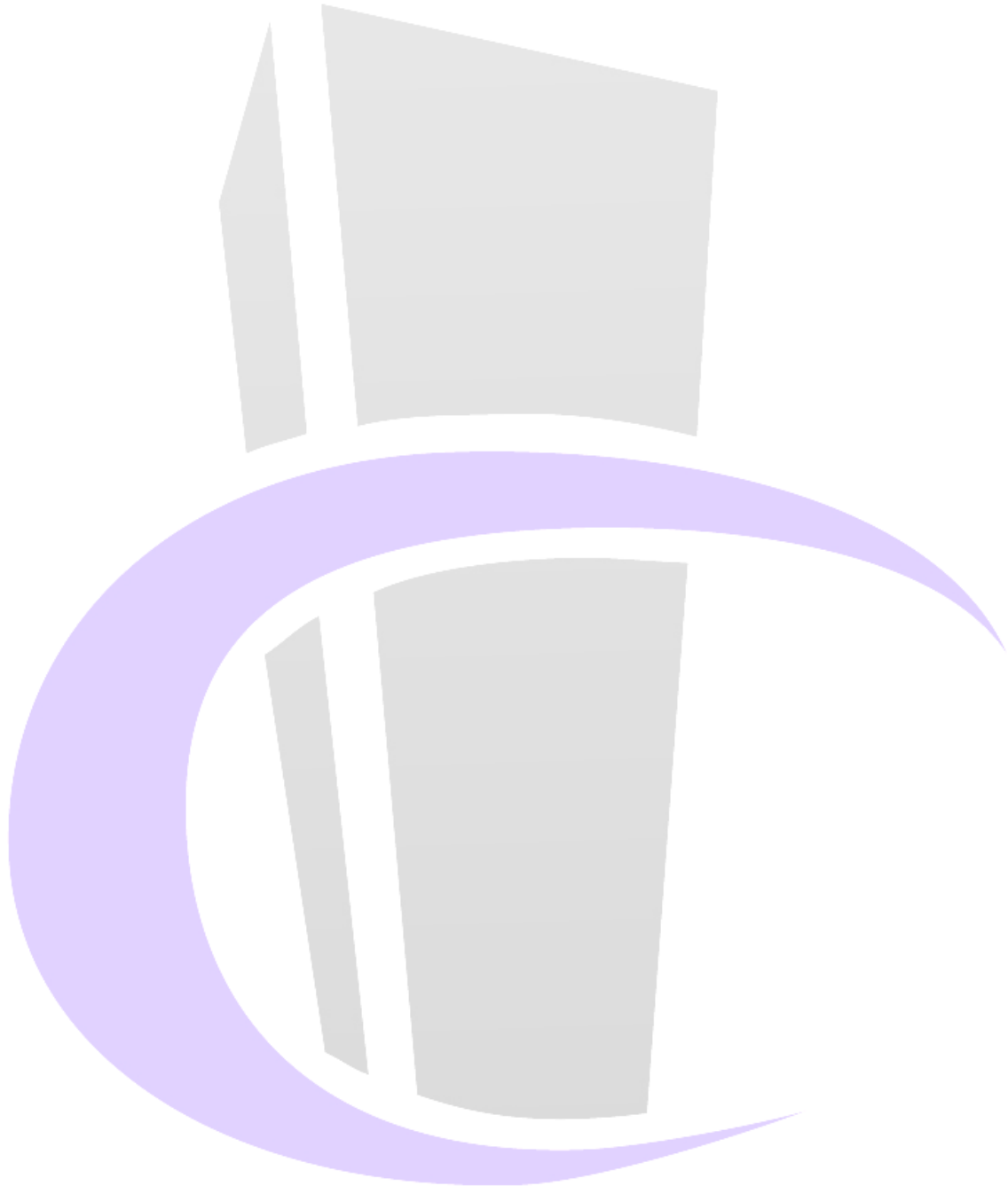
Offer success stories, client testimonials, and references. The quickest and most effective way to put a new client at ease is to provide them with a reference from somebody in a similar situation to them. The reference should be from somebody that you've helped who's similar in age, gender, injuries (if applicable), and life commitments.

Always have client testimonials posted out in the open. If you have a website, include a separate tab. If not, make sure your manager posts testimonials you collect in a spot where clients take a lot of breaks. By the water fountain is always a good choice. Try to include 1 testimonial from every demographic you like to train. Of course, make sure you get permission to use your client's success story in your marketing and ask in advance if you want to use them as a reference.

If you follow the principles in this e-book you'll already have background info on the client. That background info should prepare you for the direction of the first meeting. If you need to think about how to answer a question, close your mouth. Don't say umm or uhh. Avoid using a flank attack when speaking with the client, bombarding them with every bit of information that you know. I promise you they'll shut off within 30 seconds. Every bit of information you give them has to be specific to their needs

There's nothing wrong with being proud of your education and showing off your previous success stories. In meeting with a client you need to educate them

on the differences between high level and expensive certifications and weekend courses, while staying positive and not putting anybody down.



Principle #4

Put Yourself in Their Shoes

A nervous client may seem standoffish. This is probably not because they're unfriendly or have had a previous bad experience. Sometimes it's because they look up to you and are intimidated. After all, you've succeeded in fitness. They're seeking your help because they respect your knowledge, expertise, and results.

It took me a long time to figure this one out. I was almost always much younger than my clientele and they were so successful in life. I couldn't believe that they would be intimidated by me. Yet, when they came to me for help, they were shy. I mistook that shyness for rudeness.

Then, I put myself in their shoes. These people were used to being successful. They had careers, money, families, and respect in their communities. All of a sudden, in the gym, they were complete novices. Their bodies were starting to fail them. They had to go back to school and learn a totally different skill. I was the teacher and they respected me for it. I started to think about the last time I attempted to learn a new skill. How difficult it was and how intimidated of the teacher I felt.

To put myself in my client's shoes I started to think about the skills my influential teachers exhibited. The first one that came to mind was that effective teachers don't put you down when you fail. They always stay positive and make you feel at ease.

Then it hit me! I need to put these people at ease. They aren't being rude. They're just on edge!

Think back to when you first came into the gym or when you attempted to learn a new skill. Try to recall how you felt. Nervous? Awkward? Humbled/ Frustrated? Intimidated? Remember your screw-ups.

When new clients fail early on in our training I put them at ease with a story about when I screwed up or failed doing something new. I try to make it as relevant as possible. In an example where a client has a hard time grasping the squat I'll first tell them a story about a screw-up of mine. My favourite is when I had to dump the bar off of my shoulders while training in a gym in Australia. I then educate them about the physiology of skill acquisition. Daniel Coyle describes the phenomenon of acquiring more myelin around the nerves as we become increasingly skilled in his book "The Talent Code". The key is to try, fail, and fail better. We have to fail in order to learn. I also make sure that they're aware that we learn skills overnight when our brain makes sense of the dedicated practice during the day. I might even share a personal story, like teaching myself to throw a ball left-handed for a university project. It took me months!

Telling stories of your own failures is a great way to put a new client at ease. It reminds them that everybody's human and learns at a different pace. If they don't push the envelope and make mistakes they'll never learn. Make them understand that that's how you got to the point you're at and that's how they're going to grow.

Principle #5

Listen

Listen to your clients. This should be a no-brainer, but it's often underestimated.

Any doctor will tell you that with the right questions and open ears, patients will tell you exactly what's wrong with them and how to fix it. Personal Training clients are the same way. Trainers who ask the right questions and have the ability to shut up and listen will discover what they need to know about their clients.

They'll tell you:

1. What their strengths and weaknesses are
2. Their reservations
3. Their injuries
4. The most effective motivational technique for them
5. What they expect of you
6. What you can expect of them
7. Their interests outside of the gym
8. And more...

Always ask open-ended questions. For example, don't ask the clients if they've had knee problems before. Instead, ask if they have ever had any injuries. When they start talking, you start writing. Taking notes shows the client that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying and encourages them to talk more. Try to stay quiet for 3 seconds after they have finished speaking. You would be amazed at how much people remember when there is silence.

The following is a list of pertinent questions to ask during the initial meeting. Note that the questions are all open-ended. You want to avoid one-word

answers, so make sure you listen carefully to the answers and ask appropriate follow-up questions:

1. What are your goals?
2. Why are they important to you?
3. Do you have any previous injuries?
4. Have you ever had any operations?
5. Are you currently taking any medications?
6. Do you play any sports?
7. Were you a member of a previous gym?
 - a. If so, tell me about your experience
 - i. What did you enjoy about it?
 - ii. What didn't you enjoy?
8. How many drinks do you have per week?
9. How serious are you about achieving your fitness goals?

10. What activities have you done in the previous 3 months?

People love being listened to. If you listen from the heart, people feel special and acknowledged. When meeting with clients it is important to think like a reporter. You know the questions that you want answered and should devise a strategy beforehand to get that information.

Don't confuse talking with communicating. Talking is one-sided. Communicating requires you to skilfully balance talking and listening. Try the following in your next client interview:

1. Make sure the person has finished what they're saying before you start. Be patient.
2. Pause before answering. This ensures that they have finished speaking.
3. Face the person and maintain eye contact.
4. Always ask open-ended questions for clarification. Use why, what, where, who, when, and how often.
5. Paraphrase what they said before responding to show them that you understood.

Putting it all Together

To Show that You Are Different... and Better

Breaking the ice with clients quickly is the first step to building a strong clientele. In our business, relationships are everything. The quicker you can develop them, the quicker you'll benefit. Remember that clients can also become mentors, coaches, and friends in addition to being your source of revenue.

Unfortunately, client often will come to you after a negative experience in a gym. They may seem closed off at first as a protective mechanism. You are different and you need to show the client that right away. By following the 5 principles you'll quickly show the client you're different and start developing strong bond.

1. Be fully prepared
2. It's more than just words
3. Show off your education
4. Put yourself in their shoes
5. Listen

About the Author

Jon Goodman, CSCS, is a personal trainer, coach, and workshop leader in Toronto, Canada. He got his start in personal training at the University of Western Ontario while studying Kinesiology. Upon graduation, Jon decided to become a full time trainer.

Jon started his career at Body + Soul Fitness in Toronto, a boutique studio specializing in high quality personal training. But he was frustrated with the lack of materials available in the industry to help developing trainers learn the trade. He quickly realized that he would have to go out of his way to search out resources and mentors that would ensure continued success.

At that point he made the goal of reading one hour a day on various topics with the objective of developing his skill set both in business and personal training. In addition to extensive self-study, Jon also attends seminars, workshops, symposiums, and conferences as often as possible.

Jon loves to travel and has lived and worked in three different countries. Outside the gym Jon has an avid interest in theoretical physics, in particular the quest to bridge classical physics with quantum mechanics in an attempt to figure out the Theory of Everything.

Jon's passion for the personal training industry led him to form the Personal Trainer Development Center (PTDC). The center's goal is to provide developing trainers with the tools they need to make personal training a successful career. By bringing together the top experts in the fitness industry specializing in strength + conditioning, management, sales, and personal trainer, the PTDC serves as both a great resource and networking tool for personal trainers.

For more about Jon and the Personal Trainer Development Center visit:

www.thePTDC.com

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