



# How to Run a Charity Bootcamp

Make a difference. (Really). And grow your business. (A lot).

LUKA HOCEVAR

*Throw an epic event, raise money for a good cause, and generate a ton of qualified leads at the same time. This is how we do it.*

thePTDC

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# Why It's So Important

The main reason why you're in this game is to help people, right? So why not create an event focused on helping people who need it, while growing your business at the same time?

I fundamentally believe that an important part of business is doing good. That means supporting your local community and causes that you, and your members, believe in.

Charity bootcamps are a way to work towards your bigger purpose of making a difference, while supporting smart business strategy. They're a killer lead generation tool. Done well, you can bring in hundreds of qualified prospects to your facility and find that they quickly and easily convert to clients.

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## Steps to Implementation:

### **STEP 1.** Decide if you're going to do it – and commit to making it awesome.

A charity bootcamp can be an excellent way to support a cause you care about. The weekly charity bootcamps we host at my gym, Vigor, typically bring in between 40 to 80 people every Saturday. (Though we've thrown some events way beyond this size.)

This method has been hands-down our most effective strategy for business growth.

That said, running a successful event doesn't just happen. It takes some planning and preparation because who wants to run an 'okay' or 'good' event? No, you want your events to be EPIC – and that takes work.

You also must be truly committed to supporting the charity or causes you've chosen. If that is your purpose, everything you do will have a genuine drive behind it, which will make the event more successful.

So, before you get started, check in with yourself. Decide if this is important to you. If it is, commit to making it amazing.

## **STEP 2.** Select your charity and learn your legal responsibilities about earning money for them.

When choosing a charity, think about which ones are near and dear to your heart and/or your members' hearts. From there, try to go local before going national. It makes a bigger difference in the community and bonds people together, while also encouraging support from local businesses.

(Use this brainstorming worksheet if you need some help deciding.)

Before launching into the event planning, it's a good idea to think about how you will collect the money for the charity and make sure you are prepared to do it safely and legally.

### **A few considerations:**

- Be prepared to handle money safely. When it comes to collecting the money, we collect everything by check and cash, and we have a four-square reader for any cards – however, we strongly encourage cash and check so we don't lose donations to processing fees. We have also set up payment links for people when they wanted to donate but couldn't come to the bootcamp.
- Understand the legal implications of fundraising. I recommend you check with your accountant because different states have different rules when it comes to promoting charity events and how you phrase them, etc. For example, we had to switch from “charity bootcamp” to “bootcamps for a cause” due to legal issues around the wording.
- Decide how much you will give away and be prepared to be crystal clear about it. We give away everything raised – 100% gross. If I have expenses, I cover them out of pocket. While how much you give away is up to you, I prefer to say that every penny that is raised will be contributed – and deliver on that promise.

## STEP 3. Establish the basics: the name, the timing, and the size you're aiming for.

Here are some tips for these three things:

- **Naming.** Give your program a name, but be cautious of what name you choose. Because of legalities in our state we called them "Bootcamps for a cause" as the word "charity" has legal implications. While laws vary, it's probably on the safe side not to imply that you are a charity. Be clear about the fact that you are a business, collecting money for a specific cause as part of a fundraiser.
- **Timing.** Decide how often you're going to run the program. For example, we have a "Bootcamp for a Cause" every Saturday for a drop-in fee, which goes towards the cause we are donating to at that time. Consistency is important though, so be realistic about what you're capable of. If you want to start out with a fundraiser once per month or even once per quarter, that's totally fine too. Commit to what you can do and focus on making that event seriously awesome.
- **Size.** How many people do you want to attend these events? Set a goal number for yourself that is realistic yet suitable for the size of your gym, equipment, etc. While we typically have about 40 people at each bootcamp, the first one only had 7 people in it. That was a deliberate choice to try it and get the kinks out before growing the program.

*"Consistency is important, so be realistic about what you're capable of."*

## STEP 4. Design the event.

### First, start with why.

You're going to write out exactly why you're doing this, who you're doing it for, and the specific outcomes you hope to achieve.

If this seems a bit like unicorns and fairy dust for you, consider this: I've done many charity events, and any time I related my purpose for running the event, my feelings and emotions about why I want to help, and why this is so important to me, the event was so much more successful.

This understanding is going to be your fuel for putting on the event; it will also allow you to articulate it in your marketing efforts.

## Next, plan the program.

This should be relatively simple as I am going to assume you are used to designing bootcamps or group training classes. (If not, this strategy may not be for you.) Once again, however, think about how to make this one special. Depending on your clientele, you may want to make it especially challenging and creative, with some exercises they have not encountered before.

The first thing people should do when they come in is fill out a form. This form will need to include:

- Their name
- Their email address
- Their mailing address

*(Note: for anti-Spam laws, it's a good idea to put a check-box on the form that says they give you permission to contact them.)*

Before launching into the program, make sure to get people excited. You may give a super quick speech about the charity. If you have a DJ or Hype guy, or special celebrities participating, you may call them out or even ask for their help in kicking things off. (I'll explain more about that in a moment.)

### **Important note on converting participants to clients:**

In my method, there is no selling period within the event. We don't ask people to sign up afterwards; there's no push, hard sell or commitment required. We just ask people to sign in and put down their name, e-mail, and phone while they fill out a waiver. We politely follow up with a "Thank You" for helping the cause and offering them a trial week of our programs.

Many people ask to sign up and become clients, simply because they love the program. Others keep coming every Saturday and end up joining a little bit later, when they realize they need more than just the weekly bootcamp to get results.

Either way, we get a ton of leads, and above all, we get to help the causes we care about.

## Making it special.

Consider: *what is going to be different or special about this event compared to your regular, run of the mill bootcamp? What will people want to come out for?*

Remember, you want to make it feel special for your participants. This is what is going to have people coming back and telling their friends!

Here are some ideas to think about:

### **VENDORS AND SPONSORS:**

Vendors and sponsors can add freebies and fun to your event with no extra cost to you. Sure, you could skip this step, but these kinds of touches make all the difference.

Consider who may be able to help. Brainstorm and see if you can think of local businesses that share a similar type of clientele as you. For example, vendors we've had out our events (sometimes all at once) include:

- Local supplement store
- Muscle Milk (regional reps provided over 100 shakes)
- Vitamin Water
- Organic healthy chocolates (local business)
- Chiropractic/Active Release Therapy/Graston Technique specialists
- Local running specialist store
- Photographer/Videographer
- Club DJ/Hype man

Think about the people you know and whether any of them run, or work for, businesses that may be willing to get involved. A personal connection makes the process of pitching a vendor way easier.

*How to ask for help:*

- If you don't have an existing relationship with a particular business, you will need to pitch them. Here's how to do that:
- Call them up and let them know who you are and tell them a little bit about your business and the event you are putting on.
- Tell them how many people will be attending, and explain how this will give them a ton of exposure to an audience related to their market. Explain the

*“What is going to be different or special about this event compared to your regular, run of the mill bootcamp?”*

level of trust you already have with your members so you can demonstrate that this is a group of people who trust your recommendations.

- Offer them a free month of your services so they can get to know what you do and decide for themselves whether they want to work with your business.
- Have a clear 'ask.' You're not looking for money; you are only looking for a free product or service at your event to show its value.

*Note: a word of advice here – only work with vendors with products/services you believe in.*

As you can see from the list, some of the companies provided products and coupons as freebies to our guests, while others provided services that helped make the event extra special and fun.

### **INVITE LOCAL CELEBRITIES**

Getting local celebs – such as athletes, TV personalities, etc. – involved is a great way to attract more people. Offering a chance to “workout with [Name],” or grab a selfie and autograph with [Name], is an incredibly effective method of drawing people in.

If you have personal connections with these people – such as clients or connections through your network – then go for it; it's a much easier sell. However, assuming you're not already connected, you're going to want to offer to support their charity of choice. Do some research to see which cause the celebrity supports or find out which celebrity is associated with a cause that you chose to support.

You'd be surprised by how many local celebrities will be willing to help out when it comes to a charitable cause – especially one they're associated with. Work on getting a commitment ahead of time so you can include their involvement in your promotion and press release. (More on that shortly.)

In our gym in Slovenia, we focused solely on bringing in celebrities for our charity event. Soccer and basketball stars, singers, and actors that we were able to reach through relationships and connections were all recruited. We ended up creating enough buzz to have paparazzi at the gym, and we were featured in the news as well as two national trend magazines. Everyone had a blast, we raised a lot of money, and we got huge exposure. So, this one is definitely worth a try!

## STEP 5. Start to build excitement, interest, and buzz!

Now it's time to generate some mega interest for your event. To do that, you'll need to create a few promotional tools. Here's what you'll need to do.

### Create a Flyer

Put together a 1-page flyer with the name, date, charity, and any super cool stuff that the event will feature. Be sure to include sponsors if you have arrangements like that. And of course, if you've got celebrities coming, highlight the heck out of that! If you completely suck at design and don't want to make your own flyer, hire someone for cheap or ask a friend, and barter if you have to.

### Make A Facebook Event

Even if you're not a huge user of Facebook, lots of people spend most of their time there. Creating an event page makes the event official and gives you the possibility to invite everyone in your circle (personal, groups, etc.). Plus, you can tentatively track how many people have committed to coming, and remind them to boost participation. Plus, it's a great way to encourage your friends to share the event. If you need instructions on how to create a Facebook page, go here: [https://www.facebook.com/help/ipad-app/210413455658361?helpref=about\\_content](https://www.facebook.com/help/ipad-app/210413455658361?helpref=about_content)

### Create A Video

Not essential but recommended, a video can be a great way to get people excited. Video is highly shareable, and it's a fun way to tell the story. I approach these like making a mini-documentary, where I talk a bit about what the event is for, show an example from my boot camps, and include some uplifting music and visuals. The goal is not to get a ton of YouTube hits but rather to post it on Facebook and send the link through your newsletter. This way you will get targeted views and guaranteed sharing of the video through your members.

### Plan Something to Say

You don't have to have a speech but you do need a few words – basically a short story – to explain why you are doing this. You will need to tell people, over and over again, why this charity is amazing, why you support the heck out of them,

and why exactly it is so close to your heart. You will also want to write this story out and share it in your newsletter, on Facebook, on your blog if you have one, and so on.

## Get Your Members on Board

If your members feel involved, they will help you promote the event and be more likely to bring loads of friends. Plus, collaboration and inclusion support a sense of connection.

At least 2 to 3 weeks ahead of time you want to tell your members about the big event and get them excited about it too.

This is where you'll want to...

- Take the little story you wrote about the event and why you're doing it and why it's so important to you, and include it in the gym newsletter or any other publications you may have.
- Show the video you made and/or give a quick little talk before group workouts/team training.
- Put up a notice on the front white board where people walk in and see there will be an epic charity event happening soon. This will have the members asking and talking about it.
- Put your flyers up wherever possible throughout the gym, such as on bathroom doors. You may also check with local businesses to see if you can hang them up on their corkboards/notice boards too.
- If you have a Facebook group, create an event on Facebook and share it there. Be sure to make some personal comments about exactly why this charity is so amazing and why it's important to you to support them.
- If you really want to ratchet up the buzz, consider holding a giveaway. For example, you can announce prizes for the person who brings the most people with them to the charity event. The giveaway prize could include items such as a t-shirt, Kindle, free training, gift cards, etc. People like prizes, period. Talk to your vendor/partners and ask whether they have prizes they'd like to donate for a giveaway. This will be good promotion for them and let them know you'll be mentioning them in your press release. (We'll get into media in a minute.) If you are doing a giveaway, make sure you're letting people know all about it. Tell people about it in your e-mail newsletter, on Facebook/Twitter, and after all the bootcamp classes leading up to the event.

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*Two important things to remember in all your communications:*

**1. The most important thing to focus on is the charity and why you are supporting them.** But you can also talk about some of the things that will be special (vendors, DJ, etc.) as well as how the workout will be crazy. This will get the members excited without giving everything away.

**2. Make sure there is a call-to-action at the end of every communication.** In other words, you want to tell your members to:

- Save the date.
- Share the invite and bring as many people as possible (family, friends, and co-workers), including people they don't like that need to get their ass kicked.

Remember, the event is a big deal because you said it's a big deal. This is your tribe, your community, and a cause that both you and your members care about. Share your excitement!

## Get media attention

Create a press release for your event. To do this you can search online for templates, or ask/ barter with a friend who's good at writing.

Submit the press release to online press release sites (such as those on this list: <http://www.cyberalert.com/blog/best-free-press-release-distribution-services/>), as well local papers, event listings, news stations, etc. You may not get much pick up the first time (although a celebrity's name will definitely help), but over time you should see success.

Give the charity a heads up about the press release; let them know exactly when you'll be releasing it and share the press release with the charity as soon as it comes out. They may also share it with their network and media contacts, increasing your overall media coverage.

## STEP 6. Make it the 'can't-miss' event in the last days leading up to the event.

The last few days leading up to your event are important. This is the time to really focus on generating energy and enthusiasm and making sure people will show up.

Your checklist for promotion this week includes:

- Send a reminder in your newsletter.
- Post a reminder about the event on your Facebook page (link to the event page from step #2).
- Consistently remind all clients after your boot camp classes and other training.
- Make the flyers in the gym visible.
- Ask your clients to share it with others including on FB.
- Send out a group text the night before (not too late) to all interested parties with a reminder to come.

## **STEP 7.** The event itself: bring the energy, create an experience, and get information.

It's the big event: now is your time to give it all you've got.

Here are three things you need to have at the ready.

### **Your Energy/Enthusiasm**

All the extras are great, but it's up to you to bring the energy and make this event epic! Your effort and energy will be what makes people remember the event, talk about it, tell their friends about, and keep coming back.

If you've got other trainers/colleagues or anyone else helping out, have a quick pow-wow before the event to get them revved up. Make sure they're all bringing their top energy levels and delivering a "WOW" experience.

### **A Sign-up Sheet.**

Have your sign-in sheet ready and make sure everyone writes down their phone, e-mail and address (make at least the phone and email mandatory).

This way you cannot only input the new participants as leads, but more importantly, you can follow up and thank them. You'll learn how to do that in the next step.

*"All the extras are great, but it's up to you to bring the energy and make this event epic."*

## Photo or Video

You can hire (or get a friend) to take professional pictures. This is great for positioning and can be used across your social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. If you don't have professional services handy, do the best with what you've got. For example, sometimes I'll do Facebook Live during a big event and invite people to come down for the food, raffle, etc. The main point is to show what you're doing in the community and help gain interest for the next event.

## STEP 8. Follow up.

Your follow-up should include both email and a printed, snail-mail thank you card.

- **Email.** Send everyone who signed up an email. Your email should include the following:
- **Gratitude and celebration.** Let them know how much money was raised and what kind of a difference they made. If the charity has given you any kind of 'thank you', share their words of thanks. If you've got pictures you may share them here. Give people a pat on the back and make everyone feel good and special for participating.
- **Invitation to a three-week trial (or similar offer).** You may also mention the date of your next event. For example, we make a note of the fact that we have charity events every weekend.

Here is a sample of how thank you message may look. (You can also download a copy of this Thank You script to use.)

*Subject: Thank you <name>*

*<Name>,*

*Just wanted to reach out and thank you for attending the \_\_\_\_\_ Bootcamp for a Cause. Because of your help and contribution, we were able to raise \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_.*

*We're always grateful for the amazing people like you who come out to support the community and give back while having a fun, challenging workout.*

*We'd also like to give back and thank you by offering you a week of our elite training package (this is the program that produces the best transformations),*

*which includes:*

*=> unlimited team training (our group training)*

*=> an assessment and semi-private personal training session*

*=> a nutrition blueprint session with one of our Precision Nutrition coaches*

*=> access to group training for a friend*

*(\$297 value)*

*To reserve your gift please text \_\_\_\_\_ or e-mail me back with "I'm in" so we can get you scheduled with a coach. The cut of date for this is \_\_\_\_\_ as our coaches are booked and we opened up space to make sure we can get you in to accelerate whatever goals you're working on.*

*Look forward to hearing from you and excited to have you experience \_\_\_\_\_.*

Snail mail. If you received their address, send them a thank you card in the mail. This is imperative as it shows true appreciation and builds a relationship between you and current clients as well as people who have been exposed to your program for the first time. If you don't have their address, stick to email for now, but make a point of collecting their home address next time.

(Hint: Put their address in your Christmas card file to send them a holiday card later.)

## **STEP 9.** Make sure the funds go to the appropriate place.

After the event, deposit the checks and cash into the account in the coming days.

Typically, we write a cashier's check which we send out to the organization. (Sometimes we give it to the member who is closely affiliated with the organization that helped set it up.)

Again, check with your accountant if you have any questions. Make sure your accountant is on top of all the rules and regulations of charity donations "do's and don't's" so that you can focus on creating an amazing event, raising money, and helping as many people as possible while growing your business.

## **STEP 10.** Don't stop there. Consider other ways your business can make a difference.

Once your event is completed, get thinking about the next one. Now that you've got the first one under your wing, you may consider how you can make this bigger and better.

Let your charity boot camps be just the start of a business that actually cares and contributes to the local community. You may consider other ways you can give back. For example:

- Food, clothes and toy drives.
- One for One. For example, we created a plan where we donate a month of food to a child for every person who signs up for a Vigor Ground membership.
- Team volunteer work such as Habitat for Humanity, youth initiatives, river clean up, homeless shelters, etc.

Return to your Causes & Charities Brainstorm worksheet to come up with more causes.

Then give thought to how you can help. A great place to start? Contact the organizations, tell them you like their work, and ask what they need.

**MAKE MORE. WORK SMARTER. DO BETTER.**

**This free guide on how to run your own charity bootcamp is provided free of charge by the Personal Trainer Development Center.**

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