



**2021 Personal Trainer
Salary Survey:
Post-Pandemic Adaptation
Is Key to Success**



Foreword

For personal trainers, the past two years have forced massive industry shifts and personal growth for those who want to continue to thrive, both as employees and business owners. Finding new ways to connect with a target market, deliver programs, and keep clients accountable has presented challenges that have forced trainers to become innovative mavericks.

Thankfully, the industry has not imploded—rather, those who have successfully made the shift to offering online or hybrid training programs are not just maintaining their businesses but showing positive growth. Clients are recognizing that personal trainers are changing the way business has always been done in order to meet their needs, and they're willing to pay for high-quality, dedicated personal training—especially when it's delivered through a safe, no-risk, COVID-free screen.

Here, we'll explore how personal training salaries have changed over the past few years, who is getting paid the most in the personal training world, diversity issues currently facing the fitness industry, and how trainers can work to move their businesses forward in the coming years.

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Introduction

While we'd love to say that we were able to survey personal trainers post-pandemic, we're all still living in a COVID-laden world. Our 2021 Personal Trainer Salary Survey took place as the pandemic began to die down, however, providing us with solid insight into how COVID-19 affected—and continues to affect—the livelihood of personal trainers.

While many gyms and fitness centers are open, people may or may not feel safe going to the gym, especially with the onset of the COVID-19 [delta variant](#). According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), it's still not safe for unvaccinated people to attend high-intensity exercise classes indoors. From online training to virtual group fitness classes, one thing is clear—the fitness world has been [forever changed](#), and [virtual fitness](#) is here to stay.

Here, we'll explore how personal trainers have been affected by the pandemic. We'll learn about current personal training salaries in the wake of COVID-19, who is making the most money in the ever-changing fitness world, how personal trainers are coping with the fact that many clients now prefer to exercise at home, how personal trainers can work to increase their salary in coming years, and more.

Executive Summary

By and large, we found that most in the personal training community are experiencing steady business or trending toward growth, despite COVID-19 struggles. We also found that (to no one's surprise) there is much work to be done in the personal training world in the areas of diversity and inclusion.

Key takeaways from our survey include:

- Most respondents owned their own hybrid or online personal training business, owned an in-person gym, or worked at a gym and trained clients on the side.
- The most common specialties reported were fitness, strength and conditioning, and health and wellness. Personal trainers who offered nutrition coaching services earned more than trainers who offered other specialties.
- The largest jump in salary occurs after trainers have seven years of experience in the business.
- The average annual pretax income for our survey respondents was \$46,132—a very slight drop from the \$47,700 average annual income reported in last year's survey.
- Online personal trainers are earning more money, on average, than personal trainers who only offer in-person services.
- There's a clear wage gap in personal training—white trainers earn more than trainers of other races, male trainers make more than female trainers, and those in the 35-to-44-year-old age group make more money than any other age group.

Who Took Our Survey?

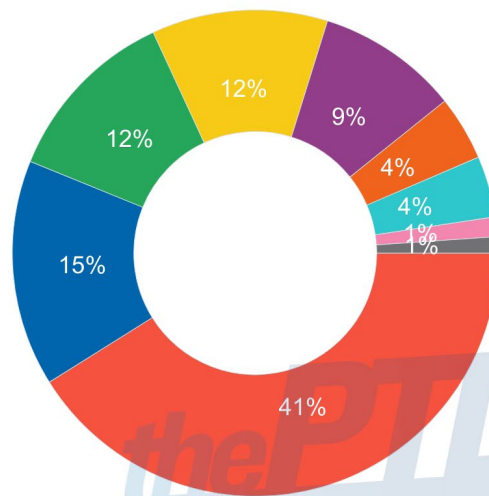
First, we'll dig into who participated in our survey.

Of 837 total survey respondents:

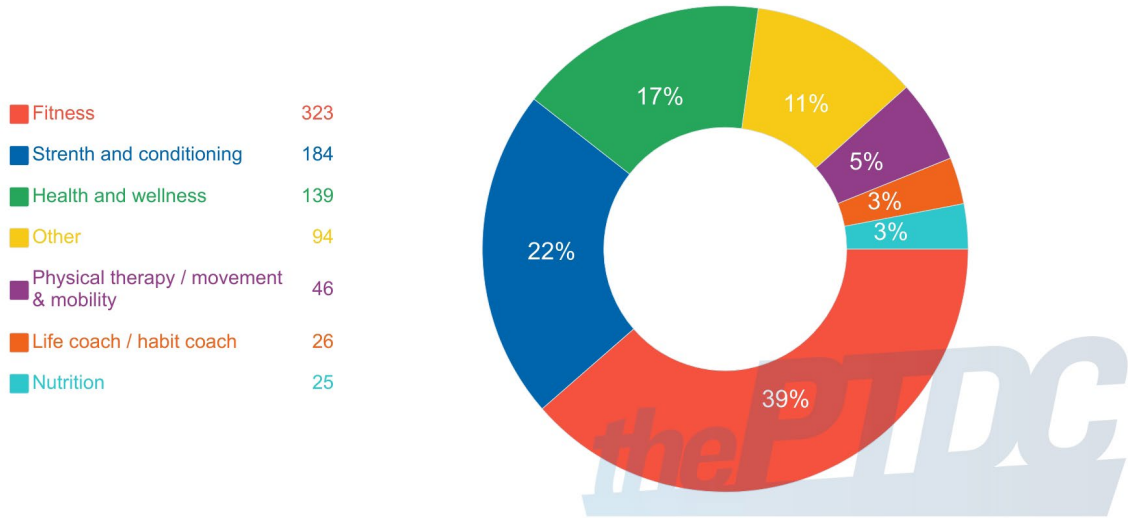
- 41% owned their own hybrid or online business, 15% owned an in-person gym, 12% worked at a gym and trained clients on the side, 12% worked in another industry and trained clients on the side, 9% worked for an independently owned gym, 4% worked for a commercial gym, 1% worked for an online coaching company, and 1% worked at a healthcare facility. 4% of respondents were furloughed or laid off from their personal training position.
- 39% specialized in fitness, 22% specialized in strength and conditioning, 17% specialized in health and wellness, 6% specialized in movement and physical therapy, 3% specialized in nutrition, and 3% specialized in life coaching or habit coaching. 11% of respondents reported other specialties, including yoga, transformation, and behavioral coaching.
- 25% of respondents had at least 15 years of experience in the personal training industry, 22% had seven to nine years of experience, 20% had 10 to 14 years of experience, 19% had four to six years of experience, 11% had one to three years of experience, and just 3% had less than a year of experience.

Employment Status

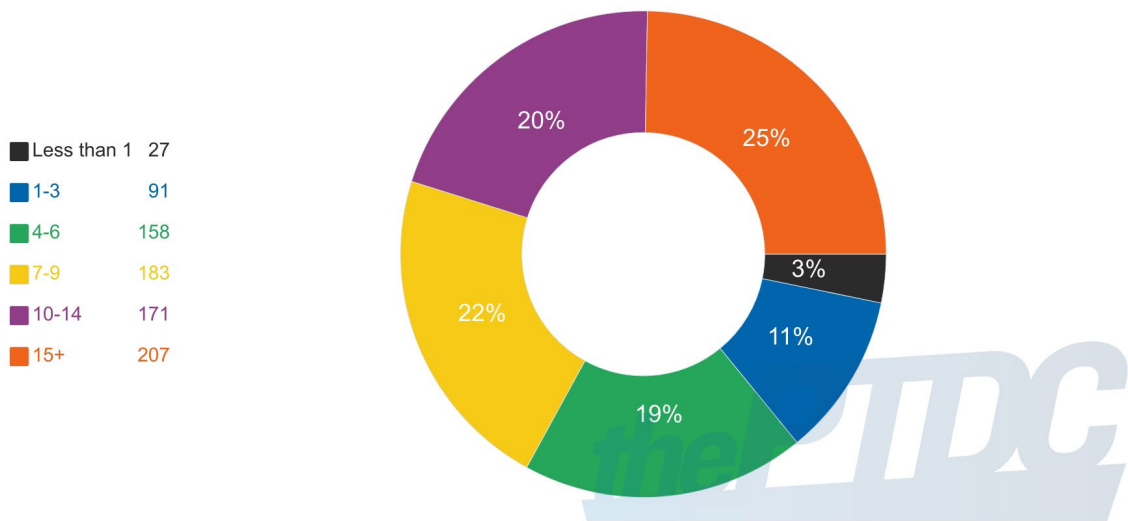
■ I have an online / hybrid business	41%
■ I own a gym	15%
■ I work at a gym + train/coach other clients on the side	12%
■ I have a full-time job in another industry + train/coach clients on the side	12%
■ I work for an independently owned gym	9%
■ I work for a commercial gym	4%
■ Unemployed / laid off / furloughed	4%
■ I work for (but do not own) an online / hybrid coaching business	1%
■ I work at a clinic / healthcare facility	1%



Survey Participants by Specialty



Survey Participants by Years of Experience



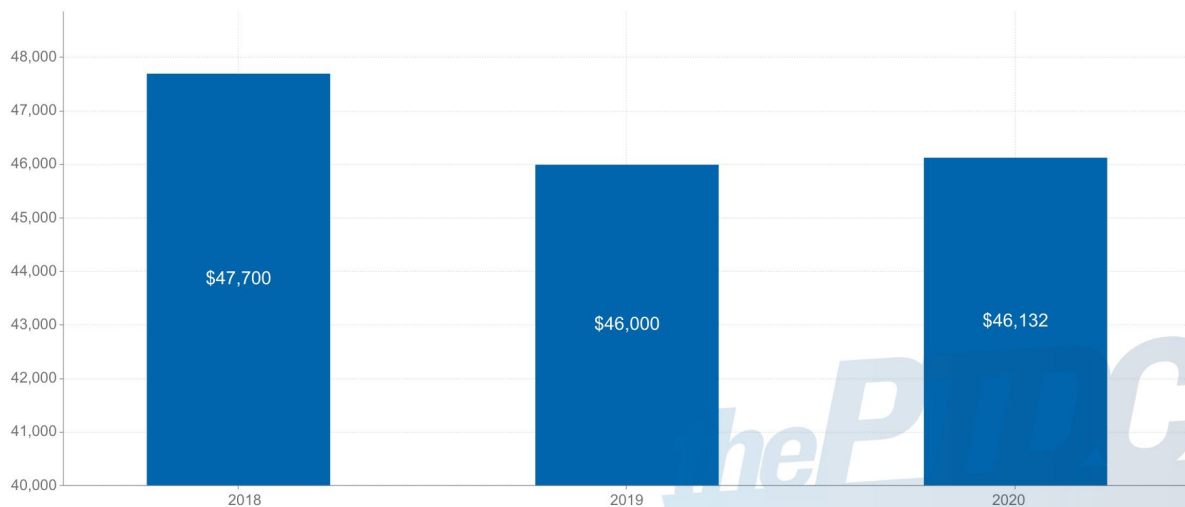
The Average Personal Trainer Salary Hasn't Changed—Much

While many personal trainer salaries took a hit due to COVID, the average salary hasn't changed very much from pre-COVID times. In 2020, the average pretax income for personal trainers was \$46,132. This is fairly consistent with the average income shown in our surveys over the past two years, with personal trainers reporting an average salary of \$47,700 in 2018 and \$46,000 in 2019.

Our survey's findings are in line with other sources—[ZipRecruiter](#) says the average is \$48,853, while the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says the average for [fitness trainers and instructors](#) is \$41,950.

Of course, many factors affect how much a personal trainer makes, including experience, education, reputation, and more.

Average Trainer Salary, 2018-2020

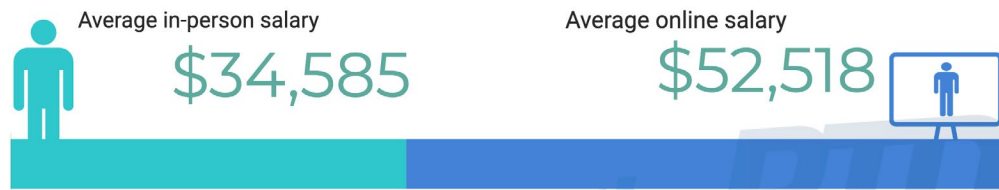


Online Personal Trainers Are Earning More Than Traditional Trainers

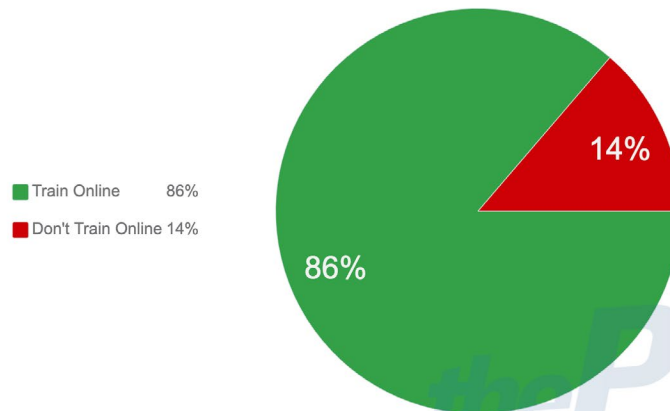
[Personal trainers have had to adapt](#) over the past two years, and many have made the pivot toward offering online-only or hybrid personal training programs. Our survey shows that online personal trainers and nutrition coaches are earning more than trainers and coaches who do not offer online services.

On average, personal trainers and nutrition coaches who train their clients virtually earn \$52,518 per year, compared with an average salary of just \$34,585 for personal trainers and nutrition coaches who offer traditional, in-person services only. Among trainers who earn six-figure incomes, 86% train their clients online.

Average Salary for In-Person vs. Online Trainers

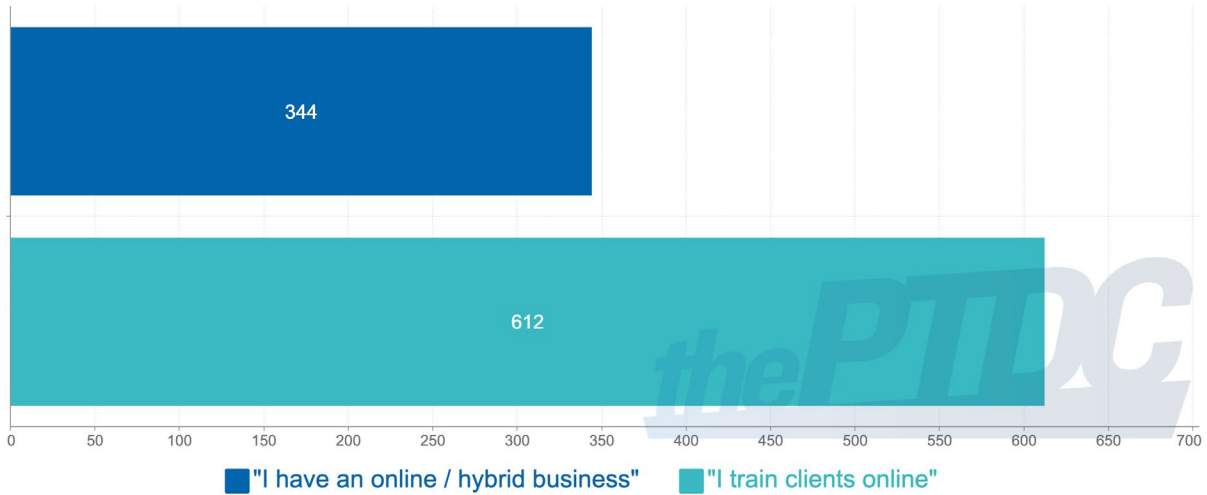


Online vs. In-Person Trainers, Breakdown Among Six-Figure Earners



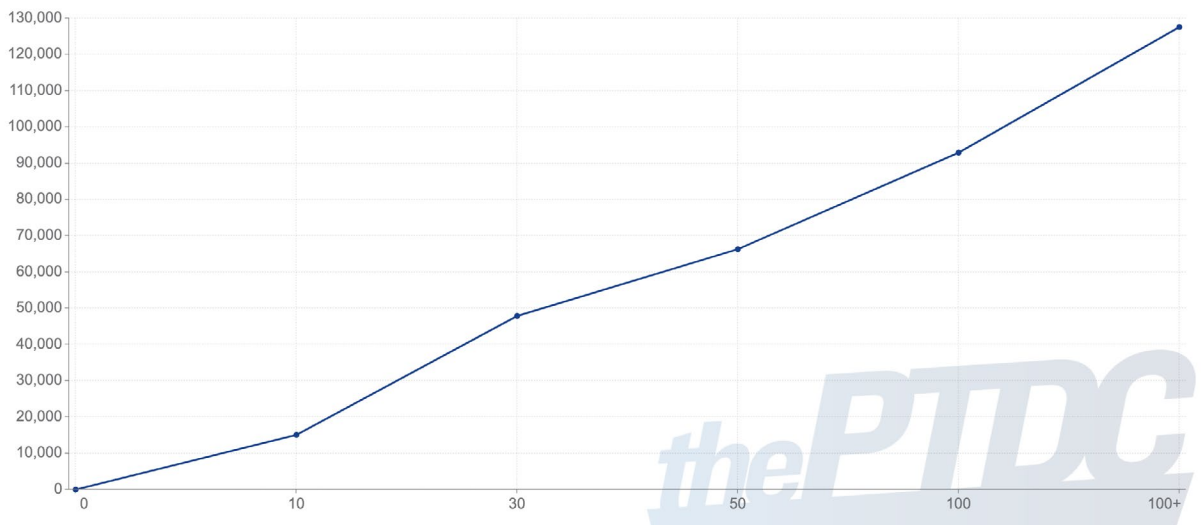
73% of trainers say they train clients online, but just 41% report having an online or hybrid personal training business model. It's possible that some personal trainers may work with a handful of clients online while still considering themselves in-person trainers, or that some gym owners are offering online services as a part of client membership packages. 24% of trainers report training clients on the side—many of these side jobs may take place online.

Trainers with an Online Business Model vs. Online Clients



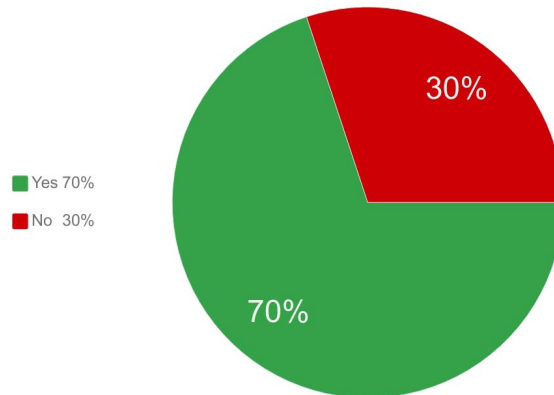
Training clients online is a scalable model that allows personal trainers to reach more people in less time, which may be part of the reason why online training is more profitable than in-person training. Trainers with over 100 clients earned more money (an average of \$127,613 per year) than trainers with fewer clients.

Annual Income by Number of Clients



70% of online trainers report training clients in other states. Online trainers have access to a much larger client base than traditional trainers. It's possible that the pandemic forced traditional trainers to rethink their business model, providing insight into how online training offers more scalability, income potential, flexibility, and control over time (the second-most important factor in job satisfaction for most personal trainers) than a traditional training business model.

Do you have online clients in another state/province or country?

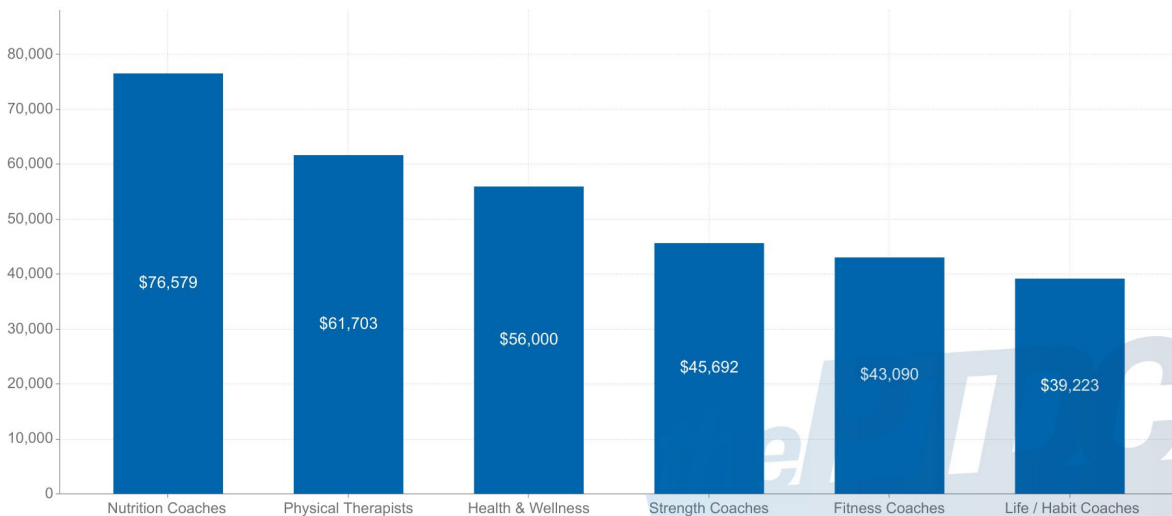


Specialties and Income

In the personal training world, different specialties bring different salaries:

- Nutrition coaches earn more than other specialties, with an average income of \$76,579 per year.
- Physical therapists earn an average income of \$61,703 per year.
- Personal trainers who specialize in health and wellness earn an average of \$56,000 annually.
- Strength coaches earn an average of \$45,692 per year.
- Personal trainers who specialize in general fitness earn an average of \$43,090 annually.
- Fitness professionals identifying as life coaches or habit coaches bring in an average of \$39,223 per year.

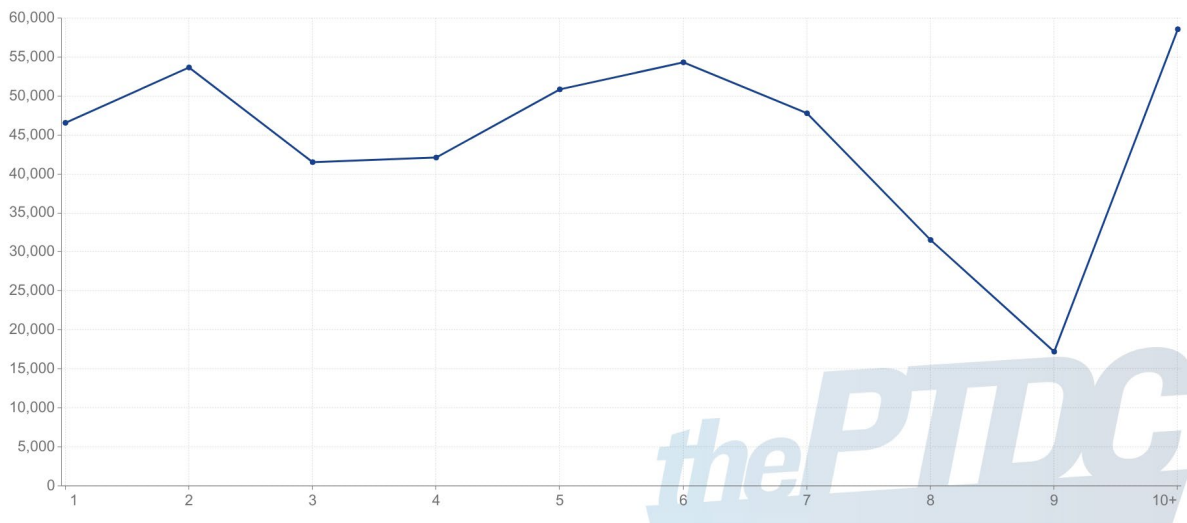
Annual Income by Specialty



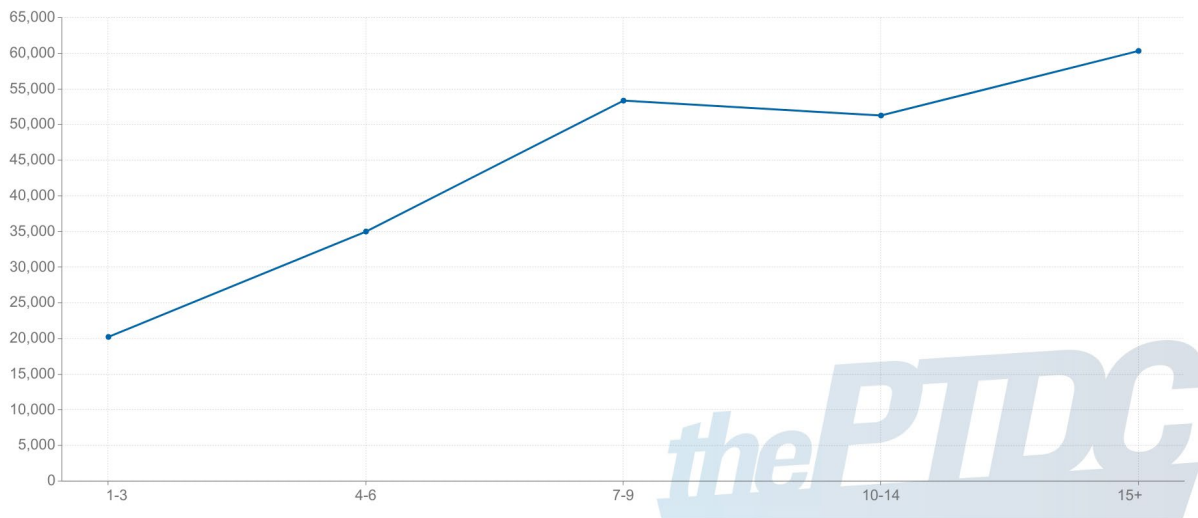
Education and Experience

Education and experience matter—but they aren't everything. Our survey showed that personal trainers who had the greatest number of certifications slightly outearned those with fewer certifications, but the difference was slight. Experience had a larger impact—personal trainers who had at least seven years of experience outearned those with less experience. Experience beyond seven years was not correlated with a substantial income increase.

Personal Trainer Salary vs. Number of Certifications



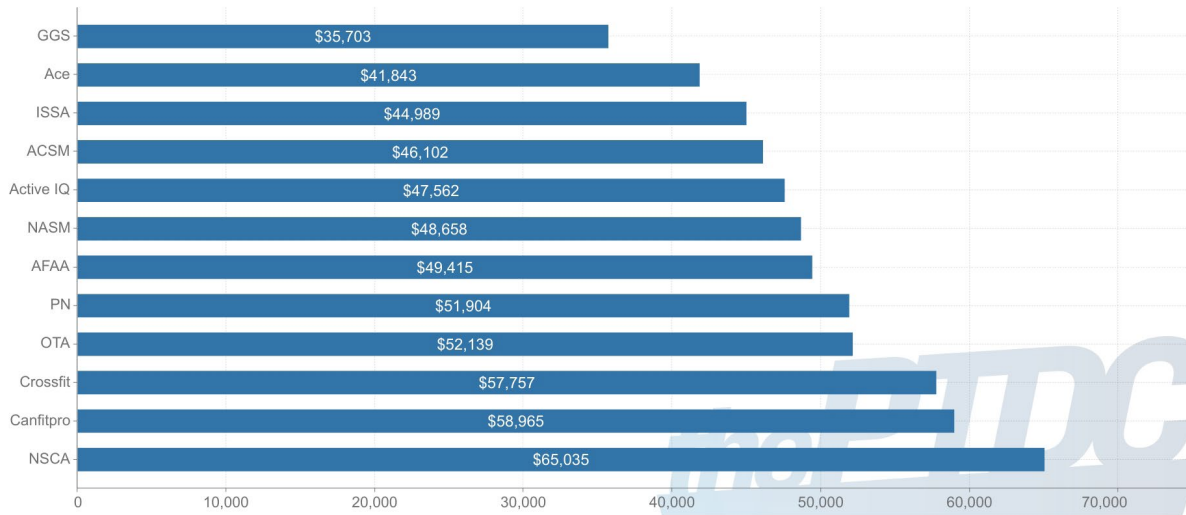
Personal Trainer Salary vs. Years of Experience



2021 PERSONAL TRAINER SALARY SURVEY

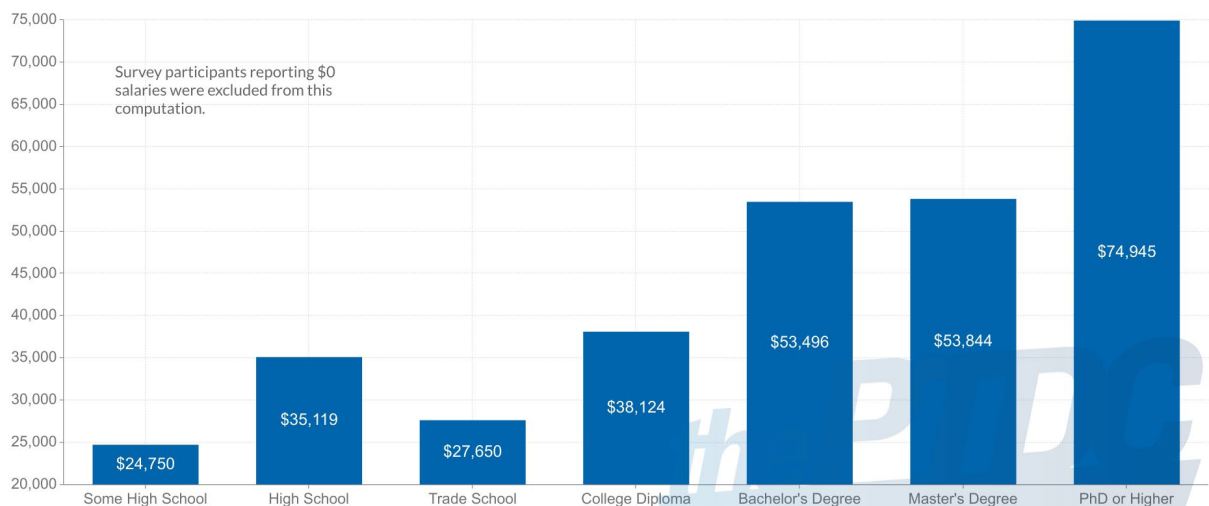
Personal trainers certified by the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) had the highest average salary at \$65,035. It's important to remember that correlation does not necessarily equal causation—with a pass rate of just 63%, personal trainers who take and pass the NSCA exam may simply be more dedicated to their craft than other trainers.

Average Salary by Certification



Education and personal trainer income were correlated. With \$0 salaries excluded, personal trainers with a doctorate earned the most, with an average annual salary of \$74,945. When \$0 salaries were included, however, personal trainers with master's degrees earned the most, with an average salary of \$51,935, trailed closely by personal trainers with bachelor's degrees, at \$51,312. Personal trainers who had less than a high school diploma earned less than all other groups.

Annual Income by Education Level

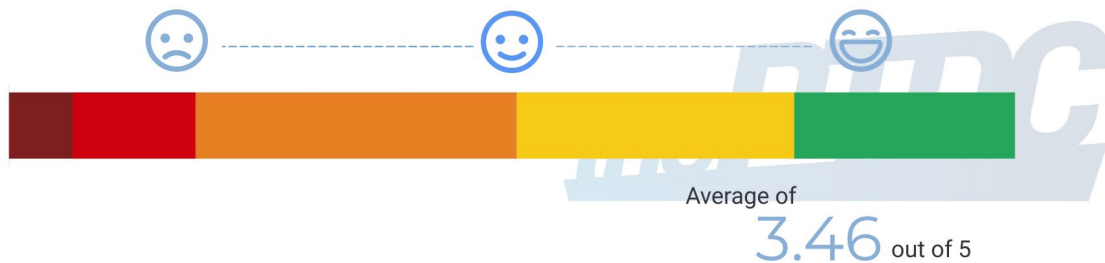


Yes, COVID Hit the Personal Training World Hard—But Most Have Bounced Back

As we mentioned, the pandemic caused many personal trainers to pause and reevaluate how to safely do business. Two-thirds of our survey respondents said their business was impacted by COVID, but it seems that most have bounced back to where they were—or better.

During COVID, two-thirds of trainers were laid off, furloughed, or took a pay cut. However, when surveyed about how their business is doing today versus before the pandemic, only 6% of respondents said that it's "much worse." The majority of respondents said that their business is either roughly the same or slightly better than it was before COVID.

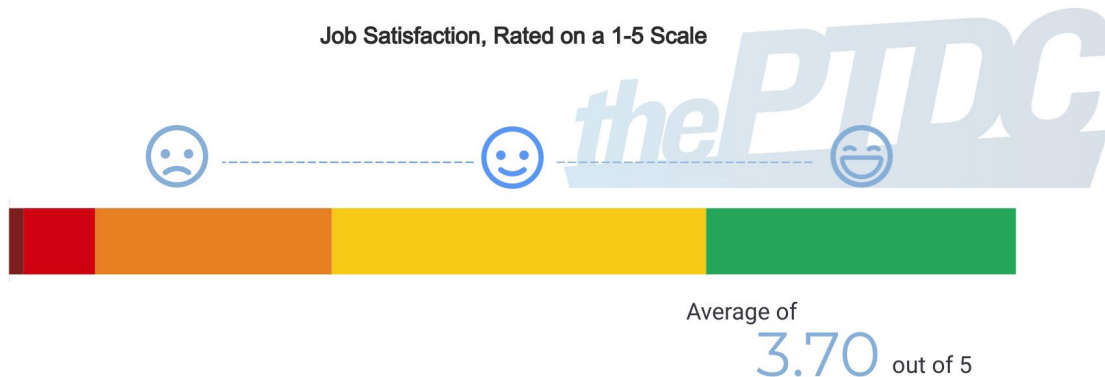
"How is your business now vs. pre-pandemic?" Rated on a 1-5 Scale



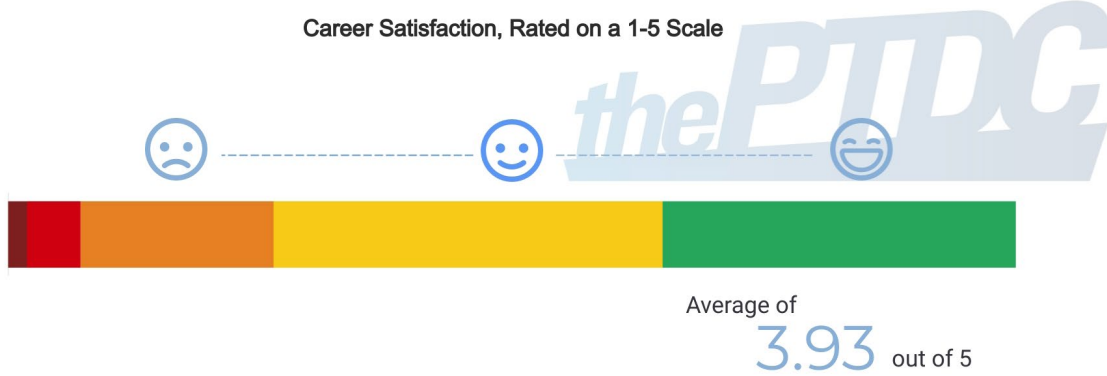
Personal Training and Career Satisfaction

On average, personal trainers are fairly satisfied with their job and career choice. When asked "how satisfied are you with coaching as a career path?" on a one to five scale, the average answer was 3.93. When asked the same question regarding job satisfaction, the average answer was 3.7.

Job Satisfaction, Rated on a 1-5 Scale



Career Satisfaction, Rated on a 1-5 Scale

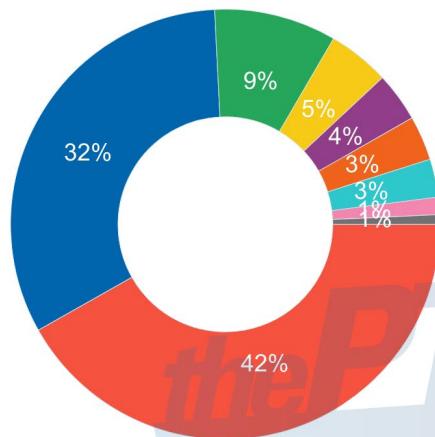


Online personal trainers are 10% more likely to be satisfied with coaching as a career path than traditional trainers. There are several possible reasons for this, including more job security during the pandemic, more flexibility, and a business model that is more scalable than traditional personal training.

While income is correlated with job and career satisfaction, most personal trainers do not list their salary as the most important thing about their job. Fulfilling / meaningful work ranked number one (42%) while flexibility/control over my schedule came in second (32%), with salary placing a distant third (9%).

Most Important Job Aspects

- Fulfilling / Meaningful Work 42%
- Flexibility / Schedule 32%
- Salary 9%
- Stability 5%
- Career Advancement 4%
- Relationship with Coworkers / Clients 3%
- Values 3%
- Recognition / Appreciation 1%
- Benefits 1%

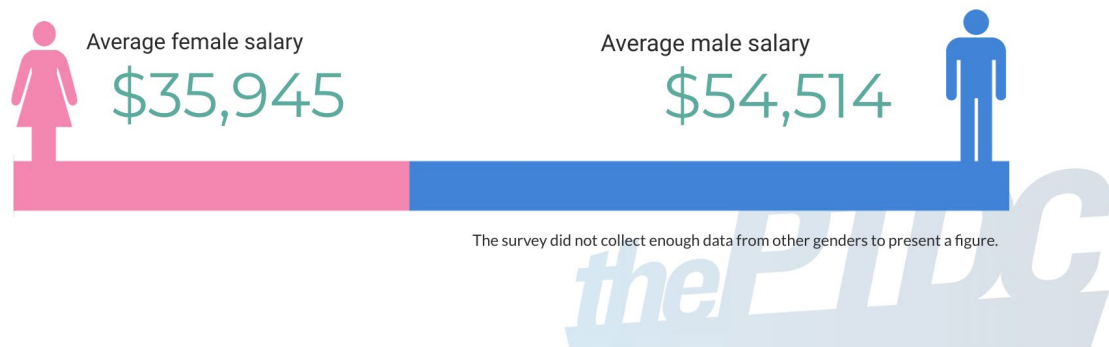


Diversity and Equality in Personal Training

There's no easy way to put it: The personal training industry has massive work to do in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and equality.

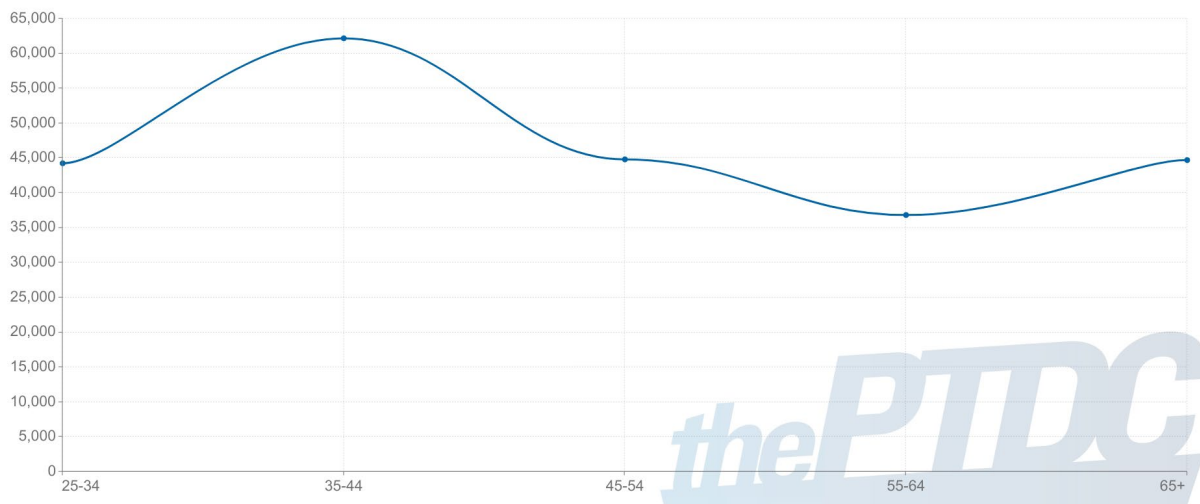
Around the world, women, on average, [earn 68%](#) of what men earn for substantially similar work. In the personal training world, the gap is even larger, with female personal trainers earning 66% of what male personal trainers make. Our male survey respondents reported an annual average income of \$54,514, while our female respondents reported an average income of just \$35,945.

Gender Pay Gap in Fitness



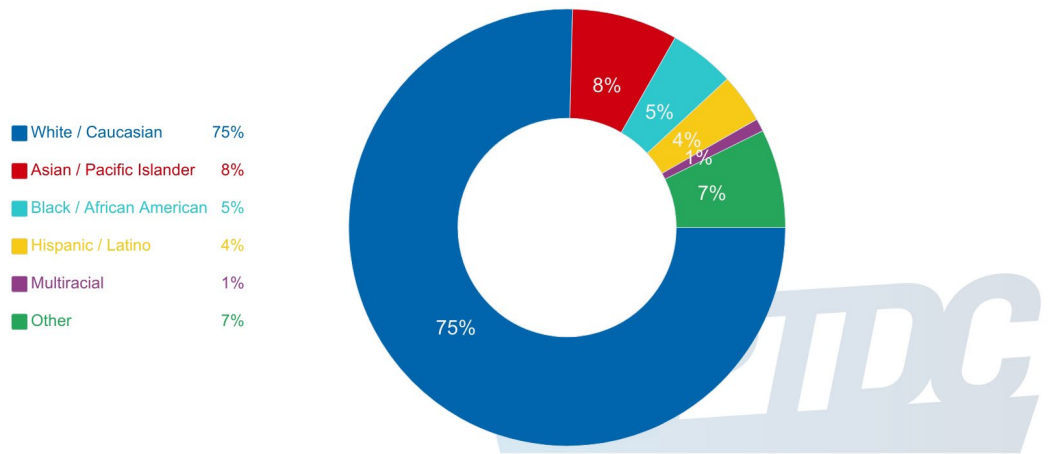
[Ageism](#) is also a major issue in the personal training community. Our survey respondents in the 35-to-44-year-old age group earned more than any other group, with an average income of \$62,198 per year. Respondents in the 55-to-64-year-old age group earned just \$36,836 per year. Ageism in the health and fitness world isn't only wrong and unfair—it also leaves a massive market untapped. Currently, more people in the United States are [over the age of 65](#) than are under the age of 65. Many [older personal trainers](#) have unique skillsets, including superior communication and motivational skills, that can help them connect with others their age (and younger).

Trainer Salary by Age Group

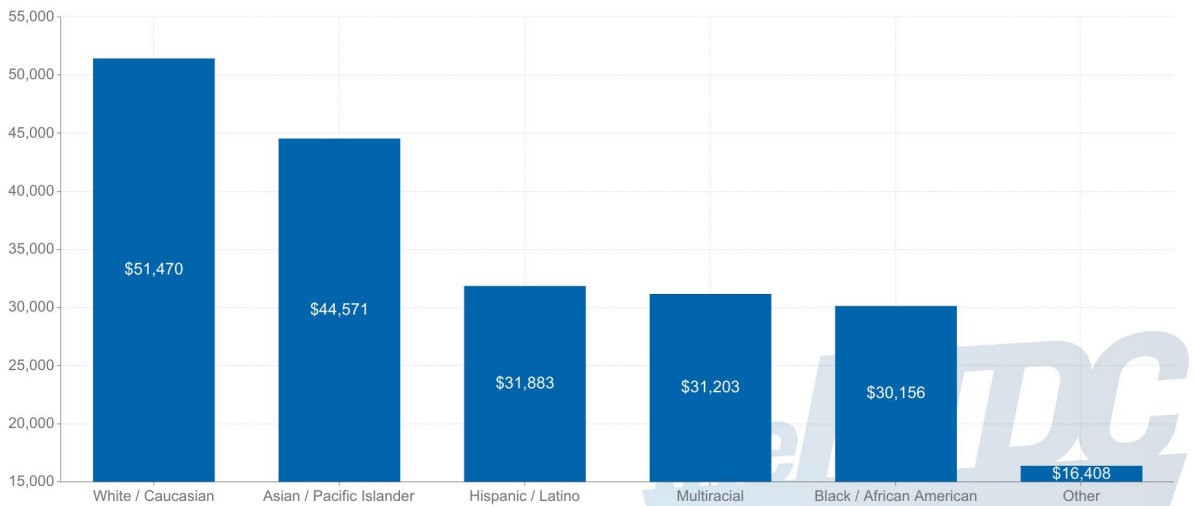


The fitness industry is notorious for being [overwhelmingly white](#), and sadly, our survey showed that personal trainers of color are typically paid less. White survey respondents earned the most, at \$51,470, followed by Asian trainers (\$44,571), Latino trainers (\$31,883), and Black trainers (\$30,156). Many believe that this problem compounds on itself—when people of color see [few trainers and fitness instructors of color](#), they may feel less comfortable participating in training or classes, resulting in fewer people of color enjoying fitness and deciding to pursue personal training as a career path.

Survey Participants, Breakdown by Ethnicity



Disparities in Trainer Salary by Ethnicity



How Personal Trainers Can Increase Their Salaries in 2021—and Beyond

If you're not already offering online personal training services, now is the time to start. Whether you choose to go all-online or offer your clients a hybrid option, virtual training isn't just an industry trend—it's here to stay.

If you aren't already offering nutrition services to your clients, you may want to consider getting certified to offer nutritional services or working with a registered dietitian or nutrition coach to help your clients attack their goals from multiple angles.

If you're just starting out, stay the course—hitting the seven-year mark is where many trainers see a salary jump. While you're working your way there, stay on top of your continuing education, and be sure to get certified (but don't feel like you need to go crazy with more than a few certifications).

If you're new to the world of business and marketing, it may be helpful to learn more about how to create a positive online presence, determine your target market, and connect with your audience members. Business education can also teach you how to use all the schedule flexibility that a personal training career offers to your advantage—not to your detriment.

Income-Driving Personal Training Skills

There are clear actions personal trainers can take to drive salary growth, including:

- **Nutrition coaching:** According to ZipRecruiter, more and more people are recognizing the connection between nutrition and health, and want to work with [nutritionists](#) who can support their diet. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the [job outlook for nutritionists](#) is growing more quickly than the national average. The median salary for nutritionists is \$63,090 per year, with the highest 10% earning \$90,000 per year (in line with our findings that nutrition coaches make more than other coaches).
- **Digital marketing:** The rise of online training means that trainers need to find new ways to reach their audiences. It's important that today's personal trainer understands how to utilize search engine optimization (SEO) techniques, conduct data analysis, utilize storytelling skills through social media posts, and engage with audiences.
- **Time management:** Salary growth requires scalability, and time management skills are key. Personal trainers may need to invest in higher-level business courses rather than additional fitness certifications, as our survey showed that business skills are far more positively correlated with higher income than additional fitness certifications.

The New Normal Is Here to Stay

Last year we said, “Welcome to the new normal”—this year provides further evidence we were right. Virtual training is here, clients recognize that it’s legitimate, and they see the value in being able to work out from home. In-person training is no longer enough to meet the needs of today’s clients. To create a sustainable business, trainers must make the transition to offering online services.

About the PTDC

The Personal Trainer Development Center (PTDC) works with health and fitness professionals to help them do a better job, build a better business, and live a better life—at every stage of their career. We believe true success comes from finding the path that works for you, whether that means building a six-figure business or simply having more time to spend with family, relax, travel, or do whatever you want.

The PTDC is also the parent company to the [Online Trainer Academy](#), which teaches fit pros how to build their business online. We were the first (in 2013) to teach online training on a large scale, and we’ve been improving our program ever since. As a result, we know more about online training than anyone else.

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