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FOREWORD BY LOU SCHULER, AUTHOR OF THE *NEW RULES OF LIFTING* SERIES

IGNITE THE FIRE



The Secrets to
Building a Successful
Personal Training
Career

REVISED
UPDATED &
EXPANDED

*A look at personal training that goes
beyond the textbooks.*

— MUSCLE & FITNESS

IGNITE THE
FIRE

*The Secrets to Building a Successful
Personal Training Career*

Jonathan Goodman

REVISED AND EXPANDED THIRD EDITION

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SECTION

1

Planning for Success

1 SO, YOU'RE A PERSONAL TRAINER – WHAT'S NEXT?

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

— BUDDHIST PROVERB

It starts with passion.

Passion is what makes the difference between a successful (and wealthy) personal trainer and one who fails in this business. I mean not only passion for training, but the ability to instill that passion in your clients as well.

Let me explain. New personal trainers sometimes think that their primary goal will be helping clients reach challenging athletic performance goals, or to get lean, or shredded. And it's true that some of your clients will fall into this group. But the majority of trainers (myself included) work with a much broader range of clients. They're not amateur or competitive athletes and they're not striving for perfect, enviable bodies. They are striving not for perfection, but for fitness. They work out to be healthier: to manage their stress, to lose weight, and to add muscle. They work out to be vital and counteract the effects of aging or chronic health conditions.

And ideally, they want to have fun.

These clients often lack clearly-defined goals. And that means they're not as motivated to train with you as you'd like them to be. They're often teetering on the fence of deciding whether to continue working out with you – or to quit. Advanced loading schemes, periodization, and/or complicated programming are unlikely to help you keep these clients, irrelevant of how good that programming might be. Let me tell you something. For the majority of your clients, **the quality of the program that you design pales in comparison to your ability to make your client *want* to do that program.**

Surprised? The fact is that the best and most successful trainers have a good understanding of physiology, anatomy, and biomechanics and they apply their knowledge to workouts. But more importantly, they instill *passion* in their clients every single day. That passion is what sets them apart.

In the best-selling book, *The Talent Code*, author Daniel Coyle describes what constitutes a great coach for children. The coaches that produce the best athletes from the grass roots level are not the best at teaching skills – they are the best at instilling passion in kids. Walter Gretzky, Wayne Gretzky's father, didn't have the knowledge to address the biomechanics of Wayne's slap shot from a young age. He made Wayne love the game, and that was more important.

Beginning exercisers may not be children, but the same lesson applies. As a trainer, your primary job is not to teach your client to activate their glutes. It's not to have you client perform 3 sets of 12 reps. And it's definitely not to “block-periodize” a training regime. That is the job of physiotherapists, strength and conditioning coaches, and athletic therapists. *Your* primary job is to make your client excited to work out and to have him or her love every single workout. That means doing everything you can to help them identify the *real* reasons behind why they're exercising, a concept we'll be discussing in detail later on. What might surprise you is that these reasons often have nothing to do with the goals they often

name at first, like losing 10 pounds or running a 5k race.

With these kinds of clients, you're not only in the fitness business. You're in the customer service business. **The best training regime is the one that will work for each client** – and the one that will make clients feel great so they keep coming back.

TUNING INTO YOUR PASSION

To help your clients find their own passion, stay tuned into your own. Ask yourself questions like:

- What was your initial motivation for working out?
- How did you start working out? Did you go to a gym? If so, describe the first gym you ever joined in detail.
- What kept you going?
- What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome them?
- At what point did you start to feel successful in the gym? How did that impact your vision of yourself?
- When was the first time somebody noticed the changes in your body? What kinds of comments did you receive? How did that make you feel?
- When was the first time you gave workout advice to somebody else?
- Did your motivation for working out change over time? If so, how?
- What made you decide to make personal training your career?
- What kinds of obstacles did you face to become a personal trainer? How did you overcome them?
- How do you maintain your passion for fitness today?

IDENTIFY YOUR CLIENTS' "WHY"

The reason I ask you to identify your personal passion is more than just introspection. It will help you connect with clients. Here's what I mean. When you consider why you were first drawn to fitness, or

first entered a gym, you'll likely start to tune into your individual passion and motivation. My very first motivation at age 15 was that I wanted to stop getting concussed in hockey. I was so scrawny and weak that I was constantly slammed by other players and wanted to be stronger. When I started lifting weights, I quickly found that I loved the act of becoming stronger – and better – for myself, and not for a team, and lost interest in hockey. My “why” then changed to, “I want to get laid” because, in my immature adolescent mind (I was about 15), I thought that girls only cared about biceps. (In retrospect, I didn't figure out I was wrong until I was in my 20s – and that's when I started training my legs.)

As I grew older I became obsessed with various lifting modalities, dabbling in everything from wanting to compete in kettlebell lifting competitions, to powerlifting, to fitness modeling. Currently I've become a fan of the “Golden Age” aesthetics era, viewing the body as a well-proportioned sculpture as opposed to growing as big as possible. I pursue this athletic ideal through training because I enjoy it, and it gives me confidence in social gatherings.

But that story is unique to me. Understanding where your *client* is coming from, what his insecurities are, and what he might be struggling with are paramount to your success as a trainer. The first step is to do what I did above, and track your passion for fitness over time. Why you train today is likely different from why you started training, regardless of when you began. Identify what you were thinking when you first stepped foot into the gym, and what your personal motivation was. And don't forget about how scared or nervous or intimidated you may have felt then.

Because regardless of the age of your client, it's likely that she is insecure about training with you. It's not dissimilar than how you felt whenever you first started training. What you've come to expect out of yourself is new to her and you've got to meet her where she is. Reminding yourself of where you once were when you started will help you connect with your client, and put yourself in her shoes, so

to speak. As you'll see in this book, when your client feels understood by you, she'll feel comfortable with you, and that's essential for her to trust you and want to train with you. We'll talk much more about that in future chapters, but for now I want you to dial into your passion as a trainer – both past and current – and keep it in mind as you read this book and move forward.

To help you find your “why,” I've developed a worksheet called “What's your passion?” You can download it at www.theptdc.com/ignite-worksheets.

✓ TRAINING TAKEAWAY

Think back to where your passion came from, and work to instill that same feeling in each and every one of your clients. Make them feel what you felt when you made fitness a part of your life and they will stay. When it comes to client retention, passion is more powerful than all of the scientific knowhow in the world.

CHOOSING A CERTIFICATION

[NOTE: I am not associated with, nor have any financial interest in, any certifying body, so what follows is my unbiased opinion.]

When deciding on which certification is right for you, the first thing to keep in mind is that certifying trainers is a business, and a lucrative one at that. You should decide which certification meshes the most closely with your training philosophy. In addition, different personal training certifications require varying levels of background knowledge and study. Make sure that you're up to the challenge if you decide to apply for a more difficult one but keep in mind that typically the more difficult the certification is to acquire, the more respected it is throughout the industry.

Fitness & lifestyle coach, writer, entrepreneur, USAF veteran, and mom, Neghar Fonooni is passionate about empowering women through strength.

A Los Angeles native with 14 years' experience in the fitness industry, Neghar believes that a positive mindset is the most important aspect of a fit lifestyle. Through her blog, *Eat, Lift & Be Happy*, and its accompanying YouTube channel she teaches women how to embrace their bodies and encourages them to enrich their lives with food and exercise.

Neghar is a contributing blogger to several sites, including MyFitnessPal.com and Schwarzanegger.com, and is the author of the 12-week total transformation system, *Lean & Lovely*.

An unabashed sci-fi and fantasy nerd, Neghar snorts when she laughs and loves lifting weights, yoga, red wine, dark chocolate, travel, fashion, and reading and collecting books. She resides in Santa Monica, California with her husband, son, and two silly bulldogs.

NEG HAR'S 3 KEYS TO SUCCESS IN THE FITNESS INDUSTRY ARE:

- ① **Find your niche.** Everyone needs one, as it will help you zero in on the demographic that will most benefit from your knowledge. Sometimes it finds you, so be willing to listen and be open.
- ② **Be authentic.** There is no other you, and trying to be anyone other than who you are will seem contrived. Authenticity is always in style, and will allow you to attract the type of client and customer that you truly want.
- ③ **Live your passion.** If you wake up every day pumped about what you're doing, you'll work hard and contribute positively to the world of fitness.

■ NEG HAR'S WORDS TO LIVE BY:

"The secret to getting ahead is getting started."

"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."

— MARK TWAIN

You can learn more about Neghar Fonooni and her "Eat, Lift, and Be Happy" Movement at www.negharfonooni.com

Personal training is unregulated in Canada and the United States and most other countries. That means that trainers don't have to be certified to work in the industry. It also means that no certifying body is held accountable for the actions of its trainers, and therefore a wide variation exists. However, most gyms' insurance plans won't cover trainers who lack a nationally-recognized certification, and some won't even hire you without one.

The industry has now grown beyond the basic personal trainer. More "side," or additional, certifications are appearing for everything from kettlebells to older adults specialization to healthy lifestyle coaching. Once again, consider your goals [see chapter 3 for more on developing a training niche] before you sign up for a new certification. Getting certified for the sake of collecting pieces of paper and having letters behind your name may be a waste of money as your clients probably won't know the difference.

However, while clients don't know the difference, these certifications are almost always a way to improve your knowledge base and continue to learn as a trainer. You can pursue certifications to work with special populations or to broaden your skills, and stay up-to-date on research in the meantime. The benefit is in the knowledge, not in the letters or in getting continuing education credits. While you can acquire this knowledge through self-study, a certification will have gathered and organized the resources for you.

What you should keep in mind is that personal training certifications open doors. Can Fit Pro, the Certified Personal Trainers Network (CPTN), and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) are all great ways to get started in Canada. In the USA there exists a wider variety of personal training agencies including the American Council on Exercise, the American College of Sports Medicine, and National Academy of Sports Medicine. Online there are options like the National Sports and Trainers Association "NESTA", and the International Sports Sciences Association ("ISSA"), which is an attractive option to those all over the World. In addition,

many countries have their own certifying bodies; Google your country and “personal training certification” to learn which are relevant for you. The benefit of being certified with a large organization is that they offer workshops, webinars, symposiums, conferences, and other continuing education opportunities to help you further your knowledge. Another factor to consider is that a company that owns a certifying body might also own a chain of gyms (for example, Good Life Fitness and CanFit Pro in Canada) or require trainers to have a particular certification. If you have a gym that you’d like to work at in mind, find out whether it requires or prefers a particular certification. That said, if you do decide to switch gyms, it’s usually relatively easy and inexpensive to obtain the required certification.

I started my career with a Can Fit Pro PTS certification, which is a “basic” certification that’s relatively easy to obtain. I eventually dropped that certification in favour of the “CSCS” (Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist) certification offered through the National Strength and Conditioning Association, which is one of the highest-level and most respected certifications available. After doing some research, I found that the CSCS aligned more closely with *my* personal interests than my other certification. The CSCS cert is more oriented toward athletic performance and the monthly research journal I received is a great resource. I switched certifications for two reasons. First, at the time I thought I might want to work with athletes. Second, I’d heard that *Men’s Health* (a well-known magazine I wanted to freelance for) only accepted writers with the CSCS designation. Since then, I have been featured in *Men’s Health* numerous times, both in the magazine and in a *Men’s Health* book. I didn’t specialize in athletes but I’m still glad that I obtained the CSCS cert.

I suggest you take a close look at possible certification organizations before you invest time and money into one. (For the most up-to-date information, contact the certification agencies directly, or visit the Personal Training Development Center for a comparison at www.theptdc.com/cert.)

DO YOU HAVE TO BE RIPPED TO BE A PERSONAL TRAINER?

Walk the walk. If you are a personal trainer, you must be fit and practice what you preach. Think about it. Would you want somebody broke to be investing your money for you? How about getting your hair cut from somebody with a terrible hairdo?

Your physique and your appearance matter and speak volumes to those you encounter and will make the difference between attracting clients and turning them off. It comes down to psychology, and something called unconscious associative connections. In the 1950s a researcher named Alfred L. Yarbus performed a series of studies he later wrote about in a book called *Eye Movements and Vision*. Participants wore eye trackers to determine where they were looking and then they were asked to look at a painting. Not surprisingly, their eyes darted across the entire painting. But when they were asked how wealthy the people in the painting were, their eyes focused on the clothing of the people in the painting. When asked how old the people in the painting were, their eyes focused on the heads.

This was the first proof of the shortcuts that our brains take when absorbing sensory information. There's simply too much information in the world to process, so our brains "cheat" for us using preexisting unconscious associative connections.

In the example above, the participants' brains had existing knowledge that clothing reflects wealth. So when asked how wealthy the people in the paintings were, the participants knew immediately to look at the clothing. Because our faces belie our age (at least without cosmetic surgery), participants also know to look at the painted faces to determine their age.

Here's my point. Sure, you may have 5 certifications, attend tons of workshops, help out lots of people, and have a host of other accolades to your name. Unfortunately none of this means anything to a potential client unless he or she takes the time to understand what it all means and, in this industry, that's going to take a long time.

So, do you have to be ripped to be a personal trainer? No. What

is important is that you physically embody the goals of your potential clients. Whether you are in the gym or not, you're a walking advertisement for your product – yourself. I've found most of my clients outside of the gym, either at social events or from conversations with strangers in a coffee shop. Looking fit and appearing professional go a long way in making somebody want to train with you. You never know when you'll meet a potential client – or someone who may pass your name along to a potential client – so you should always be prepared to sell yourself, and hand out business cards.

Your physical appearance will influence your clients' perceptions of how much of an expert you are. In *Influence*, author Robert B. Cialdini lists three ways to show that you're an expert: title, clothing, and trappings. Trainers can adapt this theory in the following ways:

- **Title.** The Dos Equis dude in commercials calls himself, “the most interesting man in the world.” That’s a good title. So is “Dr. Dre.” Give yourself a title – and yes, it can be “Doctor.” Just don’t refer to yourself as a physician or medical doctor. While you shouldn’t make something up, you can be creative. My good friend Roger (“RogLaw”) Lawson calls himself the “Chief Sexification Officer.” I’d train with him.
- **Clothing.** As I mentioned earlier, people judge us by what we wear. Be professional. If you want to appear as a knowledgeable trainer and everybody else in your gym is wearing dri-fit clothing, show up in athletic shorts and a collared shirt. Immediately you will be viewed as smarter than your colleagues. Understand how powerful perception is if you want to be viewed a certain way, and work to create the proper persona around that which you want to create. If your gym has a dress code, you can’t do much about what you’re wearing, but you can ensure that your clothes are spotless, unwrinkled, and fit well. Your footwear should also be clean and nice-looking.
- **Trappings.** Why do you think “get-rich-quick” ads show

expensive cars? Your surroundings, or trappings, play a huge part in how you are perceived. So surround yourself with clients doing great work. Even if you're not currently training somebody, find a member on the floor and hang out with him or her. Being associated with fit people will help others to view you as a good trainer. Bonus points if they're smiling.

While working out at the gym, there's a good chance people will notice you. Maybe they'll stare. That's a good thing as your workouts are another form of advertisement. One of the easiest ways to pick up new clients is to work out when your gym is busy. Make yourself visible, leave your headphones off, and put on a show. Performing new or unique-looking variations of exercises may garner questions from interested onlookers which you can use to either build relationships or offer a brief free session or assessment on the spot. Make sure you look approachable and greet people watching you; that may be the opening someone is waiting for to start a conversation with you.

Finally, never stop smiling both in your club and in your neighborhood. People will recognize you as a trainer from "that gym down the street" as you walk around the block with your coffee. Forget about checking your phone every five seconds like most of us do. The extra two seconds you take to approach somebody with a smile, shake his hand, give him a compliment, ask how he is doing, and wish him a good day could be all of the marketing that you'll ever need. Always remember that people buy trainers, not training. How you look and act is just as important as what you say.

One last thing I'd like to remind you about. As a trainer, you're in close quarters with your clients, and bad breath or any other offensive odors will turn them off. A few suggestions:

- Keep a stick of deodorant at the gym.
- Keep a toothbrush and ample breath mints at the club.

- Avoid coffee right before training a client. Opt for a 100mg caffeine tablet instead. If you do drink coffee, be sure to use a breath mint afterwards.
- Avoid cheap “dri-fit” clothing if you can. It starts to smell foul quickly.
- Always have a fresh pair of socks with you. There’s nothing better than a fresh pair of socks.

✓ **TRAINING TAKEAWAY**

Always remember that you’re your own best advertisement, both in and out of the gym. Looking and acting fit is a prerequisite of the job, so behave accordingly.

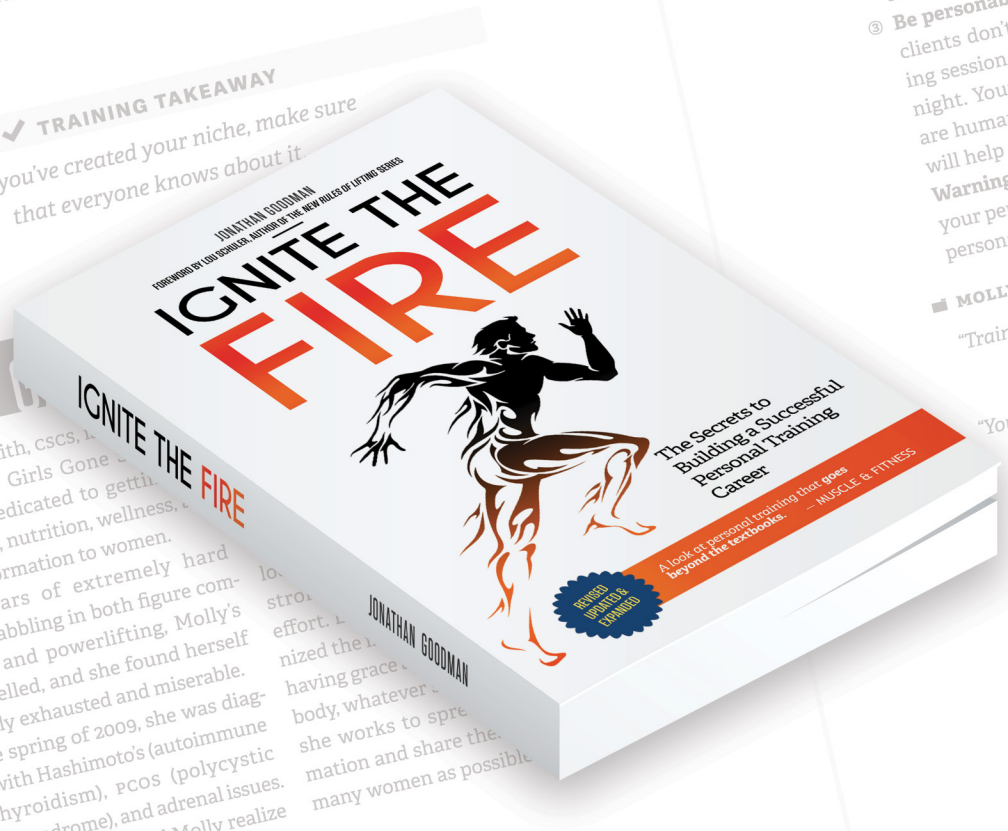
POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A successful personal training career starts with passion – both the passion you have for your career and your ability to create passion in your clients.
- A fitness certification can help launch your career as a personal trainer. Choose the certification that makes sense for your current career; you can change or add certifications in the future.
- As a trainer, you’re selling yourself all of the time, sometimes when you least expect it. Make sure you “walk the walk.”

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