



Premier Pump
Paris Trainer
DMX

womens



mens

Designed for the more narrow
footed runner seeking an equal blend
of cushioning & support

featuring a

manual pump system to
customize the fit

& provide support
around your ankle

Visit the Reebok Alliance website at
<http://alliance.reebok.com.au>
to purchase your Reebok Premier
Running Footwear at 35% off RRP.

The Holy Grail of gym floor operations



IN DECIDING A TITLE FOR THIS ARTICLE I briefly considered 'Back to gym floor basics' to highlight the somewhat basic nature of the concepts discussed, but realised that while the ideas may be basic, successful execution and delivery of them is something that is rarely achieved. Just as the 'solution' for weight loss is as simple as consuming less energy than one uses, it is recognised that it is in the implementation of this concept that the challenge arises. The same applies to gym floor operations – defining objectives is easy, implementing them less so. The objective for us as managers is for gym staff to be regularly, systematically and consistently engaging with users of our facilities in such a way that their visit is enhanced and their likelihood of returning soon is increased. If it can ever be consistently achieved then it just may be the 'Holy Grail' of fitness facility management!

At the risk of overly-simplifying the message; you should have your gym floor staff talking to members on a regular basis. Why is this the Holy Grail? Because it's the one area that has eluded fitness centres, especially larger facilities, for years yet it is an integral part of our core product offering. The problem was perhaps best articulated by the CEO of a successful industry operator who said, 'We get two main complaints from our members about gym instructors. One is that they can't find them, and the second is that they only talk to staff, or the 'pretty people'. So I figured if we just got rid of all our instructors we could eliminate half of our complaints'. While this was said in jest, it does describe a very common problem with gym floor operations, and identifies the frustration experienced by many owners and managers.

In the last twelve months I have exercised in over two dozen different clubs around Australia and New Zealand and only once did I see a staff member (other than facility owners, who often do a great job) engaging with anyone other than the 'pretty people'. 'Not in my club, we even have a system for it' I hear you say. Many clubs will be able to produce a gym manual clearly showing what the system is, when to do it, and how it works. Unfortunately, reality is often rather different from the manual.

The thing about systems, processes and manuals is that they are delivered by people, and it's at this people level that they tend to fall down due to lack of training, measurement, assessment, reward processes and re-training. It's not that gym staff want to do a bad job – very few workers in any industry want to do a bad job. The problem is that they often lack the tools and training to achieve what is expected of them. Gym staff tend to be very good at what they think they are trained to do: writing and demonstrating exercise programs. What is needed is a refocus to include skills that our clubs need.

Why is talking to people such a problem for gym staff?

In the United States public speaking is actually rated as the number one fear, ahead even of death. While few will admit this, for many, the idea of approaching a stranger that they have little in common with, and talking to them, rates up there with public speaking. So it isn't surprising that when asked to talk to members, gym staff have difficulty achieving this.

This is especially the case with young staff who lack the confidence to speak to those who they perceive they have nothing in common with. Instead of talking to the slightly overweight woman that joined up last week whose name no one seems to know, they just go and find someone they are comfortable talking to, such as another staff member or one of the gym regulars.

THE ACID TEST

Tour your facility's gym floor now, randomly select a handful of members (don't cheat and pick the regulars, pick the ones that no one knows) and ask them if a gym instructor has initiated a conversation with them today. If none of them has been approached, then you will know that action should be taken.

What's the solution?

Changing this type of behaviour involves three components;

Step 1. Training

Step 2. The carrot and the stick (or rewards and punishments)

Step 3. Making it the norm

Based on my observations, the first step is often skipped and the second step moved onto straight away, providing a system with incentives, and even negative consequences, to encourage the right behaviour. Because of a lack of training, step two often fails, and consequently step three is seldom reached. These missing steps need some attention.

Training involves more than just outlining expectations of what to do; it requires you to provide the tools to achieve it. With sales staff we expect them to gain referrals from each new membership, so we spend time training them to achieve this: what to say (sample scripts), how to handle objections, and so on, and importantly we also measure the results. Gym instructors' training should involve providing sample scripts of what to say when approaching the member, and role playing this regularly (I know role playing can be a pain, but if you really want this to work – try it). The key with this stage, as with a lot of training, is making it fun. Teach the 'hit and split' concept of how to quickly move from one member to the next without ten-minute conversations. Teach the 'Queens method' of greeting someone and moving on (the open question, the closed question, the statement). Teach instructors that it is alright to multi-task; saying hello to someone as they walk by on their way to write a program for someone else is fine. Train instructors about what new members want to hear to make them come back again soon (and that it's not more information on how to do exercises correctly!). If you're familiar with sales, you will recognise many of these concepts from basic sales training.



Empowering



you to excel



FIRST IN FITNESS CAREERS

Internationally recognised training for personal trainers, gym instructors, group fitness + aqua instructors.

With 10 campuses nationally, the Institute is the leader in fitness training.

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FITNESS

Call now to fast track your fitness career

1300 669 669

www.fitness.edu.au

Boost your REPutation with one New Zealand registration!

Over 175 facilities in New Zealand ONLY employ and contract with registered individuals, so registering makes you more employable. In addition Registered individuals can access public liability insurance extremely cheaply (less than \$200 a year) and also receive regular updates on education courses, job opportunities and general industry developments.

Already 1300+ exercise professionals benefit from registration with the New Zealand Register of Exercise Professionals.

For information:
www.reps.org.nz
Ph 0800-55-44-99

International callers:
+64-3-379-6139



Richard Beddie

CEO of FitnessNZ and owner of two clubs in Christchurch, Richard has a passion for the business elements of the fitness industry and is a firm believer in industry collaboration to grow the industry. Richard has presented internationally on a variety of business topics, including engaging with government, and building industry standards.



20-22 April 2007 ♦ Sydney Convention Centre

To avoid the pitfalls faced by many fitness businesses, join Richard at his enlightening FILEX 2007 session:

♦ The common mistakes in setting up and running fitness facilities (A2B)

For program information see page 9 of your FILEX brochure, or visit www.fitnessnetwork.com.au/FILEX where you can also register online.

REMEMBER – you'll save \$\$\$s if you register as an Early Bird by 5 March!

