

The Personal Training Profession

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, the fitness professional will be able to:

- **Discover** employment opportunities for an entry-level fitness professional.
- **Craft** a professional resume and hone interview skills.
- **Describe** the most common daily job tasks for fitness professionals.
- **Develop** sales and marketing strategies to drive clientele growth.
- **Identify** requirements and opportunities for continuing education in the fitness industry.

Fitness Industry Employment Landscape



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The fitness industry is experiencing enormous growth all around the world. In the United States, for example, the demand for “fitness trainers and instructors” (the broad job category for all fitness professionals) could grow to 402,000 jobs by the year 2028, and that is just within the domestic American health club market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Because this growth is seen in other parts of the world as well, this strong outlook for fitness industry employment continues to grow. Fitness professionals have the option to work for a variety of employers or to work for themselves, effectively running their own business. Subsequently, successful fitness professionals should always adopt a lifetime-learner mentality, always seeking to improve their knowledge and skills.

Importance of Education and Certification

The profession of personal training can trace its origins to the 1970s when bodybuilders and athletes were hired to help clients develop a muscular appearance. Soon after, commercial health

clubs realized that they could create an entirely new revenue stream by offering personal training services to members. As the personal training profession grew, earning a fitness certification, such as a Certified Personal Trainer (CPT) certification, became increasingly important. The purpose of a professional certification is to ensure that individual job candidates can demonstrate the ability to perform the tasks required for a specific job category.

Current-day Certified Personal Trainers are now responsible for designing exercise programs that integrate all systems of the body using a variety of exercises that improve balance and coordination, core strength, overall movement quality, and health. The function of a Certified Personal Trainer has evolved from simply improving aesthetic appearance to helping clients improve their overall quality of life by designing exercise programs for weight loss, injury prevention, athletic performance, and function improvement for activities of daily living. This creates employment opportunities for fitness professionals who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to create customized exercise programs.

A Certified Personal Trainer credential can help an individual begin a career in the fitness industry; however, as fitness professionals progress through their careers, it will be necessary to pursue continuing education to develop advanced skills that meet the needs of a wider variety of clients, such as those with chronic health conditions (e.g., heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis) or musculoskeletal dysfunction (e.g., limited flexibility and poor movement quality).



STRETCH YOUR KNOWLEDGE

A National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) Certified Personal Trainer beginning their career should be prepared to design exercise programs for people of all ages and generations, specifically:

- Generation Z (post-Millennials): born after the year 1997
- Millennials: born between the years 1981 and 1996
- Generation X: born between the years 1965 and 1980
- Baby Boomers: born between the years 1946 and 1964
- Silent Generation: born between the years 1925 and 1945

As adults progress through the human life span, their abilities change, and it will be necessary to adjust exercise programs accordingly (Mora & Valencia, 2018). This creates the need for fitness professionals to pursue continuing education to ensure they develop the skills to meet the needs of a changing clientele.

Employment Opportunities

After earning the NASM-CPT certification, the next step is deciding the best employment option that provides for a stable income with a schedule to accommodate a comfortable work-life balance. From working in a large health club to training clients in their own homes, Certified Personal Trainers have several different options to establish a practice with consistent clients.

One choice a fitness professional must make is whether to work as a direct employee of an organization or as an independent contractor. A second choice is to start a business that could include working with clients in their homes, running group workout programs in a local park (with the appropriate permits), or investing the money to open a studio. Finally, as technology is evolving, there are now numerous options for offering fitness training services online.

No matter which avenue of fitness employment is selected, it can take time to acquire clients and build a solid book of business that provides a steady source of income. Even if a fitness

professional has the goal of starting a business or opening a fitness studio, beginning a fitness career by working as an employee at a commercial health club could help establish the foundational skills necessary for long-term success. Even when working in a health club or studio as a direct employee, a fitness professional is essentially running their own business when serving the members of that facility, because the fitness professional's own expertise and commitment to providing a quality service is on display, which directly impacts the fitness professional's reputation and personal brand. A fitness professional who begins a career working for an employer will learn important business and customer service skills that will be useful if they do eventually make the decision to start a business.

COMMERCIAL HEALTH CLUBS



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As of 2019, the global health club industry is reported to include more than 210,000 facilities serving more than 180 million members (International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, 2019). The goal of the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, which actively promotes the health club industry, is to have more than 230 million health club members worldwide by the year 2030, creating a tremendous amount of employment opportunities for fitness professionals. In short, more health club members create a demand for more Certified Personal Trainers. As a result, the decision to work in a health club could establish the foundation for a financially and personally rewarding career.

Health clubs can be local, regional, national, or even international with locations in multiple countries. Additionally, commercial health clubs can be operated within a corporate structure where a central office oversees operations or as individual franchise affiliates where each location is owned independently (**Table 2-1**). This is important to consider, because a franchise with a local owner will probably be operated differently than a large, publicly traded chain of health clubs. Even if the goal is to one day open a private facility, it is a good idea for fitness professionals to begin their careers in a commercial facility, because it is essentially on-the-job training for operating a fitness business.

Certified Personal Trainers could be considered among the most important employees in a health club because they come in direct contact with club members on a daily basis and help them achieve the results they desire. The primary business of a health club is to sell and retain memberships. With that in mind, an employer has a vested interest in seeing Certified Personal Trainers succeed, because the more members who purchase personal training services, the more revenue is generated for the company.

As a direct employee, a fitness professional is often paid an hourly rate when working a scheduled shift on the fitness floor, an additional amount when delivering a personal training session to a client, and various bonuses based on the amount of personal training sold or the number of personal training sessions delivered. In most employment models, a fitness professional can earn anywhere from 40% to 70% of what the client pays the club for the individual training session.

INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALS

Another option for working as a Certified Personal Trainer is the independent contractor model in which a fitness professional contracts their services to one or more health clubs or training studios. As independent contractors, fitness professionals will pay either a per-client or monthly fee to a facility to be able to use that location, essentially becoming customers of the facility themselves. Additionally, independent fitness professionals can train clients at their homes or in public spaces like parks and athletic fields (**Table 2-2**).

TABLE 2-1 Types of Health Clubs

Category	Description
Low-cost	In recent years, these types of health clubs have exploded in popularity. These facilities offer a low-price membership, often including very few amenities other than access to exercise equipment. Access to amenities or programs, such as group fitness classes, small group workout programs, or personal training, costs extra, if the services are offered at all. Additionally, many low-cost clubs will have 24/7 key card access for members instead of employing a front-desk staff.
Mid-market	Health clubs in this category provide all features of low-cost clubs with additional amenities like higher-end locker rooms, snack and supplement sales, and group fitness workouts included in the price of membership. In addition, these health clubs often have multiple locations that can be accessed with the same level of membership.
Premium	Health clubs in this category typically feature multiple group-fitness studio options like indoor cycling, mind-body, and traditional group fitness programs. They also frequently provide a selection of high-end amenities like towels and complimentary personal hygiene products, cafes to provide postworkout nutrition, pools, full-service spas and salons, sports courts, and in-house childcare services. The price point for a membership at premium clubs varies considerably based on location, the company, and the level of desired facility access. Oftentimes, these clubs sell family packages to help keep things more affordable.
Nonprofit	Many nonprofit organizations, such as the YMCA, operate fitness facilities. They then use the revenue from the fitness programs and memberships to cover operational costs, improve the facilities, and fund a wide range of community-based initiatives. However, the term <i>nonprofit</i> can be slightly misleading; while these organizations may not generate profits for a private owner or corporation, they still require fitness professionals to generate revenue no differently than they do at for-profit clubs.

TABLE 2-2 Employment Options for Independent Contractors

Employment Option	Description
Studio or health club	Fitness professionals pay rent to use a facility as long as they have their own liability insurance and adhere to established guidelines and operating procedures.
Traveling to client's home	A fitness professional will travel to a client's home to provide services. This service could also include access to a facility if the client lives in a housing development with a fitness center.
Online coaching	There are different options for delivering training services online, which could include selling prepackaged programs, providing coaching to a group of remote clients with similar goals like preparing for a marathon, or providing personalized services like remote one-on-one coaching.
Organizational wellness	Employers may contract with a fitness professional to provide fitness classes to help employees stay healthy and disease free. This service will require liability insurance to use an employer's facility.

Operational costs

The various monetary requirements associated with the day-to-day running of a business.

Working as an independent contractor allows a fitness professional to establish their own pay rates and earn the entire amount. However, keep in mind, this ultimately means a fitness professional is responsible for paying all the **operational costs**, such as fees to use a facility, marketing for new clients, continuing education, and benefits such as health care, time off, and automated income tax withholding. At first, it may seem tempting to work as an independent contractor because of the ability to earn more per session; however, when considering all of the costs and other administrative factors, it can be highly challenging for new fitness professionals. Certified Personal Trainers who train independently need savvy skills in sales, marketing, and business operations to ensure costs and profits are managed wisely.

Different facilities will have different arrangements for how fitness professionals can rent space, but generally any fitness facility that allows independent contractors to meet with clients will require a formal agreement, including a monthly payment for the ability to rent space at that facility. It may be tempting to simply pay for a gym membership and offer personal training services directly to other club members, but that is “training under the table” and is considered a form of theft. A health club may prosecute fitness professionals for shoplifting or trespassing if they are caught. This violates the NASM Code of Professional Conduct and could also lead to the loss of the NASM-CPT credential. When entering into a contract with a facility, fitness professionals should make sure that all expectations from the manager or owner are clearly identified and communicated in writing.



TRAINING TIP

There are many factors to consider before a fitness professional makes the choice to work as an independent contractor, including the following:

- When searching for a facility to rent space, fitness professionals should pay close attention to how the staff treats existing members. It can be difficult to market personal training services in facilities that do not provide an exceptional service experience.
- If the plan is to work directly with clients in their homes, a fitness professional should take the time to research the local market to see if it can support that business. Costs such as gasoline, vehicle maintenance, and time driving place to place should also be considered.
- A fitness professional should identify marketing expenses required to attract clients. It takes a lot of time and effort to develop a marketing strategy that can attract a steady stream of customers.
- A fitness professional should budget for purchasing liability insurance. When working for an employer, a fitness professional is covered under an employer's liability insurance. However, when working as an independent contractor, fitness professionals must purchase their own liability insurance to protect their personal assets in case of a lawsuit.

High-intensity interval training (HIIT)

An exercise training method defined by intervals of near-maximal intensity broken up by relatively short rest periods.

SMALL GROUP TRAINING

From providing a more affordable price point for coach-led workouts, to a more enjoyable participant experience, a number of factors have led to the growth of group workouts, also called small group training or group personal training. Traditional group exercise classes, such as dance aerobics and indoor cycling, can include upward of 30 or more participants. Conversely, group personal training programs feature workouts for smaller groups of individuals who can be coached by an individual fitness professional. There are a number of branded fitness studios offering a variety of group training concepts ranging from **high-intensity interval training (HIIT)** sessions and boot camps to custom group workouts for special populations (e.g., older adults, youths). Because group personal training requires a different skill set than leading a single individual through a workout, fitness professionals are encouraged to pursue additional education to develop the necessary communication and coaching skills to lead group training programs.

ONLINE FITNESS COACHING

There are numerous fitness consumers who are motivated to exercise on their own, but they need the guidance of a fitness professional to know what to do. This creates the perfect opportunity for online coaching programs. Online coaching is a completely new business model of delivering personal fitness services that has evolved over the past decade.

Just like in-person personal training, different models exist for how online fitness coaching can be delivered to clients. Two of the most common models include selling predesigned workout programs or offering personalized workouts based on specific needs.

Some online coaches will meet with and coach clients through workouts using a camera-based app, while other online coaches may simply create a number of preformatted programs and market them through a social media channel. Additionally, some fitness professionals may provide a hybrid service where they meet with a client in person to conduct an assessment and design the initial exercise program but then may provide ongoing coaching and program maintenance remotely through an online platform. This hybrid model, specifically, can be leveraged by all working fitness professionals to maintain consistent interaction with clients who do not purchase multiday-per-week training packages, helping to boost accountability and **adherence** to the program.

Adherence

The level of commitment to a behavior or plan of action.



TRAINING TIP

Certified Personal Trainers have a lot in common with stock brokers and real estate agents. Once an individual earns a license to sell stocks or real estate, it is merely the foundation of their career—it is up to the individual broker or agent to generate all of their own respective business. Earning the NASM-CPT credential is a foundational step of a possibility-rich career. However, it is up to each individual fitness professional to generate their own book of business for long-term success, no matter which employment model is selected.

Career Development

Personal training can be a rewarding career in terms of both helping others to change their lives and earning a good living. Many fitness professionals pursue careers in the fitness industry because they are passionate about helping others, not because they enjoy the minutiae of administering staff policies or managing expense reports. However, at some point in almost every fitness professional's career, there will be the consideration about whether or not to apply for a promotion to club management because it can provide a consistent salary and be a great step for long-term career growth.

Every place of employment is different; so, before making the decision to take on an expanded role at a company, fitness professionals need to carefully consider whether it will provide long-term career satisfaction. Moving into management can quickly shift the focus of a fitness career from directly helping people to overseeing business tasks. For some, that is an expected consequence of career development; but for others, it can mean a departure from the very reason they chose to earn a CPT credential.

FITNESS MANAGER

A fitness manager's duties include maintaining a staffing schedule, providing mentorship to fitness professionals, and holding regular meetings with the entire fitness team, all while still responding directly to member needs when necessary. For fitness professionals with the long-term goal of opening a facility, working as a fitness manager will inherently teach many of the

necessary business and managerial skills required for running a successful operation. Fitness managers are paid in salary with bonuses for reaching performance goals.

GENERAL MANAGER

Often promoted from a department manager position, a general manager is responsible for all business operations of the club, from sales to repairs and maintenance. They oversee multiple departments and individual employees. General managers are often paid a salary with bonuses for achieving specific performance metrics. Depending on the company structure, opportunities for advancement into regional, divisional, and national corporate management roles may also exist. Moving into higher roles of management will typically require advanced education in both the fitness and business fields.

FACILITY OWNER

One of the benefits of becoming a Certified Personal Trainer is the relatively low cost for starting a business when compared to many other industries. In its simplest form, the initial start-up costs for an entry-level personal training business are for the certification exam, liability insurance, appropriate business licenses (as applicable by locale), marketing costs, and a few pieces of easily transportable exercise equipment.

Fitness professionals can start a business working with clients in their homes or public spaces, and then eventually grow to a point where it is financially viable to invest in and open a physical location. There are different models for this, including opening a franchise, starting a business from scratch, or purchasing an existing fitness facility. Some owners may be very involved in the business and work as the general manager of the facility, while other owners may invest in a business and pay a manager to conduct the operations. With so many options to consider, a fitness professional's entrepreneurial spirit is what will truly determine if individual business ownership is the right path to choose.

ADJACENT CAREERS

In addition to working directly with clients, the NASM-CPT credential can serve as the foundation for an alternative career path. The following are a list of potential opportunities for fitness professionals interested in growing their careers in a different direction than traditional club management and operations. It is important to note, however, that many of these options will require additional education, such as completing a bachelor's or even a master's degree.

■ Master Instructor

- Works directly with equipment companies or fitness education organizations to teach workshops that provide attendees with continuing education. This often requires formal education like a degree in an exercise-related field, as well as the participation in a formal selection process to become a trusted representative of a company.

■ Writer or Blogger

- Writes fitness-related content that is relevant to specific demographics for online resources or print magazines. Independent bloggers can earn money via ad revenue on their website, while a more common option is to be paid per article to write content for health clubs, equipment companies, or other fitness-related businesses. This requires effective written communication skills and the ability to identify interesting content that is relevant to a specific audience. Additionally, credibility and a solid professional reputation need to be crafted before moving into the content creation world.

■ **Strength and Conditioning Coach**

- Designs, implements, and coaches workout programs for the specific purpose of improving athletic performance. Strength and conditioning coaches are typically employed by sports organizations or universities and can work with youth, high school, college, recreational, and even professional athletes. Working in this capacity for a university or professional team often requires an advanced degree, fitness industry certification, and internship completion.

■ **Social Media Influencer**

- Represents and promotes specific products or brands on various social media platforms in exchange for sponsorship. This requires not only an established, professional reputation within the fitness industry and beyond but also the ability to develop, produce, and distribute interesting, engaging content that is relevant to a specific audience and can attract followers to drive brand growth. This is a highly competitive space. Typically, successful fitness influencers will have already earned their platform via previous achievements in athletics or by first building a clientele comprised of high-profile celebrities.

■ **College or Trade School Instructor**

- Teaches fitness curricula at an accredited college or trade school. This always requires an advanced degree, such as a master's of science or PhD. Additional training and credentialing in learning theory and instructional design may also be needed to effectively teach at this level.

Resume Writing

Aspiring fitness professionals need to understand the importance of a well-written resume submitted to hiring managers or business owners. A resume should be a short, outlined presentation of an individual's ability to contribute to a particular type of organization. In short, it should highlight an entire life, not just work (Schultze, 2010). A new Certified Personal Trainer may not have any specific experience working in the fitness industry, but it is important to highlight other skills and job experiences that can easily transfer.

Selling personal training services to health club members and exhibiting excellent customer service are critical functions of a fitness professional's job duties. To earn the interview, it is important for applicants to show hiring managers that they are comfortable with customer service and the sales process. Therefore, when writing a resume, fitness professionals should feature any and all professional experience that relates to sales and customer service. For example, if an applicant has experience working as a server in a restaurant, then it is important to highlight that specific work experience because it demonstrates the ability to approach customers and upsell additional products like appetizers or desserts.

A professional resume should be limited to one or two pages and can be written in different formats either to feature chronological work experience or to identify specific skills aligned to the jobs where those skills were developed. The common advice is to have a one-page resume; however, if an individual has a tremendous amount of work experience, a two-page resume is acceptable. Whether a resume is one or two pages, it should highlight how an individual's previous work experience provides them with the skills to be an effective



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fitness professional (**Figure 2-1**). An online search about how to write a professional resume can provide the most current and effective ways to structure a resume to attract a potential employer’s attention.

**HELPFUL HINT**

When writing a resume, fitness professionals should highlight how previous jobs have provided the experience in customer service that they need to be successful. To stand out, they should describe personal activities that are interesting and will catch a reader’s attention (Schultze, 2010).

The resume should be:

Creative. It should provide an accurate employment history in the most creative way. “Word-smithing” the descriptions of previous work experience could help a candidate stand out to a potential employer.

Organized. The resume is a representation of the job seeker. It should be well structured with a consistent flow of information that shows an attention to detail. The use of action verbs will highlight accomplishments at previous jobs.

Unconventional. The resume should feature experience related to a fitness professional. For example, working as a counselor in a youth camp shows the ability to lead large groups of people.

Vulnerable. The fitness professional should be honest and show the ability to learn and grow in a position by highlighting both successes and failures.

Component	Description
Name, address, email address, and phone number	Percy Trainer 1234 Main Street Anytown, USA percytrainer@email.com (555) 555-5555 Applicants should use their most up-to-date street address, email address, and phone number. It is also important to use a professional email address that includes a clear naming structure. Using email addresses that involve slang or unrelated terminology should be avoided.
Social media accounts	LinkedIn: Percy Trainer Facebook: Percy Trainer Instagram: @PercyTrainerFitness Many prospective employers will review an applicant’s social media accounts. Before applying for jobs, applicants should review all social media accounts and remove or hide inappropriate posts or pictures that could cause the employer to pass on their application.
Summary	An NASM-Certified Personal Trainer, with the ability to design exercise programs that get results and deliver excellent customer service skills, seeking to apply my years of experience in retail management toward being a personal trainer for ABC Health Clubs. Resumes should provide a brief one- or two-sentence review of top skills along with a statement of interest in the open position.

Figure 2-1 Components of a resume

Component	Description
Work experience	The Retail Outlet 2005 - Current 2015–Current General Manager Manage all operations for a large retail establishment resulting in \$80,000 a month in sales. Three-time winner of General Manager of the Quarter. Promoted from Assistant Manager. 2012–2015 Assistant Manager Organized staff schedule and supervised employees. Promoted from Shift Leader. 2009–2012 Shift Leader Responsible for supervising cash register employees during work shift. Promoted from Cashier. 2005–2009 Cashier Perform general duties related to customer service and collecting payment for customer orders. Even if it is not specifically relevant to working as a fitness professional, it is important to show a consistent employment history. Moreover, this is where an applicant can feature skills that carry over to the fitness industry. Such skills might be managing a budget or customer service, and demonstrating leadership skills, such as being promoted or given responsibility as a supervisor. Special awards or recognition like Employee of the Month or highest-producing salesperson should be called out. Potential employers want applicants that know how to go above and beyond the basic expectations of a job.
Education	NASM Certified Personal Trainer - earned in 2019 California State University 2012 Bachelor of Science in Business Administration Anytown High School 2006 General studies Applicants should list the NASM-CPT credential along with any other formal education like trade school, community college, four-year university, or postgraduate work. Again, it is not necessary that the education be specifically relevant to the fitness industry; the purpose is to show the ability to learn and follow through with completing an education program.
Other interests	Volunteer - Anytown Red Cross Volunteer on a monthly basis to help the Red Cross serve meals to those in need. Anytown High School Varsity Basketball, 2-year starter, state champions 2005 Applicants should identify nonwork experience like being an athlete, which can be relevant for showing that an applicant can successfully work as a member of a team, or volunteer work, which demonstrates the ability to manage time and shows that an applicant takes an interest in being of service to others.

Figure 2-1 Continued



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Job Search and Interviewing

The purpose of the resume is to market a candidate's skills to obtain an in-person interview with the hiring manager. The interview then becomes the step where an applicant presents their skills to a potential employer as a solution that can help improve business. Working as a fitness professional in most commercial health clubs is both a sales-based and customer service-oriented business, and the interview is the first opportunity a prospective fitness professional has to demonstrate their sales and customer-service skills with the hiring manager. But before securing an interview, it is important for aspiring fitness professionals to know where to look for potential employment.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A JOB

When it comes time for the job search, most online employment websites include job postings of companies looking to hire Certified Personal Trainers. In addition to using employment websites, aspiring job candidates should go directly to the websites of any potential employers to learn about their hiring process. Furthermore, another search tactic can be to drive around the town where employment is desired and identify potential facilities. In addition to a resume, most employers will require a candidate to complete an employment application on the company website to initiate the hiring process. But it is always a good idea for the candidate to also visit in person whenever possible to personalize the process for a greater chance of success.

Once the application is complete, there may be an initial screening process, such as a pre-interview questionnaire or a telephone interview to see if applicants meet the basic qualifications the employer has identified as being essential for success before offering an in-person interview.

ATTIRE

Even though the standard uniform for a fitness professional is exercise clothing, when visiting a potential employer to inquire about job opportunities, it is necessary to dress in professional business attire. Wearing traditional business clothing shows a potential employer that a job candidate takes the opportunity seriously and understands the importance of professionalism.

When interviewing for the position, it will be equally necessary to wear professional business attire to demonstrate respect for the professional nature of the job. Even though fitness professionals work in an informal environment where they may have to demonstrate a variety of different exercises, they are still delivering a professional service and should dress like a professional when interviewing for a position. Once hired, most fitness businesses will provide specific uniform guidelines to ensure consistent, high-quality customer service.



TRAINING TIP

When working as a fitness professional, avoid wearing muscle shirts or clothes that are too tight or overly revealing. Instead, wear tasteful workout attire. Implement proper, professional grooming standards, such as combing hair or pulling it back and wearing minimal cologne, perfume, or jewelry. Consider it from the client's perspective: a client may not be interested in working with a fitness professional who is disheveled or poorly groomed or one who is wearing clothes that are inappropriate for a professional setting.

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is a formal process that enables job candidates to display their personality, convey their work ethic, and discuss aspects of their job history beyond what is on their resume. It is also an opportunity for job candidates to learn more about the business, its practices and processes, and its culture.

At an interview, it will be important to focus on the conversation and answer all questions with as much clarity and honesty as possible. There is nothing wrong with saying, “I don’t know,” when it comes to a technical question. It is much better to be honest and truthful than to evade the issue and make up things. The primary purpose of the interview is to identify the candidate’s ability to communicate effectively and function as a member of the team. During the interview, a candidate should discuss how their previous work experience can benefit the employer, as well as share any relevant information that demonstrates the ability to successfully function as a member of a team. The following guidelines should be used to maximize success during an interview.

- **Pre-interview**

- Read the job description several times prior to the interview to become familiar with the position and its responsibilities.

- Research the company in advance by visiting its website.

- Practice answering potential interview questions prior to the actual interview.

- Prepare at least three questions in advance to ask the interviewer.

- **Interview**

- Wear professional business attire.

- Bring a padfolio, a professional looking pen, and extra copies of a resume.

- Arrive 15 minutes early.

- Be well groomed and avoid excessive makeup, flashy jewelry, and extreme hairstyles.

- When introduced, shake the interviewer’s hand and look them in the eye (unless the culture in that country does not favor this behavior).

- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions about potential job responsibilities and the culture of the business.

- Answer interview questions clearly and concisely, using good examples.

- Practice good posture; sit up straight, and don’t slouch.

HOW TO FOLLOW UP

It is an excellent idea to follow up after the interview with a thank you email or even a handwritten note. Writing an email or handwritten note to thank an interviewing manager for their time shows that a candidate is serious about the opportunity and interested in employment with the company. In the thank-you message, the candidate should make sure to reference specific



TRAINING TIP

Even when working as a direct employee, fitness professionals should still behave as if they are running a personal business. Many employers require fitness professionals to set monthly production goals and then develop a business plan to help achieve those goals. Acting like a business owner when working for an employer can help a fitness professional establish a foundation for long-term career success. There are many factors to consider prior to making a commitment to an employer, including the following:

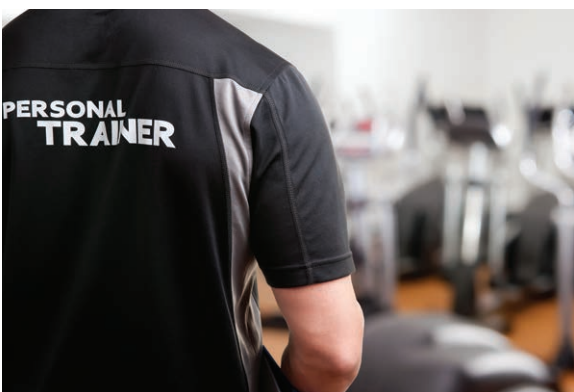
- During the interview process, ask the potential employer about specific procedures for marketing and selling personal training. Many employers offer an onboarding process that teaches new fitness professionals how to

conduct business in the facility, especially when it comes to the sales process. The interview process can help identify which employers offer the best options for career growth.

- Identify facilities that attract specific client demographics such as older adults, athletes, or women only. Aspiring fitness professionals who desire to work with a specific population and develop a specialty niche can become successful by working in these facilities.
- Uncover the flow of business throughout the day. A suburban facility may be busiest in the mornings before work; during the day because of stay-at-home parents, retirees, and high school kids; and in the evening after traditional work hours. An urban location will experience the highest volume of visits in the morning before work, during lunch time, and right after work, with periods of extremely slow time in between. Identify the busiest times of day for a prospective employer and then plan on being available to work with clients at those times.
- Consider the daily commute. Be realistic about the costs and time associated with a daily trip to and from work, especially if planning on training clients first thing in the morning or late evenings.
- Ask the interviewer about additional benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, continuing education, and retirement savings through a 401(k) account. When deciding about employment, fitness professionals should consider the entire benefits package and not just the per-session compensation or hourly pay rate. Many employers in the fitness industry will offer professional development and education for their staff when first beginning employment and over the course of a career.
- Research the reputation of the company. As employees, fitness professionals represent the facility, but they should keep in mind that the employer represents the employee as well. Fitness professionals should determine if their values are aligned with a prospective employer. For example, does the fitness facility emphasize providing remarkable customer service, rewarding employee successes, or maintaining a professional yet relaxed environment?

aspects that may have been discussed during the interview, such as the potential for career advancement or options provided by the employer for continuing education. A well-written thank-you note can often make the difference and help an individual earn the job opportunity, especially when several people are interviewing for the same position.

A Day in the Life of a Certified Personal Trainer



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There are only a few specific times of day when most clients have the free time to meet with a fitness professional. While there are exceptions, most potential clients are generally available in the morning before work, during their lunch hour, and after work. In most markets, the popular times for clients to work with Certified Personal Trainers are from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m., 12 p.m. to 2 p.m., and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. However, given the nature of the modern economy where many people work nontraditional jobs or have the freedom to work from home, it is becoming increasingly possible to meet with clients at all times of the day.

As fitness professionals takes on more clients, there will be many demands for their time (**Figure 2-2**). To establish a healthy work-life balance, it is important for a fitness professional to set and follow specific working hours. Being available at all hours might seem important when starting a personal training business, but fitness professionals should keep in mind that overextending oneself can lead to poor customer service and burnout. It is important to set guidelines for availability and adhere to them.

In an effort to reduce the number of hours worked, while also increasing the amount of money earned, many Certified Personal Trainers are learning how to coach group workouts.

A Sample Day in the Life of an NASM Certified Personal Trainer	
Time	Activity
5:00–6:00 a.m.	Wake up, get dressed, and commute to work
6:00–9:00 a.m.	Train morning clients before they head to work
9:00–10:00 a.m.	Roam the floor, clean equipment, and greet guests at the front desk
10:00–11:00 a.m.	Personal workout time, includes filming for daily fitness tip on social media
11:00–11:45 a.m.	Lunch
11:45 a.m.–2:00 p.m.	Coach group workouts for lunchtime clients
2:00–3:00 p.m.	Administrative time: client communication, program design for clients, and completion of any necessary paperwork
3:00–4:00 p.m.	Break
4:00–6:30 p.m.	Train evening clients
6:30 p.m.	End of work day

Figure 2-2 A day in the life

Group workout programs often base compensation on the number of participants; the more people in a group workout, the more money that professional can earn per hour. Coaching group workouts during times when the most clients are available is one way for fitness professionals to increase income while also improving work–life balance.

Operations

Working as a Certified Personal Trainer includes numerous business tasks in addition to directly training clients, such as reviewing assessment or intake forms, preparing invoices and collecting payments, developing or updating exercise programs, making follow-up phone calls, writing emails, or sending text messages to schedule and confirm appointments. Managing a day’s operations tasks takes time, but it is highly necessary to keep new **prospects** coming in and existing clients coming back.

Employers also typically require specific duties to be performed around the facility when a fitness professional is not working with clients. These duties could include circulating on the fitness floor to provide assistance to all members, cleaning gym equipment, putting away equipment left out by members, working external events (health conferences, street markets), or helping the membership team at the front desk.

When working with clients, fitness professionals should establish specific hours that they are available to see clients and adhere to this schedule for consistency. It is important to begin and end client sessions or group workouts on time so that one session or group workout does not overlap with another. Clients pay for a set amount of time; if the client is late, the session should still end on time and not run into the next. For independent fitness professionals traveling to different locations to lead workouts, it will be necessary to factor in commute times and plan for traffic.

Prospect

An individual who has been identified as a potential client.

GUIDELINES FOR UNCOMPROMISING CUSTOMER SERVICE



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A major focus of daily operations in the fitness world is customer service. It is important to remember that customers return because they feel valued—like they are a part of something special. There are many reasons why individuals join a health club, such as improving health and overall well-being, managing a healthy body weight, providing activities for the family, or simply feeling more comfortable in their own skin. However, there are only two primary reasons why members and clients continue to return:

1. They have learned how to enjoy exercise and are experiencing the results they want.
2. The service they receive is highly enjoyable, and the facility provides a sense of community.

The fitness industry is part of the service industry. When an individual invests in a health club membership, they are paying for access to the facility and the services provided by the employees. If a Certified Personal Trainer fails to deliver a high level of service to clients, then attracting and retaining clients becomes very challenging. It is important to note that clients have many different demands for their time. This means the most successful Certified Personal Trainers are the ones who can adapt accordingly to each individual's communication preferences and coaching needs. A client could hire a Certified Personal Trainer for many reasons, but the services that clients are actually paying for and expect include the following:

- **Accountability.** Many clients want to be held accountable for their exercise goals and prefer to be contacted, especially after missing a session. Fitness professionals should allow no more than 24 hours to pass before contacting a client after a missed session. This demonstrates a level of service that can help ensure the client adheres to the program.
- **Support.** Wearing exercise clothes or exercising in a public area can be intimidating for many people and hiring a Certified Personal Trainer can help certain individuals build confidence to exercise. Fitness professionals should always seek to create a positive environment where clients feel proper support and encouragement for pursuing their exercise goals.
- **Feedback and guidance.** One of the most important benefits of working with a fitness professional is receiving the proper instruction for the exercises required to reach specific goals as well as the guidance for how to follow and make progress in a long-term exercise program.
- **Results.** Clients want to know that their exercise program is producing the desired outcome. The most effective way to evaluate progress is by conducting various fitness assessments. Fitness assessments allow a fitness professional to have a specific, methodical, and consistent way to gather data about a client's progress every few weeks.

Existing and potential clients will always expect those minimum levels of service. If they are not met, then it is likely that clients will take their business elsewhere or, in certain cases, quit exercising altogether. If the expectations are exceeded, however, clients are more likely to return and may also refer their friends or loved ones. When it comes to long-term clientele development, even the best marketing and sales techniques are never as powerful as direct client referrals. Client referrals are a powerful strategy to gain more clients and keep a steady stream of business.

Fitness professionals also need to realize that whether they are working with clients in a health club, leading a group through an outdoor workout, or posting a video on social media, they are always being watched by others. For example, a member on a piece of cardio equipment watching a fitness professional work with another client will always make a variety of judgments based on personal observations. If the member observes that the fitness professional is distracted or acting unprofessionally, then that individual will most likely avoid opting for personal training services. However, fitness professionals who are attentive, communicate clearly, and provide encouragement and motivation will be noticed favorably by other members in the facility. Being professional and caring is one of the best forms of advertising for future clients.



TRAINING TIP

Fitness professionals should always be seeking to improve their customer service skills. Providing remarkable customer service increases the likelihood that clients will adhere to their exercise program. In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, sales and management expert Dale Carnegie (1936) identified important tips for how to deliver an exceptional service to all clients in any industry:

- **Smile.** People feel appreciated and tend to smile back when a professional smiles first.
- **Say hello and look people in the eye.** Unless the culture views eye contact as threatening, this is a great way to create an instant connection with people.
- **Listen.** Actively listen and encourage others to talk about themselves.
- **Act as if you are the owner of your own business.** Even if you work for someone else, your daily actions should reflect the values of the business.
- **Introduce yourself and ask for the individual's name.** Make sure to use their name in conversation.
- **Talk in terms of the other person's interests.** This can help build understanding and find areas of common interests.

SAFETY PROCEDURES

From a minor injury like spraining an ankle to a severe medical emergency like cardiac arrest, it is important that all fitness professionals who work in a facility are prepared to handle a variety of emergencies and unexpected situations. Therefore, it is important for fitness professionals to be familiar with all facility safety procedures, such as where emergency equipment is located, how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED) device. Each fitness business will have its own unique safety procedures, which should be clearly explained during employee onboarding.

If a Certified Personal Trainer is contracting space from various facilities, it is important to ask about each facility's safety policies and procedures in case of an emergency. Fitness professionals who travel to work in clients' homes or lead outdoor conditioning programs need to establish their own robust safety guidelines and should always have the necessary first aid equipment to be able to handle any unexpected injuries that could occur during the course of a workout session, including investing in an AED device. It is highly recommended that independent fitness professionals seek additional first aid certification on top of the CPR and AED certification required of all Certified Personal Trainers. Additionally, before working with clients independently, personal liability insurance must be purchased and maintained, and it is also suggested that fitness professionals work with a legal professional to develop a client consent form as an additional level of protection.

Sales and Marketing

Clients seek the services of a fitness professional because they have a problem that needs solving. Their problems may include difficulty losing weight, lowering their blood pressure or cholesterol, or improving their strength and stamina necessary to make the varsity basketball team. Fitness professionals offer clients solutions by using exercise as their tool of choice. It is through this collaborative effort that clients aim to become better versions of themselves.

These services cannot occur without the sales process. Building a successful personal training career requires the ability to close a sale, which can be one of the most challenging aspects of the profession. It is one of the most important skill sets that fitness professionals need to learn and practice. In particular, Certified Personal Trainers must become comfortable with the **sales process** such as presenting prices for personal training session packages and asking potential clients for the sale. After all, without the sales process, fitness professionals are not able to help their clients reach their health, wellness, or fitness-related goals. These two functions are linked and dependent on each other.

Sales process

A system for learning about the needs of a potential client to be able to identify and present a number of solutions for those needs.

Sales

The term *salesperson* sometimes generates a negative image, but the reality is that ethical sales techniques are rooted in helping others. When people ask about personal training services, they are really looking for advice and guidance from an expert who can help them achieve specific results through exercise. Selling personal training services is about asking a client to make a commitment to an exercise program to improve their own health, wellness, and fitness. In that light, selling becomes the process of educating potential clients about how an exercise program, catered to their individual needs, will help them achieve their goals. Fitness consumers have an interest in getting results from their workout programs, and fitness professionals who feel confident presenting their services as a solution will be most successful in the sales process.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SALES PROCESS

For Certified Personal Trainers to have a successful career, they must be comfortable asking potential clients to purchase training sessions, which requires the ability to become comfortable with the sales process. There are specific stages of the sales process:

1. Identifying a customer's needs
2. Communicating solutions for their needs
3. Making the sale by asking for a financial commitment to solving their needs (Gitomer, 2015)

The process of designing an exercise program is based on assessing a fitness need that the program can solve. The ethical sales process is no different; it is about assessing the client's needs and delivering solutions. Many fitness professionals enter the profession because they sincerely want to help people, and being a true sales professional empowers that desire. A sales professional is one who educates consumers on how they will benefit from a product or service offered.

When the sales process is performed correctly, there is no pressure placed on the customer to force a decision. A sales professional guides the conversation by asking the customer several **open-ended questions**. These questions help a sales professional learn about a customer's wants, needs, fears, and desires. Using this information, a salesperson can then accurately communicate potential solutions to the customer. Sales professionals understand that the success of their career is based on the ability to help customers find the solutions they want and need and will be ethical and honest in all communications.

Open-ended questions

Nondirective questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no answer; they require critical thinking to formulate a response.

PROSPECTING AND LEAD GENERATION

Prospecting for new clients is an integral part of every fitness professional's working day. Without meeting new people and developing a pipeline of potential clients, even the most skilled Certified Personal Trainer will fail in their career. Without that pipeline, client needs will never be uncovered, and personal training programs will never be sold.

Prospects are potential sales leads that can be converted to paying clients. They are not just random people off the street; rather, they are individuals who the fitness professional has already identified as being potentially interested in fitness services. Prospects can be identified in a few ways:

1. Asking for referrals from existing clients
2. **Working the floor** to meet as many facility members as possible and building **rapport**
3. Obtaining warm leads provided by the member and/or sales department
4. Answering inquiries from social media and other marketing streams

To continue receiving warm leads, health clubs will commonly offer one or more complimentary personal training sessions to new members when they sign up. This creates a low-pressure opportunity for Certified Personal Trainers to demonstrate their expertise and market their services to an already captive audience. This is an additional benefit of working in a large health club, because many commercial health clubs may sell dozens to a few hundred new memberships per month. Each new member is a potential client for the fitness professionals working at the facility.

In these types of facilities, the management team will have a system for distributing new member information among the fitness staff. However, every facility is different, and warm leads from new member sales should not be expected or relied on. Fitness professionals must always build rapport with the existing membership base and demonstrate their professionalism every day, viewing new member complimentary sessions as a bonus to the lead generation process.

Generating sales leads outside of the health club environment becomes a little more challenging because it is up to the fitness professional to develop and distribute all branding and marketing materials to uncover potential clients. One highly recommended tactic is to network with other service-based businesses in the area that also cater to a health-conscious clientele. Doctor's offices, physical therapy clinics, massage therapy studios, chiropractic offices, and weight-loss centers are all service-based professional businesses that cater to consumers who may also see the value in working with a Certified Personal Trainer. Complementary service-based businesses can be identified through the local chamber of commerce or other business networking groups. Then, it all comes back to the same task that fitness professionals perform on the floors of health clubs every day: building rapport and uncovering a prospect's fitness needs.

Working the floor

A rapport-building technique where fitness professionals walk around the gym floor talking to members without overtly presenting a sale.

Rapport

A relationship in which two people understand each other's ideas, have respect for one another, and communicate well.



TRAINING TIP

When working the floor, it is important to get to know as many health club members as possible; however, it is equally important to not be too pushy or aggressive. This can be accomplished by keeping the atmosphere light and pleasant. The goal is simple: make a quick introduction, learn the name of the prospect, start building rapport, and then step away without mentioning anything related to sales. Then, as you have repeated interactions with the prospective client, fitness needs can be naturally uncovered, and solutions can be presented without ever having to "sell."

BUILDING RAPPORT

Rapport represents the building of a relationship based on open communication and trust. Building rapport with clients requires the ability to communicate with honesty and make friendly, personal connections. Every interaction with a member or client is a chance to establish rapport and develop a relationship with a potential client. This makes it important for fitness professionals to always smile; be outgoing and friendly; ask for people's names and use them in conversation; and uncover each prospect's unique likes, wants, and needs. Then personal stories and life experiences can be related to those of the client in order to build a connection that leads to trust and professional respect.

Many successful Certified Personal Trainers focus new conversations on the prospect's family, hobbies, and their desire to change their life for the better before ever discussing how an exercise program can help meet those needs. If the fitness professional is sincere in these interactions by working to build the relationship first, the sales process can become natural and automatic. Potential clients want to understand how their needs, wants, and desires are going to be satisfied. When a Certified Personal Trainer can demonstrate their value and uncompromising customer service in advance, the only decision the prospect has left is when to schedule the first appointment. Successful fitness professionals do not need to "sell" a client on anything; instead, they need to take the time to understand how each potential client wants to make lifestyle changes through exercise and demonstrate that they have what it takes to provide support and motivation for the long-term.

Forecasting

A business management technique that helps predict how much work is needed to meet a revenue goal.

FORECASTING

Forecasting is financial goal setting and helps determine how many prospects a fitness professional needs to interact with on a daily basis to keep a consistent client pipeline flowing. It is important for a fitness professional to set financial goals to measure progress and success. Setting a salary goal can help a fitness professional identify how many client sessions they will need to deliver to achieve that goal. This is especially important when considering a life as an independent fitness professional. If a Certified Personal Trainer is unable to accurately set and then meet monthly revenue goals while working for an employer, then it is not likely that they will be successful running a facility that requires maintaining a far more complicated budget, including rent, professional liability insurance, repairs to the facility, and any overhead costs such as compensation for employees.

ASKING FOR THE SALE

Buying decisions are primarily emotionally driven, and the decision to invest in sessions with a Certified Personal Trainer might be extremely emotional (Ahmad et al., 2019; Kemp et al., 2018). Potential clients may be dealing with a vast array of feelings such as fear, anxiety, or inadequacy, so part of the fitness sales process is about taking the time to uncover those feelings. For example, a doctor may have advised a client to lose weight and lower blood pressure to avoid the risk for a heart attack or stroke. That is a heavy emotional load to consider, but one a Certified Personal Trainer may be able to help with. It is only after presenting the solutions to uncovered problems that a fitness professional should ask the client for a sale.

After demonstrating one's ability to help solve a client's fitness problems, the first step in asking for the sale involves presenting various purchasing options. Each client will place a different level of value on fitness services and will also have unique time and budgetary constraints. For that reason, it serves a fitness professional well to provide a "good, better, and best" package scheme, with price points that can appeal to a broad range of individuals. In this way, there is



TRY THIS

Use some basic math to determine the number of personal training sessions needed per day to meet an annual income goal:

1. Set a goal for total annual income: \$_____
2. Divide that annual number by 50 to determine income needed to be earned per week:
Annual income goal $\div$ 50 = \$_____ weekly income goal*
*50 is used instead of 52 to provide the fitness professional with 2 weeks of vacation per year.
3. Divide the number for the weekly income goal by the pay rate earned per training session:
Weekly income goal $\div$ Per session rate = _____ number of weekly sessions needed to meet annual income goal
4. Divide the number of weekly sessions by the number of work days per week to determine how many sessions are needed each day to support the annual income goal:
Sessions per week $\div$ Days of work per week = _____ number of daily sessions to meet the annual income goal
5. A common rule of thumb is that an average of 10% of initial prospects will close on a sale and convert to a client. With that in mind, multiply the number of sessions per day by 10 to uncover how many prospects need to be interacted with daily to keep the client pipeline full enough to support annual income goals:
Sessions per day $\times$ 10 = _____ number of prospects to interact with each work day

a solution available for everyone, from busy executives to stay-at-home parents to retirees on a fixed budget.

Health clubs typically offer preset packages of personal training sessions or a monthly subscription that provides a specific number of personal training sessions for a flat fee. For example, a health club may offer a prepaid package of 20, one-hour personal training sessions, or it could offer 4 sessions per month for a monthly subscription fee. The subscription model is becoming increasingly popular due to the affordability it provides. Only the most affluent of clients will be able to pay for large training packages up front, so a smaller monthly fee can be much more comfortable to budget for.

Fitness professionals working for themselves or as independent contractors will need to decide how to structure the services they want to sell. Because of this, considerable research needs to be performed to uncover competitor rates in the surrounding area. If numerous competing facilities charge similar rates, independent fitness professionals need to set their rates accordingly while still remaining competitive.

When asking for the sale, fitness professionals should present all of the available price points and allow potential clients a little time to receive the information. Clients need to be the one to choose the program that works best for them so that they feel empowered in the decision-making process. Some input can be provided to help guide their decision, such as, "If we meet two times a week, I feel comfortable I can help you meet your goal in 10 weeks. But if we meet three days per week, you will be able to reach your goal even faster!" This educates clients about prices and expectations for results. It is perfectly fine if a client is happy with the lowest level package, because once a client is signed, every training becomes an opportunity to keep building rapport, demonstrating professionalism, and tracking the client's progress.

Marketing

Once performance goals are set and a fitness professional knows how much work to perform to earn a specific amount of income, it will be necessary to market fitness services to potential clients. Marketing is the process of promoting a service for the purpose of communicating the

features, advantages, and benefits of personal training to potential clients. Many health clubs will have dedicated marketing departments that handle most of this effort; however, even in the biggest commercial health clubs, all fitness professionals are still responsible for building and maintaining their own clientele. Whether working for a health club or as an independent contractor, it will be necessary to at least develop a personal marketing plan to communicate with potential clients and help bring them into the gym. Fitness professionals just starting their career should realize that it could take as long as 3 to 6 months of work to develop a full client schedule.

For fitness professionals in charge of promoting their own services, their marketing should solve a problem; specifically, it should tell a story about how a service (or product) can enhance customers' lives. Marketing should communicate the benefits of working with a Certified Personal Trainer to help potential clients meet their health and fitness goals. For example, if a Certified Personal Trainer is working in a suburban location with a large percentage of stay-at-home parents or older adults, then the Certified Personal Trainer needs to determine effective methods of communicating with those specific audiences. In this case, a Certified Personal Trainer with the experience of being a parent could market to the stay-at-home parents, whereas another with specific education in working with special populations could focus on working with older adults. Just as prospecting requires the uncovering of individual fitness needs, greater marketing efforts for the independent fitness professional need to uncover and solve for fitness needs of an entire community and surrounding population.

It might be helpful for a fitness professional to identify their **unique selling proposition (USP)**. A USP could be traits or skills that allow one fitness professional to stand out from others by featuring services that are unique or different. When high-intensity workout programs were first introduced, the USP was that doing extreme workouts in a short period of time was a different way to exercise that produced results not offered by other methods. Examples of USPs that a fitness professional might use include:

- Specializing in working with active adults aged 55 years and older
- Focusing on weight-loss clients to help them learn how to use physical activity for long-term health and body composition improvement
- Training athletes to improve their sport-specific performance

Unique selling proposition (USP)

Highlighting unique skills or traits during a sales presentation that allow an individual to stand out from the competition.



TRY THIS

Coaching Group Workouts

Teaching group fitness classes can be an effective marketing tactic for a Certified Personal Trainer. It allows for the promotion of personal training services to a group of consumers who are already committed to achieving results. Earning an additional certification as a group fitness instructor can open an entire new world of potential clients.

BUILDING VALUE AND A BRAND

A **brand** tells a story and creates an identity for a product or service (Ries & Ries, 2004). The value of creating a brand identity is that it establishes a top-of-mind presence, which means that a specific brand name immediately comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a generic product category. A fitness professional can create a brand featuring a style of program design, such as body building or endurance training, or build a brand around a category of equipment, like training specifically with kettlebells.

Brand

A product or service identified by specific, unique characteristics.

As most sales are based on emotional decision-making, creating a brand to define the quality of personal training services that a client can expect is an important step in establishing an emotional connection with a client. A Certified Personal Trainer who invests the time to develop a specific brand for their service can help prepare clients for what to expect during the personal training experience.



TRY THIS

Identify your favorite brands of fitness programs or products that are currently popular and think about how each brand identity helps improve the popularity of the product.

Besides working with a specific type of clientele or type of equipment, another way to establish a brand is through personality or the specific method by which the workout experience is delivered. There are key differences, for example, between a drill instructor-type fitness professional who barks no-nonsense orders and someone who is more nurturing and supportive of everyone's emotional needs. There are plenty of people who enjoy each, creating the opportunity for a fitness professional to build a brand that is directly tied to their own unique personality and coaching style. One Certified Personal Trainer may establish a brand of being the toughest workout in the city, while another fitness professional establishes a brand where even the most deconditioned individuals feel welcomed. Regardless of which type of brand is selected, one of the most effective methods of establishing a brand identity is by simply delivering on the promise of service.

USING A SWOT ANALYSIS TO BUILD A BRAND

To develop a full schedule, fitness professionals should take the time to identify a specific group of potential clients who can benefit from their personal training services (target demographic). A **SWOT analysis** can be used to identify areas of strength that can be used for building a brand and establishing a USP while also identifying opportunities for professional growth and development. SWOT stands for **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats:

■ Strengths

Identify the strengths and competitive advantages including education, skills, abilities, or work experience with a specific population. Examples of strengths might be education, certifications earned; the name or location of employer, which itself may have a strong brand identity; or experience working with a particular type of client. The strengths can ultimately help identify the professional traits to develop a brand identity.

■ Weaknesses

Identify any and all weaknesses; be honest and thorough, the more honestly a fitness professional can assess their weakness, the more opportunities for growth can be identified. Examples of weaknesses might be unfamiliarity with specific types of clients such as elite athletes, being uncomfortable with the sales process, or overall lack of fitness industry experience.

■ Opportunities

Identify the opportunities for developing new professional skills or expanding into new business opportunities, such as being able to coach group workout programs. Weaknesses can be turned into opportunities; for example, the lack of education in a specific area of exercise science is actually an opportunity to take a continuing education workshop to gain the necessary knowledge to work with a specific type of client.

SWOT analysis

A professional development technique that helps individuals identify their personal strengths and weaknesses, opportunities for growth, and potential threats to success.

■ Threats

Identify all of the threats that might impact a fitness professional's business. Examples of threats are the general economic climate, the number of other fitness professionals working in a health club, or competitors who plan on growing or expanding into the marketplace. In some cases, threats are due to external forces that cannot be controlled (such as an economic recession), while in other cases they can be turned into opportunities for new business.

Table 2-3 shows what a SWOT analysis for an entry-level Certified Personal Trainer in a large urban market might look like.

TABLE 2-3 Sample SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	■ NASM-CPT credential ■ Internship at recreation center during college conducting assessments and designing exercise programs for other students ■ Interest in helping clients with lifestyle and weight management issues; successful at helping clients adhere to exercise programs for weight loss
Weaknesses	■ Not confident in asking clients for money ■ Need to learn more about marketing and sales ■ Not certified to teach group exercise classes
Opportunities	■ Take a workshop to learn more about sales and marketing for fitness professionals ■ Work for a large health club operator in town that attracts 100-plus new members per month; see 6 to 10 new members a week to conduct assessments and introduce them to the facility ■ Learn how to coach group workouts to expand opportunities to work with club members
Threats	■ Competition from the other health clubs and training studios in the immediate area ■ Low consumer confidence in the current economic climate ■ Limited space to train clients when club is crowded

FOUR PS OF MARKETING

A marketing plan should identify business opportunities and how to attract business in a specific market environment. For a health club employee, a market could simply be the members at the health club; for an independent Certified Personal Trainer, it could be all of the residents in a specific neighborhood or households in a community. The marketing plan will help determine the most effective way to promote the services offered by the Certified Personal Trainer, which will differ based on the specific market the Certified Personal Trainer is working in. To help simplify the process, fitness professionals should consider the Four Ps of marketing, also known as the marketing mix: product, price, promotion, and place. A marketing plan should address the Four Ps by:

- Communicating the benefits of using a *product*
- Identifying a competitive *price* of the service
- Determining how the service will be *promoted*
- Selecting the *place* or method of distribution (Westwood, 2016)

Table 2-4 outlines what a Four Ps marketing plan could look like for an independent personal trainer.

TABLE 2-4 Sample Marketing Plan

Marketing Plan: Jane Doe's Epic Personal Training

Product: Jane Doe's Epic Personal Training

Jane offers in-home personal training services to women who want to learn how to strength train safely and effectively.

Price: Jane charges clients a flat monthly rate based on whether clients want one, two, or three sessions per week of live personal training (4, 8, or 12 times a month).

Place: Jane offers in-home personal training in a specific neighborhood of a large city, including apartments and offices that have workout facilities where Jane can work with her clients.

Promotion: Jane starts a blog and social media feed to focus on strength training advice for women to grow her business. She also relies on word-of-mouth referrals from existing clients.

SOCIAL MEDIA

From one point of view, each of the various social media platforms appears as if it was designed specifically for fitness professionals. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube allow fitness professionals to share information with countless numbers of potential clients—but only if promoted the right way. The short video formats are perfect for fitness professionals who want to provide a brief demonstration of a specific exercise, an entire workout, or a more detailed explanation about how to perform a challenging movement.

Social media is changing the way many fitness professionals do business by being able to advertise online coaching services to a much wider audience than could ever be reached by simply working in a health club. For example, social media platforms allow fitness professionals to post exercise or workout videos that can then be used to market online personal training services. Theoretically, this means that a fitness professional could potentially develop and work with an entire client list without ever stepping foot in a gym.

An important recommendation for fitness professionals who want to use social media to promote their business is to maintain separate accounts: one to share public information for potential clients and coworkers and a different account to share personal information with friends and family members. When sharing personal activities outside of work, a Certified Personal Trainer should be consistent with a fit and healthy lifestyle, but it is still a good idea to keep business and personal lives separate.



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INDUSTRY EVENTS AND NETWORKING

Another way to market a fitness business is by attending fitness-industry events like conferences, trade shows, or workshops and networking with other like-minded fitness professionals. Remember that some fitness professionals may prefer to work with a specific population of clients, so getting to know those specialized individuals can open doors for professional collaboration. Each can refer clients to others based on their respective, unique skill sets. In this scenario, instead of competing, each fitness professional's business becomes elevated, and all succeed.

Another benefit of attending industry events is that many are also marketed to fitness consumers and other members of the general public, creating opportunities to market services to a wide audience. Health fairs and fitness expos provide good opportunities for Certified Personal

Trainers to attend events where a number of consumers are interested in learning more about exercise. Additionally, instead of simply attending as a participant, fitness professionals can often volunteer at industry events for even closer access to industry leaders. Working at an event also provides numerous learning opportunities without having to pay the expensive event fees. In addition, many events that offer continuing education units will provide them at no cost to the volunteers who staff the event.

EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

There are numerous online platforms and websites designed for the purpose of creating and managing email lists. As fitness professionals build a business using an email list service, they can communicate directly with potential and existing clients. Email campaigns can be set up to distribute important information or to promote a sale on personal training programs. Most health club employers will currently be using email campaigns to communicate directly with club members, and it can benefit a Certified Personal Trainer to inquire about how to contribute content to better market services directly to club members. For independent fitness professionals, using an automated email service can be a highly beneficial tool to generate business.

Continuing Education



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As a career in fitness progresses, it will be important to pursue additional education necessary to develop the skills and abilities to serve a wider range of client types. The most successful fitness professionals know the value of being lifetime learners, and they live with the mentality that the more they know, the more there is to learn. The fitness industry is constantly evolving, with new research happening every day that potentially changes the way we think about the human body. Because of this, Certified Personal Trainers—similar to other allied health professionals—must remember that earning the CPT credential is only the start of a lifetime of professional development. The critical importance for working fitness professionals to stay current with the industry's ever-growing body of knowledge means that NASM

requires all Certified Personal Trainers to complete a specific amount of continuing education every 2 years to keep their certifications active and valid.

Requirements

NASM awards continuing education units (CEUs) at the rate of 0.1 per contact hour of training. For example, if a continuing education activity is approved by the recertification department for 0.5 CEUs, that activity is expected to take around 5 hours to complete. To keep the NASM-CPT credential active and valid, NASM requires its fitness professionals to complete



HELPFUL HINT

A total of 2.0 CEUs is required to renew the NASM-CPT credential every 2 years: 1.9 CEUs from continuing education efforts and 0.1 CEU from renewing a CPR/AED certification.

1.9 CEUs—roughly 19 hours of continued education—every 2 years. Additionally, because it is a strict requirement for certification, a final 0.1 unit is awarded for the renewal of a fitness professional's CPR/AED certification. All in all, this makes for a total requirement of 2.0 CEUs every 2 years.

Opportunities

The two most popular methods of earning CEUs are by attending live events, such as workshops or conferences, or by completing online education courses. Online CEUs can be earned by participating in live webinars or completing an online self-study course on a specific topic. Digital learning opportunities allow fitness professionals to learn at their own pace and often allow for a greater in-depth analysis of the learning materials. However, in-person workshops and conferences allow for invaluable networking opportunities and the ability to learn directly from professionals who are leading the industry. Different individuals have different learning preferences, so it is up to each fitness professional to identify the sources of continuing education that work best for their specific needs.

TRADE SHOWS

Conferences, conventions, and trade shows are traditionally multiday events that feature a variety of workshop topics and speakers. Quite often, attending just one annual conference or trade show can provide an entire renewal cycle of CEUs (1.9), making conferences and trade shows cost-effective means of recertifying. Typically, a sign-up sheet will be provided at the beginning of the event, and as fitness professionals attend educational sessions and lectures, they account for their attendance on it, often requiring a signature of the presenter as proof. As technology advances, this method is beginning to be replaced with mobile, digital solutions that make accounting for trade show CEUs much easier. When the event is over, the completed attendance sheet—or copy of the digital attendance record—can be uploaded to the recertification portal as proof of earning the associated CEUs.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops provide the opportunity to earn CEUs by getting hands-on with a specific subject, exercise programming technique, or new piece of equipment. A variety of health clubs, certifying organizations including NASM, and equipment companies frequently offer workshops on a number of different topics. Once a fitness professional has identified a specific education need, a simple internet search for “fitness workshops near me” can help identify potential opportunities. As with trade shows, third-party workshops require documented proof of attendance.

ONLINE CEUS AND SPECIALIZATIONS

There are a variety of options for earning CEUs online, including participating in webinars, completing specially designed CEU courses, or earning an advanced specialization. Online continuing education courses vary in terms of depth, rigor, and price. Some courses may be short and inexpensive and offer a small amount of CEUs (0.1–0.3). Other courses, including advanced specializations, can be worth up to 1.9 CEUs and teach topics in great detail. Topics of online continuing education courses can include nutrition, corrective exercise, performance enhancement, behavior change, or special populations.

COLLEGE COURSES AND INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTIONS

Many higher learning institutions, such as community colleges, allow area residents to take single classes that can then be evaluated by the certifying agency and approved for CEUs. Typically, any higher education course in exercise science, kinesiology, anatomy, physical education,

exercise physiology, or nutritional science can be submitted for CEUs. Values will depend on how many contact hours of instruction the course contained.

Additionally, after a trusted professional reputation has been built in the fitness industry, experienced fitness professionals can convert their industry contributions into CEUs for recertification. Industry contributions include writing articles for respected fitness magazines, creating content for fitness education programs, speaking at conferences, and presenting webinars. Because these can all be considered contributions that drive the industry forward, NASM and other certifying agencies recognize the effort involved and can provide CEUs on a case-by-case basis.

Acquired Skills and Benefits

As previously mentioned, earning the NASM-CPT credential is only the starting point of a fitness career. Continuing education programs provide additional learning opportunities about exercise program design to meet the needs of the extensive variety of clients a fitness professional can expect to encounter over the course of a career. As a Certified Personal Trainer progresses through their career, it will be important to focus on educational opportunities that not only satisfy the biannual recertification requirement but also function to drive that career forward.

WORKING WITH NICHE POPULATIONS

Certain niche populations, such as youth athletes, active aging adults, and pre- and postnatal women, have special needs from an exercise program. Continuing education resources provide the learning opportunities for topics that can then be applied to niche client populations, helping to considerably expand a fitness professional's book of business. Continuing education is like a toolbox: the more opportunities fitness professionals pursue, the more tools they have in their toolbox for a wide variety of situations. Acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to work with niche populations empowers a Certified Personal Trainer to work with more people than someone who only has a foundational credential.

INCREASED PAY

When working for a commercial facility, one frequent benefit of completing continuing education is a higher pay rate, specifically when an advanced specialization or an additional certification is earned. Many facilities have tiered compensation programs, where a new Certified Personal Trainer typically earns a base rate when training clients. However, once an advanced specialization or additional certification is earned, that same fitness professional can be advanced to a higher tier and earn more per session. This can often compound, so that fitness professionals with numerous specializations or certifications end up earning far more than fitness professionals with only one certification. And for the independent fitness professional, the ability to cater to niche populations not only increases the number of clients one can work with but also allows the individual to potentially charge more per session.

SUMMARY

The personal training field has evolved greatly over the past 50 years. What began as a niche service catering to bodybuilders and athletes has evolved into a field responsible for using exercise and physical activity to improve a wide range of fitness components and promote optimal health and wellness. All around the world, career opportunities are growing for fitness professionals

with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to design exercise programs that can change lives for the better. Through dedicated efforts in customer service, sales, and marketing, along with a commitment to being a lifetime learner, Certified Personal Trainers can craft a highly successful career in the fitness industry.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Once an individual earns a Certified Personal Trainer credential, there are a number of different options for employment, including opening a personal training studio, working with clients directly in their homes, working in a health club, or operating an online coaching business. Each choice provides a viable career option, and no matter which one is selected, it can take time to develop a clientele that provides a steady source of income. Even if a fitness professional has the goal of starting a business or opening a fitness studio, beginning a fitness career by working as an employee at a health club can help establish the foundational skills necessary for long-term success.

After earning the NASM-CPT credential, a well-crafted resume is needed to attract the necessary attention to earn an interview. A resume should be a short, one- or two-page, outlined presentation of an individual's ability to contribute to a particular type of organization. A new Certified Personal Trainer may not have any specific experience working in the fitness industry; however, it is important to highlight other skills and job experiences that can easily transfer—specifically experience in customer service and sales. During an interview, it is most important to communicate effectively, openly, and honestly.

Whether traveling to client's homes or working as a health club employee, fitness professionals are responsible for managing their own business, making it important to act professionally with everything they do. Client management includes doing all necessary paperwork such as reviewing assessment or intake forms; preparing invoices or paperwork and collecting payment; developing or updating exercise programs; conducting follow-up phone calls, emails, or text messages to schedule and confirm appointments; and managing any other communication relating to working with existing clients. Fitness professionals working for an employer should follow any existing guidelines for marketing through online channels or social media, while independent Certified Personal Trainers should learn how to use numerous online resources and mobile apps to market their services, communicate with clients, and even collect payments.

Once a job is earned or a new business is formed, fitness professionals should establish specific hours that they are available to see clients and adhere to this schedule for consistency. A client must understand that they are paying for an hour of time. If the client is late, the session should still end on time and not run into the next client's session. All clients will appreciate the ability to establish and maintain a consistent schedule. This will also help avoid burnout and ensure that a healthy work–life balance is maintained.

While many fitness professionals enter the industry wanting to help people and are not interested in being sales people, the reality is that sales skills are needed to be successful and earn a living. Selling personal training services is about asking a client to make a commitment to an exercise program to improve their own health, wellness, and fitness. From that perspective, selling becomes a more comfortable process of uncovering a client's needs and providing solutions to those needs.

Along with sales, marketing is the process of promoting a service for the purpose of communicating the features, advantages, and benefits of a service to clients. Whether working for a health club or as an independent contractor, it will be necessary to develop a marketing plan to uncover potential new clients. Health clubs often provide new members with complimentary

training sessions to help Certified Personal Trainers build their clientele. Additionally, when not working with clients, employed fitness professionals have the advantage of being able to work the floor to meet new members and build rapport. Fitness professionals just starting their career should realize that it could take as long as 3 to 6 months of work to develop a full client schedule.

Not only is continuing education a requirement of maintaining the NASM-CPT credential but it also can help fitness professionals expand their business by learning how to work with niche populations. Numerous options exist to earn the required 2.0 CEUs every 2 years.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- From working in a large health club, to training clients in their own homes, fitness professionals have numerous options to establish a personal training practice with a consistent flow of clients.
- Another employment choice for fitness professionals is starting a fitness business, which could include working with clients in their homes, running outdoor group workout programs, or opening a studio.
- As technology is evolving, there are many options for offering training services online.
- Working as an independent contractor allows a fitness professional to establish their own pay rates and to earn the entire amount, but operational expenses, insurance costs, and taxes must also be accounted for.
- The first step in succeeding as a Certified Personal Trainer is offering uncompromising customer service.
- Selling personal training services is about asking a client to make a commitment to an exercise program to improve their own health, wellness, and fitness, which makes selling an activity of uncovering client needs and presenting solutions to those problems.
- If rapport is properly built with a prospective client, sales will feel natural and automatic.
- Forecasting techniques should be used to predict how many clients will need to be serviced to support a desired annual financial goal.
- Marketing is the process of communicating how a specific product or service will meet the wants and needs of a potential client.
- The Four Ps of marketing include product, price, promotion, and place.
- Social media and other digital marketing campaigns are extremely important for growing a modern fitness business.
- Continuing education courses are not just necessary for recertification; they can teach fitness professionals how to work with niche populations and enable the expansion of a fitness business to new and exciting areas.
- The most popular methods of earning CEUs are attending workshops or conferences or completing online education programs. Additionally, CEUs can be earned by participating in livestream webinars, reading fitness articles and passing a quiz or test, or contributing to the industry by creating content for fitness education programs, speaking at conferences, and presenting webinars.

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