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Let's do it one-on-one

Personal trainers can help you achieve your fitness goals if you lack knowledge, experience or discipline

by Kelvin Jacques :: guest contributor

Every year millions of Americans make fitness and diet resolutions going into whichever new year. And every January, gyms across the country see surges in memberships. The gym floors are most crowded through February, with the crowds dwindling by March, and often being fairly lightly used by the summer and fall. Of course, by winter's extended holidays there really isn't much point trying to play catch up, is there?

Fitness should be a lifestyle, not a habit. It is also a skill with its own body of knowledge. And, because of this, exercisers who do not have know how to work out safely and successfully; those who have busy lives; and those who have not made fitness a lasting priority, will often fall off their well-intended regimens, mired in ineffectiveness.

How then does the average person achieve improvements in body composition (body fat percentage versus lean tissue), endurance and self-esteem? Call a professional. When your pipes are clogged, you call a plumber. When your stomach hurts, you call a doctor. And, when you need help improving your fitness, you call a trainer.

There is a great deal to consider before hiring a trainer for the long haul. You need to know that your trainer will be able to give you the results you need for your personal improvement and empowerment.

It is imperative to do the same amount of homework choosing a trainer as you would a mechanic, lawyer or real estate broker.

Here are some guidelines that are the hallmark of an effective, professional trainer:

First, your trainer should be punctual, and his/her hygiene impeccable. Be sure the trainer is certified through a nationally recognized licensure organization. Don't be afraid to ask how many hours of practice/study are required to achieve a particular certification, nor to ask how often it must be renewed — be wary of programs that cost under \$300 to renew. Also, you might ask if she has a degree in exercise science or a related field (e.g. sports science, dance, kinesiology, physical therapy, etc.). Be wary of lackadaisical attitudes towards certification, or dismissive conversations concerning a background in exercise. Just because a person knows how to work out to achieve his own results does not imply that she knows how to train anyone else.

Your trainer should ask you about your goals and limitations, should be receptive to and energized by the challenges of tailoring a regimen for you as an individual, and quick to generate a preliminary strategy to address your initial habits



A Fitness Together trainer works with a client during an early morning training session.

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and level of commitment. The trainer will be focused on you continuously, watching technique, and being completely engaged in the session — try to avoid trainers who talk to others, watch television, and/or seem to be distracted or bored.

A good trainer will avoid routines: From one session to another you should be doing completely different exercises, or implementing variations on exercises that have already been done. The body

adapts quickly and an effective trainer will make liberal use of muscle confusion. An effective trainer will have a huge arsenal of activities that continuously raise the bar. Your trainer should also be able adapt at a moment's notice if you are hurt or develop any type of contraindication to a specific activity. An effective trainer will not exacerbate injuries, and will insist that you rest if you are hurt or unwell.

Because each person is so different it might be best to find a venue where you work one-on-one with a trainer and where the distractions are minimized by accommodating only a few appointments at any given time.

Fitness Together, a national fitness chain with multiple locations throughout the Carolinas, specializes in this. Their mantra is "One client, one trainer, one goal."

Carry Selby, manager of Charlotte's Fitness Together

— Dilworth, has been with the company for over two years.

"I enjoy working with clients in this atmosphere, because I can give them my full attention while they are achieving their own progress in their own time," Selby says. "It's really satisfying, because people are so much more likely to commit to a program when they know it has been created specifically for them. I get to watch them transform, and it makes me feel good to help people become healthier and happier."

Each trainer will have her own style, but at Fitness Together there is a focus on three-dimensional, multi-joint exercises. There is a lot of jumping, throwing and balancing, which ultimately seems more like playing than working out. Selby's specialty is seamlessly combining multiple exercises into one activity, although, as manager, she doesn't take as many clients as she used to. Lisa Pappanastos, another Fitness Together trainer, is adept at combining resistance training with cardio components. For those who prefer a male trainer, Colin Johns creates a variety of regimens that make use of body weight, free weights and sport-specific activities.

If gay-friendliness is a subject on your mind — with all the hours you might spend with a personal trainer — have no worries at Fitness Together. You'll feel right at home, if their early 2009 "Shower with other dudes" advertising campaign is any indicator. ::