

LECTURE 2

Basic Requirements Needed to be a Personal Trainer

Knowledge & Application
of Personal Training

LECTURE **2**

So you want to be a Personal Trainer?

It's not necessarily the case with everybody but you are probably keen on sport of some kind, you enjoy going to the gym and doing exercise and you think it will be a great career getting paid for something that you'd do as a hobby anyway. And let us say from the start that that is one of the best reasons for taking up a career – doing something you enjoy. You're less likely to get the Monday Morning Blues and less likely to be counting the time till your next day off! And what's more, you'll be helping people to get fit and healthy. What could be better than that?

But there are some pitfalls that we want to set down right at the beginning.

1. Generally speaking, personal trainers are not held in very high regard by the general public, unlike, say physiotherapists. Often, they are seen as just obsessed by their own physical appearance. Also, to the untrained eye, they don't seem to DO very much apart from standing gazing out of the window while the client does the exercises. This is an exaggeration of course, but I hope you can see where we're coming from.

So the first thing to consider is how to be viewed as a professional in the same way that physiotherapists or osteopaths are viewed. We'll go into that further in a minute...

2. The second thing is that there will be some clients who are very keen on exercise and have clear goals. Maybe they want to take part in the London Marathon or get better at their particular sport. You may even be lucky enough to train professional athletes of some kind. But there will also be clients who are NOT keen, who drag themselves to your sessions because they think they OUGHT to get a bit fitter or they OUGHT to lose weight but they hate doing it – they're instantly bored the moment you mention exercise. If you could give them a magic pill instead, they'd take it like a shot. So what do you do about those clients?

Those two points are important when we start on a course to become a professional personal trainer. And the purpose of these lectures and the course you are following is to help you to get there.

A very beneficial thing that the government have done is to produce some National Occupational Standards. It sets out standards (Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) and matches these against what is required for each particular level. So, in these lectures we will be giving you all the information that is required to reach Level 3 which is the qualification needed to be able to practise as a personal trainer. (And also importantly, to be able to get professional insurance to practise).

So let's outline some basic requirements needed to be a professional personal trainer.

Firstly, in order to be a true professional, you have to behave like one.

Just take a moment to think about a health professional you know – and how they look and behave. It could be your doctor or nurse or physio. More often than not, they have a sense of authority – they appear to KNOW what they are talking about. They also make an effort to UNDERSTAND your problem and go along with you to try to help. They're also SYMPATHETIC – they don't just dismiss your concerns. And that's a requirement of a personal trainer.

A good professional is also very POSITIVE – however difficult they think your problem is, they will be supportive, and of course, often without you knowing it, they will be trying to get to the root of your problem. So they are ASSESSING you – and this is what you will be doing for much of your time as a personal trainer.

“Why is Amelia having difficulty doing a simple lunge?”
“Why is Ben not able to lift weights above his head?”

You've maybe heard the expression, “It takes two to tango”. This applies to the relationship between personal trainers and their clients. Your job is not simply to issue instructions which the client then obeys unthinkingly. Your job as a professional is to INSPIRE them so THEY take some responsibility for their health and fitness as well as you.

And lastly, but perhaps most importantly, professionals NEVER STOP LEARNING. They have enquiring minds so that even after qualifying, they are constantly improving their knowledge, taking extra courses, reading, researching on the internet.

Becoming a personal trainer means that you will be helping people to lead better happier, healthier lives. What could be a more rewarding job than that?

Ethical Code of Conduct

This sounds like a real mouthful but basically it means behaving professionally with a client in a sensible, responsible and moral way.

Some of the things are very obvious. For example, it would be clearly immoral to prey on an elderly client simply to get your hands on their life savings. And it would also be immoral (and illegal!) to refuse to train someone because of their sexual orientation or because of the colour of their skin.

But there are other things that are not immediately apparent, but which are important in acting and behaving as a professional. Let's take them one by one.

1. Presenting yourself positively to the client in the way that you dress, the way you speak and the way you conduct yourself generally. This will vary according to the client and according to the situation you find yourself in. Think about the way you greet them (smiling is always positive) – maintain good eye contact and on the one hand don't be too formal or on the other, too casual. Learn their name and use it. Make them feel special.

2. Be consistent with each client. For example, you don't treat them in an offhand manner one day because you're feeling depressed or "in a mood". Different clients may respond better to one sort of relationship rather than another, but with each individual client it should be the same from session to session.

3. The needs and concerns of the client are paramount and it is your duty to provide them with training and exercise that will do them the most good. So - pushing them beyond their limits in an exercise for example, may make YOU feel good and powerful (they're doing what YOU tell them!) but ultimately it may be bad for their welfare. So exercising judgement as to their safety and welfare is an essential part of the ethical code of conduct.

4. You should be aware that the client's needs in terms of exercise and training are probably different to your own. You should not assume that because, for example, you are keen on body building, that that is the best thing for the client. They may need to be more mobile and flexible for instance. So beware of pushing your own agenda onto a client.

5. It is important to build up trust with a client. You will find that they often tell you quite intimate things about themselves and their families and it would be unethical to gossip about these things to your friends. So confidentiality is a key aspect of ethical conduct.

6. Know the limits of your expertise. Don't recommend things to them or courses of action which are beyond the scope of your professional expertise or because you happen to have read it in a magazine. Know when to refer them to see a doctor or other health professional. To assist this, it is good to have a positive relationship with other health professionals.

7. It is also unethical to recommend or sell therapies or products that are of dubious benefit to the client.

8. You will often be working in a one-to-one situation with a client and it is important that you safeguard yourself against things that you say and do which could be misinterpreted. A difficult area and one that has caused a lot of controversy in recent years is the amount of intimacy that should be allowed to occur between trainer and client. As a trainer you are in a position of power and it would be easy for you to assume that if you engage in a sexual relationship with a client, that it is absolutely consensual whereas the client may feel differently. They may feel they have been pressured into it – which could lead to complications down the line. Avoiding such situations is not only professional but sensible.

9. While I made the obvious point above about not discriminating on the basis of sex, race and age etc, it is easy to find yourself giving more attention to a particular client because they have similar interests to yours or are more congenial to you. As a professional, all clients are equal, and you should treat them equally.

10. It is important to be insured to practise and that you are aware of all relevant legal legislation associated with the industry and you make an effort to be up to date and aware of any changes that relate directly to your practice. This will cover areas such as Health & Safety and measures to safeguard your clients. Pleading ignorance is not a defence. There are many associations and bodies that offer free guidance and support. The Association of Independent Personal Trainers is one of these groups. I advise you to join such a group so that you have an official body for help and guidance.

A genuine conversation overheard in a gym:

A middle-aged lady talking sourly to another lady about a trainer on the other side of the gym:

“Oh, he’s fine helping the young girls, but us fat ones are left to get on with it by ourselves in the corner”.

What does that say about the professionalism of the trainer?

How likely is it that that woman will keep those opinions to herself?

If she doesn’t, what sort of effect is that going to have on the trainer’s professional reputation?