

LECTURE 5

Getting to Know the Client

- **The state of the client's health**
- **Client motivation**
- **S.M.A.R.T. goals**
- **Responsibility and accountability**

Getting to know the client

The first thing that a personal trainer needs to do when they meet a new client is to get to know them. We don't mean "get to know them" in terms of what they do for a living or whether they prefer dogs to cats, although that sort of thing is useful down the line to establish a relationship and develop rapport.

What we mean is, get to know specific details about them with reference to their health and fitness. You are going to record these details on documents such as a PARQ form (more about those in another lecture). It's easy to miss things out so it's best to follow a set procedure.

Health. You need to find out the state of the client's health and whether they have issues which might impact on any exercise regime that you devise. For example, if someone has recently had a hernia operation, it would affect the sort of core exercises you might give them. Often, medical issues are relatively minor - dodgy knees or lower back pain for example. Frequently, someone will have an old injury that plays up from time to time. But with all these things, it is important to know about them and have them recorded, following, of course the guidelines about data protection (see Data Protection Act in the box). If, when you have spoken to them you think they have a serious health issue (for example they have recently had a heart attack) good practise is to ask them to get a letter of referral from their doctor which in effect will say that it's OK for you to train them. Or you may wish to refer them to another health professional, say, an osteopath, if they have a serious back problem. If you agree to contact that health professional yourself, always make sure you have the client's permission first.

The Data Protection Act 2018

It is a legal requirement that you follow the rules set out in the Data Protection Act 2018. The Act is complicated because it deals with everyone in whatever situation they are in. It applies to multinational companies on the one hand and on the other, to self-employed people working by themselves. But it boils down to two things.

- 1. If you want to keep personal information about someone on record, you must ask their permission first.*
- 2. You must not divulge that information to anyone outside your organisation or company (So for example if someone asks you for a client's telephone number, you can't give it to them without the client's permission).*

*If you wish, you can read the Data Protection Act in detail by going to the following address:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted>*

Client Motivation

Spend some time finding out exactly WHY the client has decided to come for personal training because this will affect the way you decide to train them in their sessions. Often, they will appear keen because it's something new, but their enthusiasm might quickly dwindle. It's not uncommon for clients to say they have come because they want "a kick up the bum" to get them out of their lethargy and into doing something active. Sometimes they reveal by hints and facial expressions that they don't really want to do it, but they feel they ought to. Occasionally, such clients will try to unload the responsibility for their health and fitness onto you so that if they don't feel better, fitter and slimmer in a few weeks, it's YOUR fault (despite the fact that they spend much of their time on the sofa eating cake!) But there are also clients who really ARE keen, do what you tell them and always turn up for sessions raring to go. All these people will need a different approach. But it would be foolish of you to expect them all to be like the last enthusiastic one.

Goals

You'll hear a lot about goals as you study more and more about training clients. One particular favourite, not just in health and fitness but in the business-world generally is the idea of SMART goals.

SMART

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound. This is fine for, say, manufacturers of baked beans who want to increase the number of tins they sell. For them SMART goals work perfectly. But it becomes more problematic when you are dealing with people who have moods, emotions, changes of heart and outside influences that affect their minds and attitudes.

Now, that's not to say that we throw the idea of SMART goals out of the window, but it's important not to have too fixed an idea of what a goal is.

- There's the woman who comes to you and says "I'm getting married in ten-month's time. By then I want to have lost fifteen kilos and look fit and toned when I wear my bikini round the swimming pool on honeymoon." She has a particular goal which would fit easily into the SMART model. She's **specific** about what she wants (losing weight and getting toned), it's **measurable** (15 kilos) and it's **achievable** (her wedding is in 10 months' time whereas if it was in two months it might not be achievable). It's also **relevant** – looking slimmer and fitter on her wedding day is going to have a positive effect on her health which is what you as a professional are concerned about. And finally, it's **time-bound**. She's not said she wants to lose weight and get toned for some time in the future. You've both got ten months to do it.
- Contrast that with the man who says, "I just want a bit of time to myself away from the stresses of work and the office, look at getting myself a bit fitter and enjoy myself doing some exercise". He has a goal certainly, but it's not so easy to pin down in the SMART sense. For that man, his goals are going to be more subjective. His idea of "enjoying" the sessions will be largely how he feels. How do you measure that? And how do you measure "a bit fitter"? One way is by asking him to rate how he feels on a scale of 1 – 10. Or how easy on a scale of 1 – 10 was it doing some step-ups. So it is still possible to apply the SMART model even for someone with vague goals like his – you just have to think round it and dig a bit deeper. But also, if he starts enjoying the sessions, you could gradually introduce some more specific SMART goals. For example, you might say, "I wonder if we can increase your enjoyment score over the next month from your average of 6 out of 10 to an average of 7 or 8 out of 10" And then you set yourself the task of how that can be achieved.

Example: Goals

TWO TYPES OF GOAL

EXAMPLE 1: AN ATHLETE

- To get my body-fat percentage into single figures
- To be able to run a marathon in under three hours
- To be able to bench-press my own body weight
- To be able to do a handstand and hold it for 30 seconds

EXAMPLE 2: A REGULAR MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

- To be able to do three hours of exercise a week on a regular basis
- To feel more energetic in everyday life
- To improve mobility and flexibility as I'm stiffer than I used to be
- To have fun and enjoy exercise for the first time in my life.

The next step is to **agree** on the goals with your client. Agreeing on the goals together is important because it is a move towards the client taking some **responsibility** for their training. As I've said already, it's all too easy for them to try to hand over responsibility to the trainer – and then blame them when things don't turn out as they expected.

Another word you'll hear a lot of as we go through these lectures is **accountability**, which is linked very much to the idea of responsibility. If you and the client agree on goals and they understand that **they** have an essential part to play in reaching those goals, you can hold them to account when they don't play their part (for example by frequently cancelling sessions or failing to do the things you've agreed on between sessions). But if you do it right at the beginning, it need not get to that stage. By establishing that you are in this together, they won't want to let you down. And if you give them lots of positive reinforcement (more about this later) when they do make improvements, this will build on itself and make reaching the goals much easier.

You **have** to show that you are interested in your client. If you aren't interested in them, **they** will be less likely to be interested.

So – you've identified and agreed on the goals. And however loose they are you have to decide **how** those goals can be reached.

- So – for the bride-to-be who wants to look good on her wedding day, what **actual** things need to be done? Strength training exercises? Nutritional advice and a diet plan? Cardio-vascular training? A mix of all three?

- And for the guy who wants time away from the office to have a bit of enjoyment and get a bit fitter, how do you do that? Use exercise games? Obstacle races? Props? Make sure there's variety each week? For example, most people find doing some boxing with their personal trainer on the pads much more enjoyable than doing a stint of running on the treadmill.

As you can see it will be different with every client so before you can decide just what exercise programme to devise for them, you have to find out exactly how fit (or not) they are. Only then will you know for sure what exercises will be appropriate.

And for that you have to assess them. But before you can do that, you need to know what you are assessing. So we come to the all-important "Components of Fitness".

That's the subject of the next lecture.