

Empower Your Evaluations

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Programs:

Performance reviews can go both ways and bolster productivity through better communication.



Welcome to part three of our five-part “Crash Course in Excellence” series with takeaway strategies. This article explores performance reviews in the fitness environment, especially the often overlooked piece of the puzzle called “bilateral evaluations.”

In our goal of managing the best group fitness and personal training staff possible, we strive to be cream. For cream to rise, it has to be managed with excellence. Traditionally, group fitness managers and personal training managers (hereafter referred to as “fitness managers”) evaluate staff, usually on a yearly basis. During a typical evaluation, a fitness manager attends a group fitness instructor’s class or personal trainer’s session, writes personal comments and then reviews this information with the staff member. This ideally occurs within a short period of time—about 48 hours—so that pertinent observations are reviewed while they are still fresh in the minds of everyone involved.

Most facilities today, especially the larger fitness chains, use their own standardized forms for group fitness and personal training evaluations. I created a standardized, objective group fitness evaluation form that appears in *Fitness: Theory and Practice: The Comprehensive Resource for Fitness Instruction*, 5th edition (Aerobics and Fitness Association of America 2010). One advantage to using standardized forms is that

they offer an objective way to evaluate individuals working in a field where differences among personalities and styles are vast. Truly, everyone gets measured using the same criteria. A disadvantage to using standardized forms is the inability to comment on the unique “flavor” and style that each instructor or trainer contributes.

Alternatively, some managers prefer a simpler, more subjective form. Figure 1 shows an example of a form I used while working as group fitness manager for Golden Door Spas. An advantage to implementing this kind of form is the ability to capture the true essence of the instructor’s or trainer’s personality. Shaun McGeahy, New York/New Jersey-area group exercise manager for 24 Hour Fitness, uses subjective forms. “I evaluate my staff [and give] specific, individual, subjective feedback to each instructor when observing a class,” says McGeahy. “This gives [my instructors] an opportunity to grow, improve and refine their teaching and connecting skills. In an industry that is forever evolving, it’s crucial to provide honest, constructive and nurturing feedback in order to develop a strong and trusting team.”

A disadvantage of using subjective evaluation forms is that not every instructor will be evaluated by the same objective criteria; only the issues that “jump out” at the manager during any particular evaluation will be recorded.

Twice Is Nice

Because each type of form has its advantages, I suggest a minimum of *twice*-yearly staff evaluations, using the objective evaluation form during the first review, for standardized consistency, and the second, more subjective form during the subsequent review. The second evaluation can also be an opportunity to reflect on follow-up suggestions made in the first evaluation.

During evaluations, it is best for you as fitness manager to observe instead of participate. As much as you may wish to jump in and be a part of the excitement, if you are engaging in movement it will be impossible to remember everything that needs to be noted. Sure, you may remember to write down a point or two after taking a session; however, sitting during the entire class to write down all observations is a more thorough method. When evaluating my instructors over the past 15 years, I have found myself writing nonstop from start to finish during every class and personal training session.

Open Yourself to Evaluation, Too

The most overlooked aspect of the review process is the notion of *bilateral* evaluations. Each time a staff member receives an evaluation is an ideal time to initiate a bilateral format. This opens up the lines of communication and furthers productivity within the department by offering the *instructor* or *trainer* a chance to evaluate the *manager's* efficacy at managing and empowering.

"Too often managers just take on the one-sided role of 'evaluator' without asking their staff for feedback to improve their own job," says Deborah Puskarich, group fitness manager for Cooper Fitness Center in Craig Ranch, Texas. Figure 2 depicts a manager evaluation form I used in the Caribbean for over 10 years in an effort to give instructors the ability to critique *my* skills as an effective manager. This bilateral form ultimately helps to foster better communication, because both sides receive feedback.

Evaluations remain a good way to gather both objective and subjective feedback about how well your managers are doing. Bilateral evaluations bring a more level, fair and balanced approach to performance reviews by providing everyone with an observing voice. Ultimately, seeing one's daily duties through the eyes of a trained observer can bring a fresh approach to the total fitness experience, from the perspective of both the manager and the instructor.

In the next column, we'll look at writing script books: what they are, how to create them and how to implement them to boost communication and productivity.

Figure 1



Date: Instructor: Evaluator: Class Name and Type:

Instructor Arrival Time: Class Scheduled Start Time: Instructor Started Class Time: Class Scheduled End Time: Instructor Ended Class Time:

Class Introductions: Pertinent Announcements Made (e.g., "modifications," special pops): Class Cohesiveness: Beats per Music (if applicable):

Instructor File: current/lapsed CPR

Do MORE of this:

KEEP this:

Do LESS of this:

Figure 2

Group Exercise Manager Evaluation

Please fill out this survey at your earliest convenience. Evaluations are only effective if they work two ways, so I encourage you to help me be an effective manager to you so I can continue to empower you and provide the tools you need.

Name:

1-5

Ratings:

To rate my managers' performance, I use a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the HIGHEST SCORE for each category. In the two sections at the end, managers have a chance to rate my performance.

1. Overall **organization** each month of schedule (in advance, accuracy...) 1 2 3 4 5
2. Overall **organization of instructor communication** (phone, e-mail, messages...) 1 2 3 4 5
3. Overall **quality of information** included in monthly mailings (useful information?) 1 2 3 4 5
4. Overall **availability** of manager (phone, e-mail, responding to your needs) 1 2 3 4 5
5. Overall **customer service** of manager to you 1 2 3 4 5
6. Overall **ability to listen** to you and try to meet your needs

- 1 2 3 4 5
7. Overall **competency** of manager at her/his job as group exercise manager 1 2 3 4 5
8. Overall **competency** of manager as group exercise **instructor** (when applicable) 1 2 3 4 5
9. Overall **fairness** of group exercise **manager** 1 2 3 4 5
10. Overall **value** of trainings that manager provides for you 1 2 3 4 5

These are the things that I like **MOST** about working for you:

These are the things that I like **LEAST** about working for you:



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