

Know Your Lines!

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Programs: A facility script book will increase productivity and improve customer service.

Welcome to part four of our five-part “Crash Course in Excellence” series with takeaway strategies. This article explores two different kinds of customer service scripts: one designed to boost fitness instructors’ talent, productivity and creativity; the other aimed at enhancing overall customer service skills throughout your facility. Instructor scripts ensure that all classes begin and end with the facility’s message and mission. Customer service scripts help train all staff consistently, making everyone aware of his or her role in the larger “drama” that unfolds in the group fitness environment.

Instructor Scripts

Earlier in this series we discussed how people take away a strong imprint of the first and last 5 minutes of a class. Perhaps what happens in the middle is less than perfect, but the introduction and conclusion stick with participants. This is why it’s so important to have a definite, planned and memorized start and finish to each experience your staff creates.

During the 12 years I managed the group fitness staff at the Golden Door Spa in Puerto Rico, I created scripts for the introductions and conclusions to more than 60 classes a week. Instructors memorized these in order to guarantee a high-quality, Starbucks®-like consistency. Regardless of who taught the 10:00 AM “Hard Core, Peace Core” class, for example, each class began and ended with the same remarks so that on any day at any time of the year guests would receive the same product.

Of course, the class design gave instructors plenty of opportunity to present the material in keeping with their own teaching styles, but each class began and ended in the same way (see the sidebars “Sample Class Introduction” and “Sample Class Conclusion” for examples). The opening and closing scripts paralleled each other, created consistency and still left space for instructors to customize each experience.

Customer Service Scripts

During my time at the Golden Door, I passed through the staff entrance hundreds of times. The message “Smile! You are onstage!” greeted me daily, painted across the ceiling. This message echoes my own philosophy—that everything that takes place inside those doors is “onstage.” Truly, all instructors (whether they are employees or independent contractors) become integral “cast members” in the “show” of fitness.

An actor takes on different character roles. Acting requires assuming a persona that is translated magically from the page to the stage. Imagine writing, or “scripting,” the specific attitudes that all “characters” in your facility should adopt. Script writers commonly include adverbs, such as *enthusiastically*, *worriedly* and *inquisitively*, to hone and refine an actor’s approach to delivering certain lines. However, this refinement is often overlooked in many customer service-oriented businesses. We cannot assume that our staff members know what roles to play if we do not provide adequate scripts with detailed lines and directions. Scripts give instructors the tools they need to play the roles you desire.

Dedicate just 5 minutes per group fitness meeting to developing scripts. During the first 2 minutes, invite someone to describe a customer service issue and how it was resolved on the spot. In the remaining 3 minutes, as a group create a script (armed with hindsight) to detail exactly how the challenge should have been corrected (if it wasn’t handled satisfactorily at the time). File this challenge into a “script book” divided into categories (“members,” “locker rooms,” “movement studio issues,” etc.). If doing so would be appropriate and helpful, have staff members read the script aloud, role-playing the incident for training purposes (see the sidebar “Creating a Fitness Staff Meeting Script Book” for suggestions on how to create your own script book).

Ultimately, the goal is for everyone to handle situations by sticking to the script as closely as possible. Each staff member becomes a true actor, responsible for memorizing lines. When you train new employees, part of their training will include reading this script book to become familiar with how your facility wants various challenges handled. For example, the script book will detail exactly what the instructor should say the next time a guest becomes disruptive because of a sign-up issue for a “reserved” bicycle. The resulting consistency can do wonders for building team camaraderie, as well as

creating brand consistency.

Since the majority of customer service issues are repeat challenges, scripting helps create the best policies possible for consistent customer service. Once employees become accustomed to documenting and scripting, they can start focusing on new issues instead of old ones.

Fitness scripts serve two purposes. First, the class scripts memorized by instructors create consistency and help spread your mission and vision, making everyone in the “show” a true cast member. Second, customer service scripts give team members the tools they need to resolve less-than-ideal issues on the studio floor.

Sidebar: Sample Class Introduction

“Namasté and good _____(morning/afternoon). My name is _____, and it’s my pleasure to welcome you to this experience called _____. The purpose of this class is _____ (cardiovascular/strength/flexibility/balance/mental training). Of course, we’re here to train the outer adult, but part of our mission is also to entertain your inner child, so it’s okay to loosen up as we try new things today. During class, I’ll be offering ways to make the movements harder, called “progressions,” and ways to make them easier, called “regressions.” The theme I want you to concentrate on today is _____. You can see that we will use the following equipment: _____. Does anyone have any issues to tell me about before we get started?”

Sidebar: Sample Class Conclusion

“And so we are brought to the conclusion of our time together. Our purpose was to _____, which we achieved together with your hard work. It’s our hope that you had fun, and that this class trained not only the outside but also the inside. Remember that our theme was _____. I hope to see you at the next class, which is _____, and I’d like to let you know that you can visit our retail shop to find ways to take this experience home with you (DVDs, music). Namasté.”

Sidebar: Creating A Fitness Staff Meeting Script Book

1. At each meeting, assign a staff member to be the “script writer.” Ask another staff member to describe an issue, noting what the specific challenge was and what was done to address it.
2. Have the staff as a group decide how to handle the situation that was presented. The best solution may be the way the situation

- was actually handled, or there may be a better way to resolve the issue while upholding the facility's mission.
3. Have the script writer document the challenge and its solution. Going forward, the staff will be required to use this scripted response.
 4. Post the new issue in the script book and notify all appropriate individuals about the new entry.