

I WANT TO TEACH GROUP FITNESS!



THE ABCs TO FORGE A CAREER PATH AS A GROUP INSTRUCTOR IN THE FITNESS INDUSTRY

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

Many aspiring group fitness instructors worldwide join the fitness industry each day. Unlike those pursuing other professions that provide health or wellness services—such as physicians and dentists—today’s interested fitness instructor typically doesn’t have a clear-cut career path available for joining our exciting profession. This article aims to shed some light by offering a proven and credible career path for future fitness instructors using the alphabet from A to Z.

A: ACCLIMATE YOUR INTEREST.

Taking a variety of group fitness classes in the profession proves key before

making decisions on which disciplines you want to teach. Both the pool and the movement studio offer different advantages, and being able to teach both offers you the ability to possibly double your income should you be interested. Be sure to try dry and aquatic environments, traditional and mindful barefoot formats, and instructor-driven (freestyle) and program-driven (pre-choreographed) formats.

B: BUY A MENTOR.

Every expert consulted for this article recommends hiring the services of a mentor. His or her expertise can save you thou-

sands of dollars in mistakes later on. Unlike the resources available in the last century, when group fitness professionals led the way by trial and error, many mentors today exist at the ready to help pave the way.

Ask at different clubs to find the most popular group fitness instructor in your area and inquire about his or her mentoring services. Ask about compensation, expecting that wisdom doesn’t come for free.

Yury Rokit, AFAA certified provider based in Hanoi, Vietnam, recommends finding someone who embodies what you want to be in your fitness career. “A mentor opens doors and points you in

the right direction. Everyone in the medical industry gets to be an intern and shadow experts, yet we have to forge our own path.”

Petra Kolber, creator of Moving to Happiness®, based in New York City, agrees, stating, “teaching is both exhilarating and terrifying, so having a mentor halves your struggles and doubles in the celebration of your success.”

C AND D: GET CARDIO-PULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR) AND DEFIBRILLATOR (AED) TRAINED.

While you’re taking classes to experience the gamut of what group exercise can offer, get trained in CPR and AED. Not only do you need this to earn most certifications, such as the AFAA Group Exercise Certification, but also to make certain you possess the knowledge, skills and training to ensure your students’ safety once you are teaching, as well as the safety of

that the internationally known certifications may mean the difference between landing the job or not. Ask yourself, “Do I want to spend major-league time with minor-league companies?”

Kolber concurs, noting, “industry recognized certifications show that you have a basic understanding of the body, how it moves, and how to structure classes in a safe and progressive way. ... The industry is still relatively new and so the research and information is still changing constantly.” After you become certified, maintaining and updating your certification (with continuing education and CPR/AED) every two years ensures you will stay on top of the new trends, topics and constant evolution of the science.

As you prepare to take a certification, be sure to spend time with practice tests, study materials, and even YouTube study groups and preparation clips. There is a wealth of information available now,

ers bring about changes in their clients with no injury.”

H-I: HIRING A NEW GROUP FITNESS INSTRUCTOR, AND INTERVIEWING AS A NEW INSTRUCTOR

This author’s article “Want That Job?” in *American Fitness*, Winter 2016, provides insight on securing work as a newly certified group fitness instructor with interviewing skills.

With your new certification, ask to start at clubs by being added to their sub list—being ready and able to teach appropriate classes when regular instructors cannot make their classes.

In addition, one of the best ways to be seen and accepted in a club is team teaching with a mentor who already has a prime-time class.

Rockit says, “Oftentimes, I’ll let a new instructor teach with me at a club where he

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students in any of the classes you attend. Just Google “CPR” and “AED” to find classes near you.

E: EDUCATE YOURSELF TO TAKE A CERTIFICATION.

While you are taking classes, you start thinking about acquiring at least one major, internationally accepted certification. This does not mean “specialty training” written for those who already have a group fitness certification and are seeking to pursue a specific modality, usually with a piece of equipment such as BOSU® or TRX®; those come second. In certifications, start big and then think small.

Sergeant Ken Weichert is an award-winning international speaker and director of START fitness, based in Nashville, Tenn. He recommends that “although there are a great deal of well-written and produced certifications in the industry, there are only a few that are recognized by the majority of the market. This suggests

which did not exist even a decade ago, that can assist you.

F: THE F WORD

“Fun” has to be an element of the reasons you get involved in the industry. If you choose disciplines just because of work you can find or classes you can secure, burnout will set in quickly. Teaching authentically must be a part of your mission to create the most positive experiences (Williamson).

G: GO FOR EDUCATION OVER PERFORMANCE.

A difference will always exist between being a fitness performer versus a fitness educator. Leslee Bender, manager of 1 Body Studio in Winter Garden, Fla., suggests that standing in front of movers in a gym involves truly teaching something. “Knowing how to teach is the best job security,” she advocates, “because performers come and go, but true teach-

ers or she wants to work. Because I introduce the new instructor, it’s a public endorsement of his or her work. When I share the energy in the same room during a class, everyone is more likely to approve of the new instructor. ... When she asks for her own regular class, management is more likely to consider her because members already accept her.”

Once you get your first job lined up, purchase professional liability insurance if you do not possess this. Possible resources appear online.

Remember that one of the huge differences between group fitness and personal training is the ability to crowd control safely in an educational environment. To that end, understanding that movements are made for people but not all people are made for movements will keep you aware that, regardless of the name of any class, a disparity among levels will always exist. Whether the class name is Introduction to Yoga Savasana Level 1, or Cardio Killer



TIPS:

“Never let a class run you! As an instructor you are the boss!” recommends Salmanson.

Rockit recommends writing out and memorizing your initial start and final phase. Try to develop a script for your unique style as an instructor.

Kolber recommends staying connected: “Using social media is a must, not to mention free. Make posts that engage your audience.”

Weichert recommends fitness volunteering. “Offer to do warm-ups and stretches for events. Pair yourself with a charity to both help the charity and bring yourself recognition.”

Bender recommends attending a professional fitness convention. “A

live continuing education event offers new research and CECs toward the renewals of your certifications.”

Conventions also let you:

- Explore how fitness presenters around the world design classes that work.
- Stay abreast of current choreography, muscle movements and fitness jargon.
- Shop for new music, equipment and information.
- Connect with other fitness professionals locally and globally.
- Attend proven class formats to take home to your clients.

This author recommends video documenting yourself. Have a friend

or colleague record nine minutes of a class you teach. The first three minutes ought to include a portion of your warm-up, the next three ought to include part of the conditioning segment, and the last three minutes should be from your final phase. Watch each clip three times. First, watch with the volume muted so you can interpret your visual cueing abilities. Second, with the volume turned up and eyes closed to determine if you can follow everything based on what you hear. Finally, watch it for your total kinesthetic approach, writing down needs for improvement.



Kettlebell Kickbox Level 4, or anything between those two extremes of intensity, there will always be someone in the class whose abilities do not match the class description perfectly.

“Knowing how to create progressions and regressions for [any skill level] will keep everyone feeling successful, always. One size does not fit all in group fitness,” says Judy Salmanson, Group Fitness Coordinator at Metropolitan YMCA of the Oranges in Wayne, N.J. She recommends keeping the focus on the students, regardless of how new you are.

“Brand new instructors can act like divas,” she laments, “and forget their audience when teaching their classes. [They must remember that] it’s about the connection you make with the people who choose to take your class instead of someone else’s.”

Towards the end of our understanding of all classes being multilevel, our ABCs of group exercise career path finish with three suggestions from this author:

J-P: JUST KEEP LAYERING MOVEMENTS, NURTURING ONLY PROGRESSIONS AND REGRESSIONS.

While base moves may remain the same, try to keep things fresh by being sure you address some version of each move to make everyone feel successful.

Q-T: QUIT REPEATING SAME TERMINOLOGY.

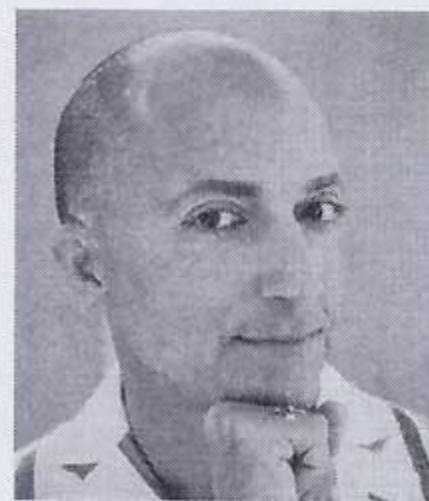
While squats, grapevines and chest stretches will most probably never change in the industry, instructors can change the way they cue movement. Just consider the many ways to rephrase “squat down and up” and you will realize the options that exist to rephrase an entire class to keep moves seeming fresh.

U-Z: UNDERSTAND VARIETY WHEN X-AMINING YOUR ZOO!

Many have likened the group exercise studio to a zoo because there are many different types of people inside. While some need coaching, others need more hands-on. Still others may need more motivational cues. To this end, today’s most successful group fitness instructors blend many different types of visual, verbal and kinesthetic cues to reach the widest percentage of “animals” in their classrooms. Research has shown this technique to be the most successful at creating positive group experiences for all (Puetz).

Carefully planning one’s group fitness career can help all new instructors make the most of the group fitness industry at the most exciting time in its history.

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