



MENTORING TIPS FROM SUCCESS STORIES

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA



Common questions for career growth

As I wrote about in "Working With a Mentor" in the September/October 2012 issue of *American Fitness* (Vol. 30, No. 5, 12-14), given the almost complete void of defined career paths in group fitness and personal training, using a mentor to fast-track your career is progressively becoming the way to stand out in an increasingly competitive fitness market. In an effort to help others grow from practical mentoring tips, and drawing from the wide variety of people I have mentored over the years, I have put together some of the most impressive success stories on which I reflect during this sabbatical year. This article exposes some of the tips and tricks that group exercise and personal training mentorees have employed to make dramatic changes in their careers, using excerpts from our interviews over the years with their permission.

CLIENT & COUNTRY: VALERIE GRANT, USA

Goals: Career development including becoming a fitness presenter.

Valerie Grant came to me over 12 years ago after a session at a convention and asked for advice about becoming a presenter.

2003

VG: "I want to be a convention presenter to help spread the message of mind-body."

LB: "Today's convention circuit needs talent that is credentialed, competent, educated and entertaining, in that order. Conventions will consider your résumé when you've got a *unique* message against the other applicants in your same field. Furthermore, to be able to give credits at

conventions, you need degrees in your field (more rare to find) or certifications by the main certification bodies in the industry (more common). Get these, offer workshops in your area to gain experience and collect the evaluations, and then I'll write you a letter of recommendation to AFAA® to become a faculty provider of credits. You must embrace this career step for reasons other than economic, because this usually doesn't pay at the start."

2010

VG: "I got my major certifications. I have downloaded and filled out the AFAA Provider packet and am approved. I'm also an instructor for the American Heart Association® of CPR and AED to make myself more marketable since instructors will always need me to stay recertified. I've become very comfortable in delivering my message to instructors from two years of local workshops, and am ready for the next step of national presenting. What and where do you suggest I apply to present?"

LB: "Congratulations on the AFAA Providership status. The fitness convention world doesn't need more *good* mind-body presenters, it needs more *great* ones. Focus on your Unique Selling Point (and we always have to be aware of our U.S.P. in this competitive market), which is that you are a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher.* So why not take that often esoteric discipline and make it practical for instructors and personal trainers?"

2012

VG: "I created and practiced teaching some programs for traditional group

exercise, mind-body and personal training professionals to teach practical, takeaway Feldenkrais® tips."

LB: "I'll help you apply to some conventions, send emails backing up your application, and make a few phone calls as well."

2013

LB: "Congratulations...you'll be invited to SCW Fitness Conventions, Asia Fitness Convention in Thailand, and PMA (Pilates Method Alliance) for Pilates."

CLIENT & COUNTRY: YURY ROCKIT MIANKOVICH, VIETNAM

Goals: Getting more clients and opening a studio.

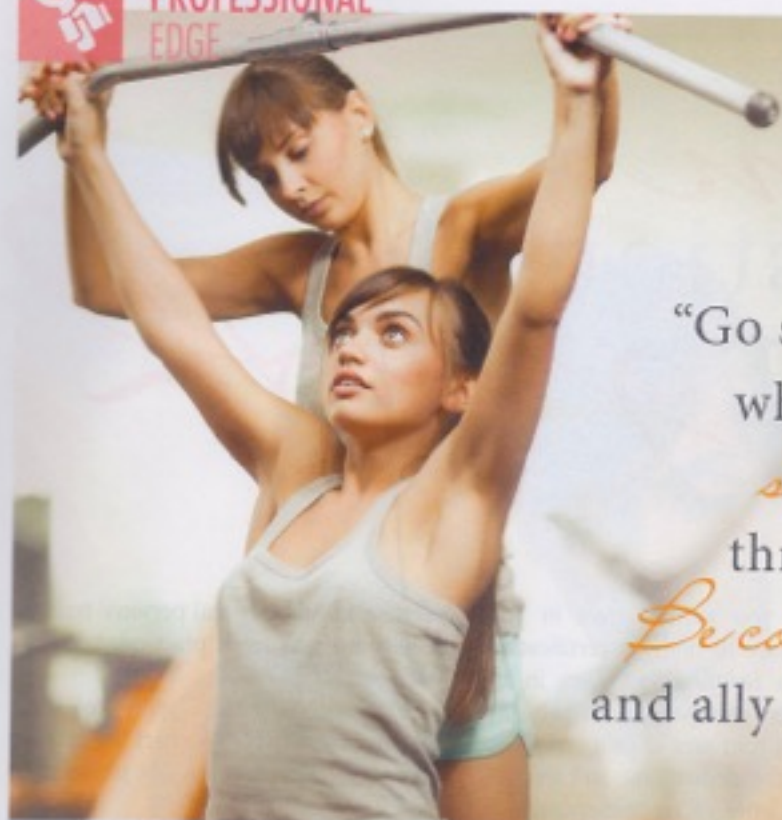
Yury Rockit came to me over four years ago as a certified personal trainer and group exercise instructor for Zumba®, working in Hanoi, Vietnam.

2010

YRM: "I want to get more personal training clients, teach more types of classes so I can work in more places, and maybe open my own studio one day."

LB: "What is your current training and teaching schedule, and who is your competition?"

YRM: "I have a personal training certification. I teach a few Zumba classes in the city at different facilities, and personal train small groups in one gym almost exclusively. There aren't many other instructors teaching Zumba, but that's changing. Since we all will be drawing from the same network of songs and



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choreography, I’m not sure that staying unique for long is a possibility.”

LB: “Since everything you are doing involves groups—both large and small—you should have a proper group fitness certification, and the AFAA Primary Certification can help boost your career by teaching you the dynamics of the classroom and other stuff you never learn in the traditional personal training world. You may also want to explore other types of classes—unique to you—you could teach in the group fitness world, mostly based on what you’re already doing. It’s also a step to becoming an AFAA Provider some day.”

2011

YRM: “I got my AFAA Primary Certification and learned so much about the group world that it even betters my Zumba class. I created a boot camp-style workout based on what I was already doing with my small group personal training sessions as you suggested, and I call it “Spirited Strength Synergy.” I started taking more detailed yoga and Pilates training with Leslee Bender, and I’m going to go study with Simon Borg-Olivier [for yoga].

LB: “Good for you in expanding from small groups to larger groups, and

furthering your fitness education. As for personal training, you may wish to consider having just a few private clients—one at a time. If they are high-profile with a job title that the community sees as valid, and if they give you permission to say you train them, this can help your own marketing. It’s always safe to have fitness income resources from both traditional facilities and your own business, and maybe you could use these clients as a future client base if you open your own studio.”

2013

YRM: “I finished my specialty yoga and Pilates training, and also added some formal education from equipment companies whose products I have been using for years, including BOSU® and TRX®, at SCW and IDEA in the USA. I found three high-profile clients and I train them at their places of work, including the owner of one of our best hotels here in Hanoi. Because they are so popular, that helps me get more clients. I’ve found a location I can rent so I’m saving money to open my own studio and work for myself.”

2014

LB: “Opening a facility takes careful planning. Go slowly and only hire those who

share your vision statement—who aren’t threatened by community. Be community-minded and ally yourself with a charity, which helps the community, but also helps with press and marketing. Give away nothing free, but also remember to create added value to your regulars with special packages, and create community. Make your place somewhere YOU would want to work, and hire for both attitude and skills.”

YRM: “I opened my studio called ‘KI!’ We’re on a street with some big-name fitness chains, and having a small studio is challenging, so we try to create more of a sense of family than the other places, including offering unique classes that the other places do not. Opening my studio was a dream come true, and now I think I’m ready to explore the world of fitness presenting to take my wellness messages to an even bigger audience.”

CLIENT & COUNTRY:
STEPHANIE WILLIAMS,
CANADA

Goals. Become a better instructor and busier personal trainer.

Feeling like she was burned out as a group ex instructor and personal trainer,

Stephanie Williams attended a fitCamp weeklong retreat to get intense mentoring on her teaching skills, which included being recorded and then critiqued by peers, self and a mentor.

2014

LB: "Looking back at the week of constructive critiquing of your teaching style, what helped you grow the most professionally in group ex?"

SW: "Two 'lightbulb' moments I remember well occurred when I realized that I grow the most by watching a recording of myself teach, and when I was struggling with the song I'd chosen for a group teaching exercise. Admittedly I was kind of nervous, standing there on camera...[Lawrence] quelled my jitters with a simple truth: 'Your participants will most remember—and remain changed by—the first 5 minutes and the last 5 minutes of your class experience, so script THOSE SECTIONS and then learn how to go with the flow for everything else.' So liberating! Musicality was a really important component of my classes... but I don't let the tail wag the dog anymore, and my classes truly have waiting lists."

LB: "And for personal training, what single tip helped you change to now boast 100% client retention?"

SW: "I ask each client at the start to quantify his or her stress, happiness and energy levels using numbers between 1 to 10, and then I redo this after each session. Tracking this over time helps me show them objectively how much better their lives are from working with me!"

CLIENT & COUNTRY: JANE WATKINS, USA

Goals. Make studio changes and expanding the business of mind-body.

Jane Watkins in Gadsden, Alabama, came to me in 2005 for mind-body mentorship. An AFAA certified personal trainer with private clients in yoga and Pilates, she taught in the same studio for 20 years but knew that she wanted to expand her role in the field as she was feeling underappreciated, underused, and "stuck" in her teaching routine. Fear kept her from moving forward.

2010

LB: "Remember that, if nothing changes, nothing changes. You can't expect to stay in the same place, in the same role, and expect the universe automatically to offer you positive shifts. Why not take yourself to a yoga retreat, change your surroundings, and meditate on what you really love about teaching? When you return, give yourself a few extra days from work at that club and investigate the opportunities in your geographic area from 'the competition.' Remember that changes are supposed to be uncomfortable because nobody ever grows from a comfortable change for the better."

2012

JW: "Your prompting me to teach from personal experience influenced me to create my Healthy Back class because, years ago, back surgery led me to Physicalmind's rehabilitation program. I renewed my passion to include spinal health in my own teaching to help others reap the same benefits of mindful movement. I not only met with the owner of the competition called Absolute Fitness Gym, but she offered me both additional numbers and types of classes, opportunities to do workshops for students with a generous split on the revenue, and introduce my Ayurvedic knowledge. It was really scary to make the change, but I'm so glad I did because now I'm growing. I learned how to get out of my own way."

LB: "Your Healthy Back class is your most popular because you're passionately teaching about it from personal experience. Furthermore, without soliciting the students from the old studio where you used to work, they all followed you because of your talent. This shows how today even mind-body programs can be instructor-driven, not studio-driven. Why not keep honing your craft now that you have this new venue to explore and share your own interests and talents? Keep asking yourself about where you could have more training in your goal to be both popular and professional to teach your passion. The advantage to your geographic area is that you can become a huge fish in a small pond."

2013

JW: "I saved up for my bucket list to study with my gurus Lynn Jacobs, Tias Little, Sarah Powers, Erich Schiffmann. They inspired me to convert from my 200 hour Yoga Alliance registry to the 500 hour registry. I also attended your fitCamp in Puerto Rico."

2014

LB: "Since you're already doing workshops for consumers, you may also wish to consider inviting instructors and personal trainers to your events because you're already preparing workshops. If fitness professionals (in addition to consumers) also attend your workshops, you can double your income. To be marketable to instructors, you must offer CEUs, so explore becoming an AFAA Provider, whose packet is available online at bit.ly/AFAAProviderPacket2015. Imagine how much more of a draw your workshops will be when they will offer CEUs for instructors in your area who can stay certified without always having to travel far for credits."

2015

JW: "I'm now offering workshops to my greatest class numbers to date, teaching my widest variety of classes, and even getting private clients from my group classes like Pilates-yoga fusion, Yin yoga and hot yoga. I'm preparing to offer workshops for both instructors and students as an AFAA Provider, too." **AF**

LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA, has been a contributing writer for American Fitness for several years and has won multiple fitness international awards, including the 2010 Iner IDEA Inspiration Award. He has been mentoring personal trainers, managers and group exercise instructors in the industry for decades. From mentoring with Skype to running mentoring retreats all over the world, Lawrence enjoys opening fitness doors for worthy professionals. Lawrence offers fitCamps and Wellness Retreats at exciting international destinations. Find Lawrence at www.findLawrence.com.