

Reinventing the Wheel

Eight Tips for Keeping a Fresh Approach for Both Clients and Classes

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In the uniquely evolving world of group fitness and personal training, today's professional needs to keep a finger on the pulse of the industry to stay ahead and on top of the trends. To do that, professionals must reinvent themselves at least once per month. This does not mean a complete change in identity, of course, but rather a constant recombination of two essential aspects of our business: what we do and how we do it. In principles such as Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demands and General Adaptation Syndrome research tells us that the more we train the body in the same way, the less it responds because over time we become efficient at all types of training.¹ To bring change to what and how we train clients, the following tips may help fitness professionals make small adjustments to reap big benefits.

THE What

In order to keep sessions fresh in terms of what fitness professionals do, one needs to stay abreast of continuing education. Web sites like www.afaa.com provide ideas for new class exercise formats. Publications like *American Fitness* yield practical tools for today's professionals to create effective change to training approaches.

Additionally, continuing education conventions like AFAA, APEX and scifitness.com offer in-depth workshops for professionals to learn new techniques and motor pathway skills in functional training.

THE How

The following eight tips will help bring a fresh approach to training each time.

Tip 1: Music

Changing the type of music, whether in the foreground or background, stimulates the brain-body connection with a different sensory experience. Even if the type of music was the only change in a training or group session, the overall feel might be different because the brain has to coordinate body movement to a new type of neuromuscular stimulation.² Professionals often get bored of teaching to the same music, but changing it can increase their own motivation. Finally, silence is also a valid option sometimes. Just imagine the same yoga sequence done to fitness-mech-body music, popular dance tracks and done in complete silence.

Tip 2: Order

Changing the order of exercises in strength, choreography or even flexibility-enhancing movement patterns not only challenges

the body in a new neuromuscular way, but also makes the overall experience feel different. Even if the only thing changed is the order—and not the actual movements themselves—the whole workout atmosphere takes on a novel quality. In a strength-training class, for example, instead of finishing a workout with abdominals and spinal erectors, reversing that sequence may surprise both the muscles and minds of the students in a positive way. Thus changing the approach to working from core to extremities.

Tip 3: Equipment

If a particular session involves equipment, try removing that piece of equipment for a section of the class to see how well students can reproduce movement patterns without depending on a workout aide. For instance, take a step combination to the floor for a few blocks of music. Similarly, if a particular class does not use equipment, consider adding an appropriate piece of stable or labile resistance, such as a floor pattern to an unstable balancing ball for a few repetitions. Adding a small ball to mindful movements of yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi can increase kinesthetic awareness while simultaneously adding weight resistance. For strength training, combining loadsliding disks with almost any weight-bearing movement pattern further challenges the stability and mobility of exercisers.

Tip 4: Fusion

Consider applying an element of fusion to your training style if you are not already doing so. Fusion, or "hybrid training," occurs with the combination of two or more modes, techniques or pieces of equipment that do not coexist in a traditional approach. If the purpose of your class is to train cardiovascular endurance, consider different disciplines for achieving that purpose within your allotted timeframe, such as adding some floor sports drills or hi-lo cardio into an existing Step class. If you have a multi-purpose class like cardiovascular endurance and strength, consider different modes or equipment to achieve your purpose, such as using a balance ball for both or fusing stepping and sculpting skills using beam balancing training. At very least, blending just 20-minute sections from three of your favorite classes will give you a new 60-minute format, with no additional work preparation on your behalf.

Tip 5: Warm-up and Class Introductions

Think of the morning NBC News Today Show. Every time the dock strikes seven we hear Matt Lauer's voice saying "Good morning," except when there is a considerable world event. During such

events, the introduction changes and we give our eyes to the television because it is not just another day of news. Equally, changing the way you introduce and begin a class can elicit a feeling of anticipation among clients. Consider the following possibilities for starting your session in a different way and creating a unique experience:

- Begin movement patterns in silence with a smile, without music, but using only visual cueing to get everyone's attention. Start speaking after the warm-up.
- Begin with a new style of music, even outside of your comfort zone.
- Begin with a different tone of voice, slightly higher or lower than your normal pitch.
- Begin your class from a different location in the gym or movement studio, perhaps in the back, and invite everyone to turn around and face you there.
- Start from a different position: if you always start standing, begin on the floor in a variety of positions.
- Introduce the class first in a different language.
- Start building excitement and the "I-want-to-learn-to-do-that" attitude in today's choreography by showing the finished "product" that the class will learn.

Tip 6: Progression/Regression Order

As responsible professionals, we know that we should try to show both progressions and regressions of movement difficulty to better include all of our participants. Consider changing up your presentation style. If you normally show movements in their progression state and then show regressions to make them easier, consider starting in the easiest format and then layering progressions, or vice versa. Changing up the way you present layers of difficulty will make participants listen a bit more attentively because they will note the difference in your technique and wonder what is coming up next.

Tip 7: Clothing

The old adage proves true: people sometimes judge books by their covers. Similarly, we are sometimes judged by what we wear. To keep a class feeling fresh, think about either changing the style of clothing you normally wear for a particular class or treat yourself to a new outfit. For example, wearing a ski suit with goggles to introduce a class could creatively signal a strength training class based on ski drills (and subsequently shedding the layers of course). Instead of wearing traditional white for yoga, a hip-hop outfit would definitely tell clients that something new is in store.

Tip 8: Assign Homework

Assigning segments of a training session class for participants to do at home, such as abdominal flexions or spinal extensions, frees up time for you to employ new techniques in class. Giving homework shows the clients how much you care about them because you are looking after them beyond class time.

Keeping classes and client sessions fresh is an important part of our job as professionals. Occasionally making small changes to surprise participants can help maintain a high level of energy and excitement. Convincing participants of the value of change is also

part of our job, because to get what we've never had, we have to sometimes do what we have never done. **AF**

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