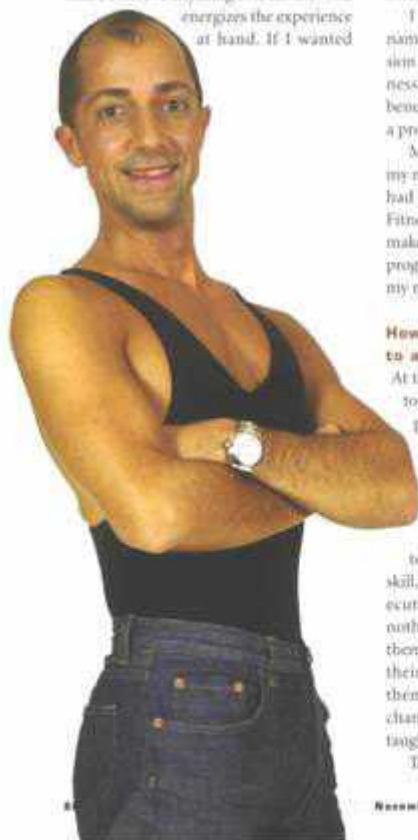


## Lawrence Biscontini talks about balance and inspiration.

The exuberant energy of 2004 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year Lawrence Biscontini precedes him. He is committed to developing distinctive science-based programs that translate to all fitness levels. A true believer in motivating the masses, Biscontini frequently travels to all corners of the world delivering the message of wellness.

### What is your favorite music mix? Why?

My favorite commercial music is Dynamix. I also love anything that elevates and energizes the experience at hand. If I wanted



music to be mere background, then I'd choose silence, and sometimes do I pick songs for their inspirational power and ability to move my chakras. For music to be my "favorite," it must have the power to transcend a class and rock a room, whether it is a dinner party, a step class or a naturally choreographed Greek sunset.

### What sources do you tap for new ideas?

My colleagues humble me with their cutting-edge programs. At every convention I take sessions whenever I can. Sara Kooperman (for versatility between land and aqua), Mary Sanders (for aquatic research) and Len Kravitz (for land research) always command my attention.

I also keep my eyes and ears open to names around me: parks, restaurants, fusion foods and even trends in outdoor fitness. If people are doing it and the benefits outweigh the risks, then we need a program to get the message out.

Most importantly, I take every idea to my mother. She smoked for years and has had heart valve replacement surgery. Fitness is still foreign to her, although she makes strides daily. If my ideas, timing and programs seem doable to her, then I know my message is for the masses.

### How do you teach to a multilevel class?

At the onset of an exercise or class, I try to introduce the purpose. I explain the principle of progression and regression. I teach at a moderate level of difficulty and offer ways to make things easier (regression) or more challenging (progression). Instructors often don't teach *independence* to students. When you offer a base skill, give the entire class a moment to execute and repeat while you simply do nothing or walk around the room. Give them opportunities to be responsible for their own movements. When you ask them to hold a pattern as you show a change, they'll be able to because you've taught them how to be independent.

Teach to the gregarious front, the mid-

dle and especially the taciturn back row at all times. This will give you a true sense of class cohesion and tell you if your progressions/regressions are adequate and appropriate. Finally, at the end of class run the choreography in the original base move combinations. This allows participants who kept the options simple to feel included because you've come back to them. It shows those who progressed how you returned full circle to the beginning.

### What was the smartest thing you did to grow your career?

The most important thing I did was truly adopt the Inspire the World to Fitness™ theme into my personal life and my business mission statement. I expanded outside the club setting to include reaching my mother, volunteering my time to those who can't pay and finding success stories. I cofounded Fitness Group 2000 (FG 2000), a company that provides grass-roots and cutting-edge continuing education programs to underserved parts of the world. FG 2000 helps me stay focused on what's important: fitness education for those who really need it (for more information, visit [www.findlawrence.com](http://www.findlawrence.com)).

### What is your favorite warm-up/cooldown/abs section?

Because I believe in changing muscle stimuli often, I don't recommend any specific modality, because warm-ups and cooldowns should be movement and mode specific. Different individuals need different exercises and programming.

Having said that, my favorite land warm-up and cooldown now is taking our participants outside to walk a grass labyrinth on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean, followed by invigorating chi kung. In the water, I like to make a human labyrinth and walk or run participants in circles that get smaller and then reverse direction. My favorite core workout is a combination of abdominal, quadratus lumborum and spinal extensor training with a Reebok Core Board, a BOSU®, a resistance ball and a foam roller.



**Who is your most inspiring class participant?**

Years ago, I taught a class in a poor province in the Philippines. We exercised in a humid room that had a floor of sand, no air conditioning and a boom box. This one sweet lady gave me homemade cookies after class. I remember thinking at the time that if she diminished her body fat and increased her coordination training, it would improve her quality of life.

During the recent IDEA World convention in San Diego, a Filipino woman came up to me and gave me a hug. "I'm so proud of you," said the lean, energetic woman—the same one who took my class 10 years ago! She is now a certified group fitness leader. She handed me a small package of cookies she had brought all the way from the Philippines. "This time," she said, "they're low fat and whole wheat. You started me on a path and here I am—an IDEA attendee! Thank you, Lawrence!" That has made all the rewarding difference.

**What advice do you have for new instructors?**

Find a mentor and take classes from him or her regularly, and occasionally from other instructors who have alternate approaches. Team teach when possible and invite criticism with an open heart.

Try to teach only what you truly love, and trust that both the people and the money will follow. Only ask people to do an exercise when you can state its purpose, and get into the habit of telling peo-

ple what that purpose is. When setting up exercises, find stability first and then add mobility; explore the relationship between them. Cultivate relentless perseverance. Remember that, on a grand scale, everything matters, and on a small scale, nothing matters. Write "yes" on Post-it® notes and put them all over your dwelling. Hang trees to stay grounded. Entertain the child and educate the adult in everyone. Do what makes you smile and try to do it better each time. My late father said that we shouldn't stop playing because we grow old, for we will grow old if we stop playing. Finally, from Zen, remember to teach only love, for that is what you are.

**How do you avoid injuries?**

For me, fitness is more about wellness, which in turn is a trilogy of body, brain and breath. To avoid injuries, I try not only to train—but also to nurture—each of these facets daily. Before going to sleep I ask myself, "What did I do to train and entertain (nurture) the body, brain and breath today?" My mentors tell me to keep track of overall balance. If I come up too short or too strong in any one aspect, I strive to balance the trilogy the next day.

I've also learned to listen to the little voice that tells me when I am feeling too tired to go for a run. I try to remember that I have to rest as hard as I train. Depending on my schedule, on some days I may need to nurture my brain more, on some my body, and on others just my breath. ■