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The Life in Our Years

A Look at What's Special About the Over-50 Fitness Population with a 5-4-3-2-1 Approach **By Lawrence Biscontini, MA**

Do you train the over fifty-age market? The *World Health Organization* tells us that by 2030, an estimated 20% of Americans will have passed their 65th birthday, which will include over 70 million people. As the International Council on Active Aging has requested, the term "active aging" should replace the previously-used term "senior" in most instances, and apply to anyone chronologically over fifty-years young (ICAA). Since having a mindset for an

inclusive approach with this population becomes paramount for all fitness professionals, the following tips serve as a quick tune-up for working with active agers.

Understanding the Demographic

Bernadette C. O'Brien figures among the most chronologically-enriched of canfitpro presenters ever. At 86, she travels, advocating the benefits of movement for active agers. "We are a uniquely heterogeneous group in the gym," she says, "because almost

all of us have different physical issues, different amounts of disposable income, ample amounts of free time, and hearts that can be the most loyal to group fitness instructors we love." O'Brien suggests that, towards our goal of inclusive teaching, each movement coach be prepared with appropriate progressions and regressions to make everyone feel successful." The take-away here for instructors and trainers, therefore, is to teach in levels of 1, 2, and 3, and explain what each level offers beyond "easier and harder."

Appreciation of Time: This population does not like to waste time. "We come because we have to, because we need to, because it's not a luxury but a necessity," O'Brien says. "Instructors can make sessions and classes fun, but they need to make every movement count." O'Brien recommends reminding classes and clients about the



Using a 5-4-3-2-1 Approach:

This author recommends counting down from five to remember practical, take-away tips for training the active aging market.

• **5 and 4 Types of Ages:** While 5 types of ages exist (Chronological, Functional, Psychological, Social, and Biological), the only age we cannot train is chronological age. Movement coaches should plan to have some skills and drills to incorporate training for each of the four ages we can train in each training session.

• **3 Planes:** Incorporate a Three-Dimensional Warm-Up with clients to be sure that we train sagittal plane movements first, frontal plane second, and transverse plane third. Not only does this help warm-up the spine in the safest way possible, but it makes sense since it functionally mirrors the way we live. First, we start our day with movements in the sagittal plane (usually out of bed to the bathroom), then reaching for objects to the sides, and then twisting after the spine appropriately becomes ready (McGill).

• **2 Sides of the Brain:** Drawing from an understanding of the brain's functions, incorporate into each session at least one skill for the left brain and one skill for the right brain in both physical and mental sections of our workouts (Brom).

• **1 Main Purpose:** "We want to make champions of living," says O'Brien, so we should design programs to make everyone able to live the concept of self-efficacy for each one's needs.

Working with this population may require planning and sensitivity for a plethora of issues, but the rewards of assisting everyone embrace aging with independence far outweigh the skills.

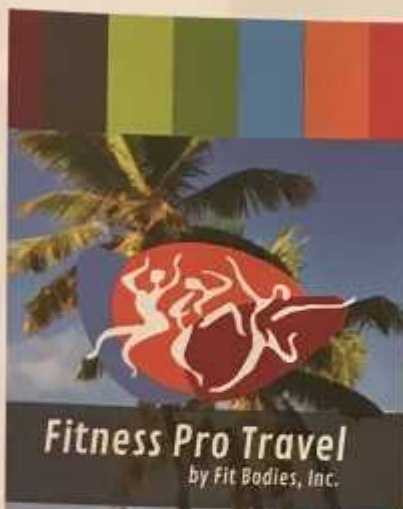
Lawrence Biscontini, MA, has been teaching active agers and writing books and articles for training them for decades, including contributing to the canfitpro Active Aging online certification with video content and his recent book *SCW Active Aging Manual: the Life in our Years*. He is glad that the ICAA recommends using "Active Agers" over "seniors," because, at 53, he forms an active part of the demographic about which he teaches and trains. Lawrence has received various presenter awards from canfitpro, and his most recent book of fiction is *Stories of Color*. Find Lawrence at www.findLawrence.com.



functional purpose of each move. "When you tell them how anything will make the rest of their day easier, and specifically, they connect on a deeper level to the movement that much more," says O'Brien. For example, when warming up the anterior tibialis in standing stationary marching, telling the participants "this will help our ankles get stronger for the rest of the day and help reduce falls," participants get an instant motivation for a desired behavior.

Class Length: It's About Time

Regarding time, offering both 30 and 60 minute land and aqua classes can be a great draw for this market, for different reasons. Shorter classes appeal to those who are new and unfamiliar with group movement, and longer classes apply to those who have the capacity to endure that timeframe.



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