

american **FITNESS**®

NASM's
OPTIMUM
PERFORMANCE
TRAINING™

WELLNESS:
FROM MOVEMENT
TO PROFESSION

**NOAH
GALLOWAY**

EARN CEUs:
FEEDING
THE ATHLETE

OVERCOMING AND EXCELLING

WINTER 2016 \$6.75

WANT THAT JOB?



YOUR INTERVIEW CAN
BE MORE IMPORTANT
THAN YOUR SKILLS!

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

With the growing interest in certification standards in the fitness industry, a frequently overlooked area is that of interview skills. Often, we can get so involved in finding new places of employment that we lose sight of how to make the interview process work on our behalf as much as possible. Most of our time spent getting certified works toward the actual examinations, not acquiring successful interviewing skills. The following lessons from some of the experts in the industry can assist even the seasoned fitness professional to secure a new position in what can become the most positive of processes.

Today's professional must remember the two most important words that begin with the letter "p." *The Crown Rises*, an on-demand course available at afua.com from this author, reminds candidates seeking new positions that being equally "popular" and "professional" proves key.

For "popular," keep in mind that no manager wants to hire you thinking you are so new to the industry that you have no following, and therefore could not be popular from the start. When discussing your skills, incorporating specific comments like "My clients/my classes tell me they love that I ____" and "People love my ____ because ____," which shows you already bring elements to the fitness party that make you popular.

For "professional," remember that hiring managers want to see you "dressed" professionally, both physically (your total exterior look) and metaphorically (your résumé with certifications and specialty trainings).

During the actual interview, attitude and personality outweigh individual skills. "I can always teach new skills, but I can never pay someone enough to change their intrinsic personality to be a fun team player interested in helping others achieve physical and mental goals for life," says Deborah Puskarich, the group exercise director for Dr. Kenneth Cooper for the Cooper Fitness Center at Craig Ranch in McKinney, Texas. She believes that the in-person interview in a fitness environment is key to understanding the applicant. "A strong, professional overall appearance and energetic personality speak to me more than the written résumé."

DO SOME HOMEWORK

Securing employment at a new facility first involves doing some groundwork. During the interview process, the more familiarity a candidate can show with the way things work at a facility, the more he or she can convince

a hiring manager of having a team player mentality.

A potential group fitness instructor candidate should not only be acquainted with the movement schedule, but could also request to take a class or two ahead of time to be able to incorporate observations into the interview. Positive comments like, "I loved the energy of the Strength class I took with Lisa, and it's very reassuring to know that our styles and energy are similar," and "I approach teaching yoga in the same way that Yuri does in his format, so I'm even more convinced that my talents are a good match for this party," let the hiring manager know that the candidate in question took time and initiative to find out more about the club as a possible place of work.

A prospective personal trainer could ask to shadow a current personal trainer for a few hours to gain perspective on the training methodology at a particular location. Positive comments such as, "I like how the personal trainers here really interact with their clients during training and then later on social media," and "What I loved about following Janie with her clients was how she always stayed at their eye level, moving up and down, which is something that I do, too," show the hiring manager how carefully you not only observed the personal training approaches, but also followed them similarly, presenting you as a good match.

Sara Kooperman, JD, works as CEO of SCW Fitness, based in Chicago, and filters dozens of résumés, conducting interviews on a daily basis. "During an interview, I want to know that a candidate has done some homework to find out about us. Did he or she study us online and find out where we are expanding? Does the candidate also know a bit about our competition?"

Teresa Tenca Hall, MS, owns, manages and teaches group fitness classes at several Nautilus Sport and Fitness Centers in Texas. Like Kooper-

TABLE 1 FROM TERESA T. HALL, MS

When coming to interview for a personal trainer or Group Exercise position for me:

DO

- Check your social media because I will use it to help form my opinion of your social personality before I hire you to be social for me at our club
- Have music prepared both electronically and on CD; most clubs are phasing out CDs
- Tell me why you want to work for me specifically at my locations
- Look at my schedule so you can tell me exactly what classes you are qualified and available to teach as well as classes that you aspire to teach in the future
- Tell me you have a passion for learning/education no matter how many years of experience you have so I understand that you are interested in continuing education in an industry that changes
- Tell me what you love about our facility and classes you have taken

DO NOT

- Say it's because you want to be able to work out close to home and get paid "to get your cardio in"
- Show up in a dress and heels if we have arranged for a group fitness audition for me to see your movement skills; dress appropriately
- Say that you currently aren't teaching or don't have any experience at all
- Tell me that you have no current certification, or a certification that you know has lapsed
- Tell me what's wrong with the other clubs you've worked for
- Tell me how you took classes at my club and found the teachers lacking because you could do it so much better



man, she has decades of experience in hiring fitness staff in a variety of capacities. "Back in the 1990s," she says, "there was no certification or guide book on managing gyms and hiring great staff, so I had to learn as I went. Because I'm also a trainer and teacher, I've kept a respect for the jobs for which I'm hiring, and that's important. My practical suggestions in Table 1 (page 13) come from true stories because I couldn't make this stuff up."

DRESS THE PART

If you have the privilege of advance notice before the interview, send a friendly confirmation email stating how excited you are to

- When asked a question, try to answer in two sentences maximum, and be clear. It always helps to restate the question before answering. This ensures that you understand exactly what is being asked, gives you a moment to think about the answer, and helps you avoid going off on a tangent. Let your true personality shine during the interview; show the company what it will get if you are hired.
- Prepare in your mind your "top three qualities and accomplishments" about why you are ideal for a job and be sure to weave them into your answers when appropriate.

Professional fitness attire shows you care when you are actively seeking a fitness position.

meet with the hiring team and thanking them again for giving you the chance for consideration. In addition to being a bit early for the interview, dressing in a professional manner shows that you take the opportunity seriously. "You don't have to dress in a business suit," Puskarič explains, "because I want to know how you will look in fitness clothes when you work for me. However, please take more time putting yourself together than you would between classes, or after training your eighth client in a row."

PRACTICAL TIPS

In addition to dress, the following tips may help you sell your best qualities during a live interview:

- Breath fresheners before an interview may be necessary, but avoid gum during an interview.²

- Prepare in your mind the "top three questions" you want asked of you during the interview. Usually, interviewers ask at the end "Do you have any questions for me?" or "Is there anything else you want me to know about you that we did not address in this interview?" at which point you can refer to your prepared topics in an effort to put forth your best characteristics.
- Be human. When appropriate, let the interviewer know what your likes, interests and hobbies are beyond the gym. Adding another layer to your personality beyond the lines of the résumé can improve your chances of being hired.³
- Kooperman suggests that at a minimum, one element of the résumé have originality or flair. Also, she says to "bring at least three copies of your résumé with you even though



you have already emailed it. Have separate, printed reference letters that include cell phone numbers and email addresses so the prospective employer can have easy access to your referrals."

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Show interested initiative that refrains from being aggressive. Follow up with the interviewer by phone or email to express your gratitude for the opportunity to showcase your skills and abilities. If it proves true, this is also the ideal time to reiterate your certainty with phrases like, "After spending time with you, I'm even more convinced than ever that I am a great match for your facility." As long as you are not nagging, such contact from you indicates how eagerly positive you are to begin at this company. "If I am torn deciding between two almost-identical candidates," Puskarich says, "the deciding factor for me is which of the two really wants to show me that he or she wants the job more."
- Buddy Macuba, group fitness manager for Equinox in California suggests sending a thank you to the hiring people. He says that doing so "lets the manager know you could be a future star with their team." On the email, you could leave a YouTube link showcasing some of your best class teaching. He advocates always glancing at someone's work this way. Recently, he says, "I hired someone after being very impressed from her online presence in a real teaching environment. I looked at some of her videos and knew instantly that she was sincere, open-hearted, professional, knowledgeable, and had an amazing personality that I didn't even see on her résumé."

A WORD ON RÉSUMÉS

The sections of your CV, or curriculum vitae, of 2016 are not the same as even a few years ago. Today's résumé exists not only on

paper, but also virtually on sites like LinkedIn® as well. Consider these tips:

- Update your versions of résumés in all locations simultaneously and stay on top of keeping these current.
- Your CV should have your Facebook (whether it be a friend or professional page), Twitter, Instagram, Skype and LinkedIn names because your prospective employer will be investigating it anyway; make it easy.
- Any pertinent links that showcase your talents, such as on a YouTube channel, should appear here.
- A small headshot in color or black and white at the top right of the résumé page will personalize your résumé and draw in the reader's attention.

Hiring for a new position in fitness can seem daunting. Taking into consideration some of the tips in this article can help make the process more positive, and successful, for everyone involved. **AF**

LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA, is an AFSA contributing writer who has won multiple awards in the fitness industry including the 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award from ECA. Lawrence has been mentoring and consulting in the fitness arena for over three decades, gaining a great deal of experience in both the interviewing and selection processes. Find Lawrence at www.findlawrence.com.

REFERENCES:

1. ROCHE, E. "WORDS FOR THE WISE." HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW, 75, NO. 1 (JAN 2007): 24-27.
2. POST, P. "ETIQUETTE AT WORK." BOSTON GLOBE, NOV 27, 2005.
3. SOLNICE, S., ET AL. MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IN HEALTH CARE: HELPING PATIENTS CHANGE BEHAVIOR. NEW YORK: GUILFORD, 2008.