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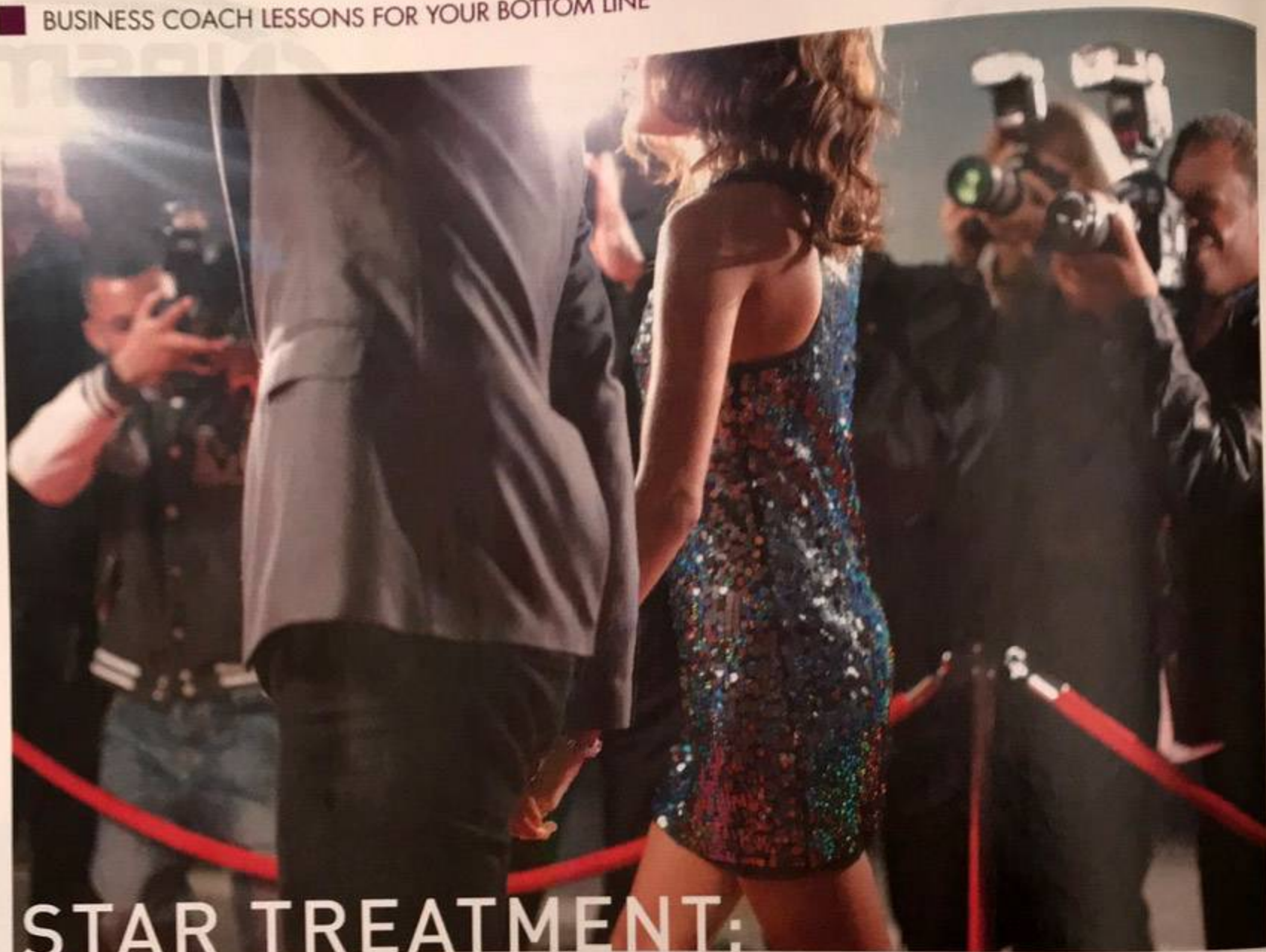
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FALL 2017



STAR TREATMENT: Finding and Training High-Profile Clients

Trainers with celebrity clients share their secrets for elevating the wellness and performance of the glitterati.

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

If you've dreamed of training famous actors, athletes, business people or other celebrities, it's important to realize that you can—as long as you do certain things right and avoid doing certain things wrong. You also need a unique job mindset and a special understanding of these kinds of clients.

Celebrity clients expect three things above all else:

1. CONFIDENTIALITY. You can never reveal anything said or done in your training sessions unless you're given the "okay" in advance.

2. FLEXIBILITY. Stars' schedules, goals and demands can shift like the winds; you must be able to adapt.

3. TOP-TIER PROFESSIONALISM. It's all business with the famous. They're not in this to be your friend, and you have to bring your A-game to every session.

Now, let's walk through each of these:

Can You Keep a Secret?

Confidentiality must be absolute with celebrity clients. Because you'll be work-

ing with well-known people dressed in fitness clothes who are not camera-ready, they must feel comfortable around you. You may even have to sign confidentiality forms and turn off your mobile phone—no selfies unless they want one. "I carry my cellphone when walking the Hollywood Hills outdoors with my clients only for emergency purposes, but otherwise it remains off," says Jeffrey Bornman, a trainer who works with celebrities in Hollywood, California. "Your client has to know that whatever happens between the two of you will stay between the two of you. Trust is the most important issue for them when letting their guard down to work with you in such a personal capacity."

How Flexible Are You?

Celebrities need a trainer who understands their special needs and expectations. You'll have to accommodate ever-changing schedules without showing a hint of frustration at tardiness, missed appointments and changed programs. You'll have to be

okay with clients multitasking—taking urgent calls or texts during sessions.

Todd Durkin, MA, CSCS, founder of Fitness Quest 10 in San Diego, agrees that having a high-profile client comes with unique responsibilities that transcend the normal 60-minute interaction. “While I treat all my clients with the same energy, focus and attention,” he explains, “many times high-profile clients need more time outside of our session with additional accountability and motivation. Because they are often very busy, it’s easy for them to get distracted and off course, so it’s my job to make sure they are doing what they should be doing when they are *not* with me.”

Can You Be “All Business”?

“Whereas some clients are not very serious about being their absolute best, celebrities tend to be more serious about results and appreciate finding a trainer who can facilitate that,” says Doug Brignole, a Hollywood trainer and champion bodybuilder who has worked with many celebs over the years. “Celebrity clients have high expectations of their service providers but don’t want to feel that their trainer is star-struck by them.”

And make sure you understand that a famous performer’s appearance is a product they use to build their brand. New York City-based Dominique Adair, MS, RD, explains that “[while] people are people in terms of their response to exercise, I have found the ‘appearance stakes’ are considerable with very-high-visibility clients. It helps me to think I am working with a brand in addition to a person.”

Jennifer Horvath, Pilates teacher trainer for Body Harmonics in Montreal, agrees: “Because they are a commodity, unlike most other clients, celebrities rarely have time for, nor want to, chitchat or get to know you like your regular clients. They are mostly all business and they just want to stick to the workout for their specific, measurable goals.”

Why It’s Good to Have VIP Clients

The benefits of working with famous clients generally outweigh the complications. “Having high-profile clients lends a strong element of social proof for your training business,” says Michael Piercy,

MS, NASM-CPT, CES, PES, CSCS, recipient of the 2017 IDEA Personal Trainer of the Year Award and owner of The LAB Performance & Sports Science center in Fairfield, New Jersey.

Furthermore, says Durkin, “If they trust and like you and you have a solid relationship with them, they have the ability to open up opportunities in their

sphere of influence. And the generous ones take care of you and your family. [NFL quarterback] Drew Brees, whom I’ve been training for 15 years, recently took my entire family to Kauai for an incredible vacation.”

The marketing voice and influence of famous clients can be a game-changer, says Mark Fisher, who trains elite Broadway

Tips from the Pros for Landing Famous Clients

Looking to find some higher-profile clients? Here are some tips from the experts:

- ★ **“Start by looking current, sleek and professional** in all of your marketing materials, from your Facebook page to website to business card. Have a consistent message, hashtag and image you represent. Project that consistency.”
—Jeffrey Bornman
- ★ **“Develop relationships with their ‘handlers.’** All high-profile clients work with handlers like agents, talent managers and publicists. By building a relationship with them, you position yourself to serve their high-profile clients.”
—Mark Fisher
- ★ **“Become the best in your field.** When the A-listers come to town and they need referrals, you will be the one referred if you are the best of the best in your city and you’ve built up a reputation.”
—Jennifer Horvath
- ★ **“Just ask the universe.** Put out there to your current classes and clients that you’d love to take on a higher-profile client and would love your tribe to help you make that happen. Ask everyone to introduce you to just one high-profile potential client. Soon you are meeting neighbors who are news anchors, friends of friends who are announcers on the local television station, and your children’s president of the Parent Teacher Association. Everyone knows someone.”
—Lawrence Biscontini
- ★ **“Start with one celebrity client, and then encourage him or her to tell a friend about you.** I was referred to a client named Dr. Harold Karpman—a Beverly Hills cardiologist—by his son. Soon, Dr. Karpman referred me to the Gavins. [John Gavin is a former U.S. ambassador and a well-known actor from the 1950s and ’60s, and his wife Constance Towers is a regular on *General Hospital* and has appeared in a number of feature films]. Soon, the Gavins referred me to Pat McQueeney [who was the manager for Harrison Ford]. McQueeney then referred me to Mace Neufeld [producer of many feature films]. Neufeld then referred me to Phillip Noyce [prominent movie director]. Noyce then referred me to Colleen Camp [former TV star and now producer of feature films]. And now Camp is suggesting introducing me to a number of other high-profile celebrities.”
—Doug Brignole

performers in New York City. "Among our many Tony Award-winning Broadway stars, we've trained choreographer Jerry Mitchell [of *Legally Blonde*, *Kinky Boots* and *On Your Feet*] for many years," Fisher said. "He's been a very public advocate for Mark Fisher Fitness, which has helped grow and legitimize our brand among the Broadway community."

Finally, you can make considerably more money training celebrities—not merely because they can afford higher rates, but because of all of the extra effort you must extend, including strange hours, travel time and extra preparation. Those hours are billable, of course.

It's a Team Effort

The personal trainer of a celebrity sometimes has to coordinate with other professionals in the star's orbit. "I have clients who are under pressure to prepare for different

types of roles, like needing to have weight gain or weight loss," says Bornman. "So I have to stay in constant contact with their nutritionist and even therapists to coordinate their overall wellness so they can achieve their SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely] goals as needed."

Adair adds: "My job as nutritionist for most celebrities means I am responsible for the nutrition arena myself and then act as a wellness coordinator for everything else including hiring others, composing medical teams and sourcing exercise equipment."

Confronting the Complications

Preparation is key to handling the ups and downs of

high-profile clients. Bornman recommends a fair—but strict—cancellation policy. "All of my clients know that I invoice them for all canceled sessions with less than 48 hours advance notice. They also know that I can try to rearrange things to create last-minute sessions, but at a markup starting at 100%."

Self-care also becomes paramount



TODD DURKIN, MA, CSCS, OWNER OF FITNESS QUEST 10 IN SAN DIEGO, SAYS THAT HAVING A HIGH-PROFILE CLIENT COMES WITH UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT TRANSCEND THE NORMAL 60-MINUTE INTERACTION. DURKIN RECENTLY JOINED LADAINIAN TOMLINSON, (INSET) WHO HE TRAINED DURING HIS 11-YEAR CAREER IN THE NFL,

TO CELEBRATE THE RUNNING BACK'S INDUCTION TO THE PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME. DURKIN HAS ALSO TRAINED NEW ORLEANS SAINTS' SUPER BOWL CHAMPION QUARTERBACK DREW Brees FOR MANY YEARS, DURING WHICH TIME Brees HAS LED ALL NFL QUARTERBACKS IN TOUCHDOWNS, PASSING YARDS AND 300-YARD GAMES.

PHOTO: FITNESS QUEST 10



HAVING HIGH-PROFILE CLIENTS LENDS A STRONG ELEMENT OF SOCIAL PROOF FOR YOUR TRAINING BUSINESS," SAYS MICHAEL PIERCY, MS, NASM-CPT, CES, PES, CSCS. PIERCY (CENTER) HAS TRAINED A NUMBER OF CELEBRITIES AND STAR ATHLETES THROUGH THE YEARS, INCLUDING ACTOR R. MARCOS TAYLOR (LEFT) AND

FORMER NEW YORK GIANTS OFFENSIVE LINEMAN AND TWO-TIME SUPER BOWL CHAMPION KAREEM MCKENZIE, BOTH OF WHOM JOINED HIM EARLIER THIS YEAR TO CELEBRATE THE GRAND OPENING OF HIS NEW PERFORMANCE & SPORTS SCIENCE FACILITY IN FAIRFIELD, NEW JERSEY.

PHOTO: DAVE ROLDAN PHOTOGRAPHY

because having demanding clients requires you to be resilient enough to accommodate strange schedules. "My VIP clients know that I offer 'concierge training,' which includes being able to text me meal questions from restaurants, requests for motivation when they are on the road, and calls to check in with me," Bornman says. "All of that comes at a premium price, and now even some of my non-celebrity clients want in on that special value."

Training a Star

At the movement level, training a celebrity is about the same as training anybody else. "I don't train celebrity clients differently than non-celebrity clients," Brignole says. "Doing so would suggest one of two things: Either celebrities' bodies are anatomically different from those of non-celebrities, which is obviously not true, or that I save the 'good' workouts for the celebrities, and I give the 'bad' workouts to non-celebrities, which is also not true."

While celebrities may rush in late and need to leave early, their challenges, goals, questions and physical issues are consistent with those of traditional clients. "Keeping a level head when working with all of your clients, regardless of what they do, or who they are, is so important," says Bornman. It's crucial, he adds, to treat all clients the same as we coach each one toward his or her wellness goals.

What Does a Celeb Want in a Trainer?

Constance Towers, star of the ABC soap opera *General Hospital* and the movie *The Perfect Murder*, often jets between New York City and her home base of Hollywood. That means she prizes a trainer who "understands that sometimes I have to cancel at the last minute and it's just beyond my control."

Towers and her husband, John Gavin appreciate that their trainer respects their privacy when he trains them at their home. "If he wants a picture for his own website or resumé, I'm happy to agree to that," she says. "But we know that in advance and plan that together outside of training hours."



LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA, is a motivational author and speaker with multiple awards. He has worked with celebrity clients for decades and collaborated with them for philanthropic goals. His website is www.findLawrence.com.