



[HELPING YOU PROSPER AS A FITNESS PROFESSIONAL]

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Building the Coaching Model



Part 6- key to marketing your coaching practice
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Training and wellness coaching are complementary services, but they are not necessarily a bundled package. In fact, many clients who diligently show up for their training sessions still struggle with weight loss and maintenance, managing stress, doing aerobics on their own and balancing all aspects of their lives. As you begin to transition your traditional fitness training to introduce wellness coaching as an independent service, you might be surprised at how many of your current clients balk at paying for coaching, which they feel is already a part of their current training package. Essentially, adding coaching to your current services is similar to starting a whole new business. Ask yourself: Do you know where to find clients who will be as equally enthusiastic about coaching as you are? Many fitness professionals who have become certified wellness coaches, in fact, struggle with this very question.

Bringing Coaching to Your Business

One of the most effective ways to build your coaching practice is to apply the coaching skills you have learned towards your business. Therefore, spend time creating your business vision. Where would you like to be one year from now in regards to coaching? In five years? The answer to this question will give you a roadmap to follow in creating a viable coaching business. Think about whether you will continue training or transition to coaching only. Do you want to offer packages of both training and coaching? Are you interested in group coaching, public speaking, seminars or writing? Your vision should include details such as how many hours a week you will work, your fees and your income growth. Once you have a clear vision of your business, create three-month goals and then weekly ones, and devote one hour a week to work on setting action steps towards the completion of each goal. Remember to set SMART goals, just as you would have your coaching clients do.

One of the greatest challenges you will face is explaining wellness coaching to your clients. In fact, most prospective clients have never heard of wellness coaching. While some may have familiarity with lifestyle coaching, they typically lack a true understanding of the process. So, if you cannot easily explain what wellness coaching is, how can you possibly convince these clients it is the answer to the health challenges they have been struggling with? To effectively introduce your coaching services to current or prospective clients, you will need to perfect the "30 second elevator pitch," a brief statement that answers the question, "What do you do?" It should be short, simple and pique enough interest for a prospective client to want more information. Once you've accomplished that, ask open-ended questions to get the client talking. This is an excellent opportunity to use your coaching skills and give someone a taste of the coaching process.

Figuring Out the Marketing Game

Becoming a masterful coach requires continued learning, practice and persistence. The more you coach, the more skilled you will become. However, if you don't have coaching clients, how can you get better? This can be a frustrating scenario, which often leads new coaches to take on any new client. This may seem like the right thing to do, but giving thought to who your "ideal" client is is a process worth spending time on. All of us have our specialties — a type of client we relate to, communicate well with and understand. Identifying your ideal client will be key in directing your marketing efforts. However, this doesn't mean you should only work with those that fit within this category. In fact, if you spread your marketing efforts too thin, you may end up not making enough impact on any particular group.

Look at your current marketing materials. Do you need to create new or updated ones? Make sure your business cards, brochures, website and other materials used for your current business reflect this new service. Once you begin telling prospects about coaching, have something to leave behind with your contact information. A mistake many new business owners make, however, is to create materials from their computer. These often look inexpensive and unprofessional. So, determine a reasonable marketing budget, and if you can't afford a professionally made brochure, create a flyer on high-quality paper or invest in an impressive business card. You should also think twice about spending money on costly advertisements. Until you've educated communities about coaching, you're advertising a product people do not understand. Therefore, these ads will, most likely, be overlooked.

Building the Right Partnerships

The first place to look for referrals is within your current profession. If you are no longer actively seeking training clients, get together with the trainers you know and respect, and let them know the direction you're turning your business. You can establish a great reciprocal referral relationship from these contacts. Also, introduce yourself to the managers of local fitness clubs, and explore how together you can grow each other's businesses. Or if you have established a relationship with fitness equipment retailers, tell them about your added services, and leave them your cards.

Aligning yourself with the medical community is probably the most challenging route, as getting doctors to refer your services will require establishing a trusting relationship. Dress and act professionally and have quality marketing materials to back you up. If you have long-term personal physicians, they may allow you to leave brochures in their waiting room, or even give your card to patients who would benefit from your services. Friends in the medical community can also become resourceful referrers. Take the time to educate them about coaching; then be direct, and let them know you are looking for new business.

Networking groups can also be a wonderful source for referrals. Educate yourself with books and articles on the skills of networking. Groups such as the local Chamber of Commerce, Business Networking International and small business associations are good places to start. It is also important to become actively involved with groups that service your ideal clients. For example, if you are comfortable speaking in public, volunteer to give a lecture at local churches, synagogues, schools and organizations. But make sure your talk is educational and not a sales pitch, which can turn people off. Your goal should be to establish yourself as the local expert on health and fitness. Remember to leave materials behind that describe your services, benefits and contact information. And if you are a strong writer, also consider contacting local publications and pitching the idea of a monthly column concerning health and fitness or offering to be available as an industry source. Once your name and company appears in publications, it establishes your credibility. In addition, by attending as many events as possible, such as health fairs, neighborhood runs or town festivals, you can become well-known in your community, which helps with your networking efforts.

Hopefully, you will soon be coaching on a regular basis. Do not forget, however, that the greatest source of referral will be your satisfied clients. Give above and beyond their expectations, and they will sing your praises. Your clients will become a walking testimonial to the benefits of your coaching program and will assume the job of marketing for you.

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