

Chapter 1

Personal Training 101: Do You Have What It Takes?

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding what personal trainers do
 - ▶ Being honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses
 - ▶ Knowing what's involved in getting certified
 - ▶ Preparing to start and build your business
 - ▶ Helping your clients achieve their goals
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When it comes to choosing a career, unless you're a masochist, you probably want to do something that you enjoy. Well, here's news that may interest you: Personal trainers love their jobs. According to a survey of personal trainers by IDEA (a professional fitness organization), 88 percent of respondents reported that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their work, compared to the national average of 71 percent.

Numbers don't lie — personal training is indeed a fulfilling and rewarding profession. Watching your clients achieve health and wellness as a result of your guidance is an incredible experience.

To an outsider, personal training may look pretty easy — you just stick your client on a piece of equipment, throw some weight on the stack, and start yelling at him to "do one more!" until he drops, right? Not exactly. This chapter gives you the scoop on what it takes to become a personal trainer and how you can get started in this challenging and rewarding field.

Determining Whether You and Personal Training Are a Match Made in Heaven

If we asked you what a successful personal trainer looks like, what would you envision? A guy or gal in great shape, with California good looks, a bright white

perma-smile, and an everlasting bronze tan? Now what if we asked you what an unsuccessful personal trainer looks like? Maybe you'd think of your local gym rat, perched on top of the piece of gym equipment you want to use, glorifying the benefits of the latest fad supplement.

Truth be told, you can't tell a "good" trainer from a "bad" trainer based on looks alone. No matter how much a person looks the part on the outside, what makes trainers good is what they have on the inside — solid skills, knowledge, experience, intuitiveness, dedication, professionalism, and understanding. Take all those attributes, roll them up with the ability to teach, and — voilà! — you have the stuff great trainers are made of.

The question is, do *you* have that stuff?

Defining the role of a personal trainer

By definition, a *personal trainer* is a fitness professional who uses the body's response to exercise to improve clients' overall physical health. Trainers do all the following:

- ✓ Perform in-depth evaluations of their clients' base fitness levels.
- ✓ Prescribe exercises appropriate for their clients' level of conditioning and specific fitness goals.
- ✓ Show clients how to properly implement the prescribed exercises.
- ✓ Monitor and record clients' progress, making adjustments as necessary to ensure clients reach their goals in a safe and healthy manner.



Think that's the whole shebang? Not quite. Much like your old Aunt Bertha, personal trainers wear many hats. When working with clients, personal trainers act as friend, teacher, motivator, disciplinarian, troubleshooter, therapist, equipment rep, and wellness consultant, all wrapped up in one. When working alone, personal trainers take on the roles of secretary, salesperson, student, accountant, business owner, and customer-service rep.

Knowing what skills you need

Being a personal trainer requires more than knowing exactly where your gluteus maximus is, or what the best exercise is to keep it from drooping. As a trainer, you need many skills to match the many roles you play for your clients. Here are some of the skills you need to hone before putting up your shingle.

You need to be accountable

You alone — not your clients, not your mother, not your annoying neighbor with the yappy dog — are responsible for yourself and your actions. If you're continually coming up with reasons (read "excuses") as to why you were late, why you didn't write out the new travel program, or why you had to cancel, clients and employers will lose trust in you. Being able to own up to the truth of your actions and working to prevent those snafus from happening in the future gains you trust and credibility in the eyes of your peers.



When you're a trainer, the only thing you have is your credibility and your reputation.

You need to be agile

No, we don't mean physically agile! (We *know* you can touch your toes!) In this case, we mean *mentally* agile — as in, the ability to come up with a completely different course of action on the fly if the original one isn't working out. Working with people's bodies requires insight and the ability to think outside the box. Each client's body is unique, and what works for one client may not work for another.



Melyssa had a client who had suffered a stroke and lost the ability to use her muscles — she was in a wheelchair, because her brain couldn't communicate with her muscles to tell them to walk, sit, or even lift things. She had hired Melyssa to show her how to "work out" with her disability. Melyssa was perplexed — how do you work out if you can't lift a weight? Then she realized that, even though the client couldn't lift the weight, she still had the ability to *resist* the weight (this is called a *negative* in trainer-speak). Bingo! They created a workout consisting of negatives in every sort of manner. Negative bicep curls, negative leg extensions — you name it, they did it. The client made great strength gains and, as a result, was eventually able to perform small lifting movements. Now, that's being agile!

You need to be a good teacher

Good teachers inspire and excite their students by involving them in the activity. They watch their students carefully, discover how they learn, and match their teaching methods to their students' learning methods.



As a personal trainer, you need to take the time to discover how each of your clients learns. By not overwhelming your clients with too much information at one time and allowing them to lead the learning process, you'll ensure that your clients retain what you teach them. When your clients realize that you've taught them something, their perceived value of you and your services increases. When you give your clients that precious gem of knowledge, they'll be back for more — guaranteeing that you'll have repeat business.

You need to be a good leader

Leaders inspire people to do their best by example. Trainers need to walk their talk and be a role model for their clients. The old “do as I say, not as I do” adage doesn’t cut it in this biz. You won’t be getting any repeat business if you tell your clients they need to watch their fat intake — while you’re stuffing a candy wrapper in the trash can. Clients follow trainers who have demonstrated that they can be successful with their clients on a consistent basis. People naturally want to follow someone who is confident, charismatic, and successful. In this profession, that means creating a successful clientele, and working with each client as if she’s the only one you have. You must provide positive reinforcement to your clients, even when they have setbacks, and celebrate each and every one of their victories, no matter how small.

You need to be a good listener

Sometimes, being a personal trainer is like being a therapist — the closer you get to your clients, the more they open up and divulge personal information about themselves. By listening more than talking, you’ll find out a lot about who your clients really are — which not only helps you understand where they’re coming from and why they’re working with you, but also prepares you to help them as a trainer.

You need to be a good observer

In addition to being a good listener, you need to be a good observer. Sometimes, your clients will tell you something different from what they’re *really* thinking or feeling. Figuring out how to read your clients’ body language, tone of voice, and physical cueing will help to improve your communication with your clients as well as the programs you create for them.

You need to be knowledgeable

Today, trainers are often expected to know the answers to just about everything related to health and wellness. Does the ThighMaster really work? If I put black yam cream on my thighs, will I burn fat faster? Not only do you have to master the technical and practical aspects of training, but you also need to know what science is saying about the latest fitness fads. Being able to separate fact from fiction — and to explain the difference — gives you credibility points in the eyes of your clients.

You need to be likeable

Have you ever met someone who rubbed you the wrong way from the start? You can’t quite put your finger on what it is about her that you don’t like, but for some reason you two simply don’t hit it off. No matter how hard you try, you can’t prevent this from happening with at least some of your clients. For one reason or another, not every client is going to like you — and you aren’t going to love every client. But you’re a professional, and working with all types of people comes with the territory.



Being likeable means knowing how to mirror a client's tone, actions, and body language until you've developed enough of a rapport that he feels comfortable with you. If your client is the strong-but-silent type, recognize this, and don't blab away about the latest strongman competition on ESPN. By using the skills discussed earlier in this chapter, such as being a good listener and observer, you can match your tone and actions to those of your client, creating a smooth start to your relationship.

You need to be passionate

Having passion about what you do and the people you do it for is essential to being a good trainer. It means being in the moment with your client, with every ounce of your attention focused on him. It means giving her 100 percent (or more if you can spare it), day in and day out. It means being upbeat and positive, and showing your client how enthusiastic you are about helping him achieve success.

We bet you've been in a gym and witnessed a trainer sitting down on the floor or on a piece of equipment, staring off into space while his client struggles through an exercise. You've probably also seen a trainer who's whipping her client through what looks to be a pretty intense workout, all the while smiling and offering the client encouragement. Which trainer would *you* want to work with?

You need to be professional

Being professional sounds easy if you're waltzing around a plush office with an Armani suit and a leather briefcase. It's not so easy when you're a personal trainer on your tenth client of the day, completely exhausted, and running late because of a traffic accident. Your client yells (even though it wasn't your fault), and now you still have to work with her even though you're boiling mad. No matter how badly you want to walk out, you tell her that you hear her and understand how she feels, apologize for the inconvenience, and get on with the session. Now that's professionalism.

You need to be positive

Much like that nasty strain of the flu that goes around every year (but without the nausea), enthusiasm is contagious. If you maintain an upbeat outlook, you'll be able to keep yourself and those around you motivated. Having a positive outlook and manner helps retain clientele — after all, working out is hard enough for your client without having to deal with a depressed trainer on top of it. Your clients aren't paying you to lament about your woes of the day. They hired you to motivate them and positively support their efforts. Think about it — would *you* want to work out with a crying Christina or a sobbing Sam?

You need to be understanding

Being understanding means remembering why you became a personal trainer in the first place. You're here for your client, not the other way around. You don't need to lecture your client when she fails to comply; she *knows* she didn't do what she was supposed to.



When your clients don't follow your plan, it's not that they're dissing you, or that they don't believe in what you're telling them. More likely, what you suggested doesn't work for them for whatever reason. Your job is to understand what went wrong — why they didn't/wouldn't/couldn't do what you told them to in the first place. When you understand the reasons behind the snafu, you'll be able to adjust your plan so they can succeed at the task. Understanding is putting yourself in your clients' shoes — getting beyond yourself and being aware of your clients' needs.

Assessing your skills

No matter how much you know about adenosine triphosphate or how well you can demonstrate the clean and jerk (if you think that's a system for getting your significant other to pick up his dirty socks, you're in trouble), knowledge and technique are only a small portion of what makes a successful personal trainer. How you perform your job on a day-to-day basis and how consistent you are in your job are what makes you successful and your job enjoyable.

For all the aspects of personal training that you can control — like your attitude and your knowledge — there are twice as many intangible things that you can't — like your schedule, your work location, the type of people you work with, your management, and so on. These are the little things that you can't plan for and that make any job loveable or leaveable. The personal training industry has quite a few intangibles that have been known to break a trainer or two. So before you sign up for the job, take an honest look at yourself and decide whether you have what it takes.

Answer *true* or *false* to the following 15 statements to determine whether you've got the goods for personal training:

- ✓ I am at my best any time of the day.
- ✓ I get along with everyone I meet.
- ✓ I can do several things well at once. (Walking and chewing gum doesn't count.)
- ✓ I have a flexible schedule.

- ✔ I enjoy working with different types of people.
- ✔ I enjoy a fast-paced life.
- ✔ I perform well under stress.
- ✔ I am organized.
- ✔ I am good at planning.
- ✔ I am a self-starter.
- ✔ I am detail-oriented.
- ✔ I can communicate my thoughts clearly and concisely.
- ✔ I enjoy explaining “why.”
- ✔ I enjoy being challenged.
- ✔ I enjoy helping others.
- ✔ I have a thirst for learning.
- ✔ I enjoy being mobile.

If you answered false to five or more of these statements, you may find the demands of being a personal trainer challenging. These statements represent typical, day-to-day occurrences for a trainer — and we’d hate to see you invest all your time, energy, and effort breaking into the field, just to find out that it’s not what you thought it would be. As they say, forewarned is forearmed!

Hitting the Books

So you know how to perform a perfect squat? Well, we hate to be the ones to tell you, but knowing how to do a squat doesn’t mean squat when it comes to succeeding as a personal trainer. Before you jump into the job, you’ll need to practice, study, cram for exams, rehearse, train, and drill. (Okay, we’ll back slowly away from the thesaurus now and keep our hands where you can see them.) You’ll also need a sheet of paper from an accrediting agency proving that you did all the above.

These days, personal trainers are looked to as experts in the field of fitness — not just gym rats who can bench-press their own bodyweight and yell, “No pain, no gain!” Apply for the position of personal trainer at any gym, and the first thing they’ll ask is, “Are you certified?” Certification is a badge of honor — it tells prospective employers or clients not only that you know what you’re doing, but also that you take your job seriously. Being certified builds your credibility — and credibility is what attracts clients to you.

A gazillion fitness organizations (yes, we counted) offer certification, and they all claim to be the most popular, the most respected, the most gosh-darn wonderful. Boning up on the top organizations out there takes a little work up front, but in the long run, it'll save you time, energy, and money.



Finding the right certification for you is important — you don't want to pay for a test that's geared to athletic training when you're looking to work with seniors, or one that requires a four-year degree in kinesiology if you don't have one. In Chapter 2, we provide all the information about certification that you need.



We know that right now you're absolutely champing at the bit to get your hands on some "body" to work on! But personal training is definitely an art — and one that has to be practiced to get it right. Taking body-fat measurements, spotting an exercise, and estimating submaximal VO_2 are not skills that anyone is born with. Don't be shy about asking friends and family if you can practice on them. If you work with people you're comfortable with, you'll be able to learn from your mistakes more easily — after all, better to bollix up a body-fat reading with your friends than with paying clients.

Getting Started

Are you ready to get out there and train the heck out of those people who need your services so badly? Great! So what's stopping you? Time's a-wastin'! Go on, get to it!

"Wait just a second," you say. "How can I get started if I don't have anyone to start with?" All dressed up but no place to go? Don't quite know where to find those people who need your services so badly? Never fear. Keep reading, and that little obstacle will soon be but a fading memory.

Creating your plan of attack

All the training, reading, studying, and practicing you do to hone your personal training skills to perfection won't make a darn bit of difference if you don't have any clients to use them on.



Lay out your goal in advance; then work backward from there. For example, if you want to train clients at a gym, your plan of attack may look like this:

1. **Call a few area gyms and ask what certifications and experience they require.**

2. Contact the appropriate certification body, and sign up for the appropriate exam (see Chapter 2 for more details).
3. Study for and take the exam (see Chapter 2).
4. Fulfill any other job prerequisites (CPR training, for example).
5. Apply for the position you want (see Chapter 4 for the scoop on résumés and interviewing).
6. Intern or get the job (Chapter 3 tells you all about apprenticing).
7. Train clients! (See Part II for the scoop on training clients.)

When you lay out your plan step-by-step, staying on track and identifying any potential pitfalls before they occur is much easier. This habit is a good one to get into, because you'll be using this method frequently with clients, outlining step-by-step how they can reach their goals.

Personal trainer for hire: Getting work



Getting your first client is a momentous occasion. Melyssa remembers how she got hers — he approached her at the gym while she was working out and asked if she was a trainer. At the time, she had just been certified and hadn't yet been hired by anyone. She told him she was, and he asked if she could train him. Melyssa told him that she would love to, but she wasn't sure if the gym would let her. So she contacted the owner of the gym, explained her situation, and worked out a deal where she was able to train clients as long as they were gym members and she paid the gym a percentage of her training fee as an independent contractor. Thus, Melyssa's personal training business was born, and she was its sole employee.



Preparing for success

The power of the mind is an awesome thing. Stepping into a new career or taking on new responsibilities can be scary, and maybe you're a little doubtful that you'll be able to succeed. We've all been there before — we look over what's involved, shake our heads, and ask, "Can I do it?" If you feel that kind of doubt creeping up on you, shake it off and set your mind straight. Even though you may need to step back and

reevaluate what you're doing once in a while, don't let the little voices in your head convince you that you won't be successful.

Having a positive mindset and the core belief that you *can* succeed and *will* succeed keeps you going on the tough days, energizing you to push on toward your goal. **Remember:** What the mind can conceive the body will achieve!

No matter how it happens for you, getting work is additive. All you need to start is one client — one single, solitary person who wants to get healthy through exercise. After you start training your client, people will see you working with her and approach you, or, if you're working with your client in a private setting, your client will start telling his friends about how wonderful you are (and you *are* wonderful!). Trust us — snagging new clients is all about word of mouth (more about that in Chapter 8). Nothing boosts your business faster than a psyched client pumping you up to his friends.



If your services aren't stellar or if your client is dissatisfied, word-of-mouth promotion can hurt you just as easily as it can help you.

Building your base

After you have a few clients on board, you'll be a bona fide personal trainer, managing multiple exercise programs for multiple clients. Thinking about your time constraints (How many people can you train in a day?), examining your career goals (Do you want to make lots of moolah? Work part-time? Hobnob with celebrity clients?), and choosing how you work with clients will help you lay the foundation for a viable personal training business. For instance, if you're going to make this a full-time deal, do you want to keep your client base small and concentrate on long-term clients? Or do you want to work with people short-term, so you can continually work with new clientele? There is no right or wrong way to do it — you're free to decide what you want. When you know what that is, you can gear your service offerings and build your client base accordingly.

Performing Your Art

As we've said, personal training requires more than knowing one muscle from another. Customer service, planning client programs, following up, and everything in between are the elements that will take your personal training from so-so to so great!

Making a great first impression

You know it, we know it, even your dog knows it — the first impression is a lasting one. That means your first client meeting is *the* most important meeting in your client relationship. You want to start out on the right foot, because you are — if you're lucky — going to be working very closely with this person for a long time. No matter what happened that day, even if your cat ate your goldfish and you got a speeding ticket, you need to slap on a smile and fake it 'til you make it.



The Midas touch

Clients may sign up with you because they appreciate your knowledge and enthusiasm, but it's the little touches — and the consistency with which you supply those touches — that keep them coming back.

After she started her own company, Melyssa insisted that every employee learn how to provide five-star service — hold the client's dumbbells for him while he's resting; get a towel and water for him *before* he needs it; manually stretch him between his sets. This differentiated Melyssa's company from the competition so well that when clients left her services to train elsewhere (which

all clients do at some point or another), they always ended up coming back. Why? Because of her attention to detail. The places they defected to didn't have towel service, didn't anticipate their need for water, or didn't stretch them between sets, making their workout experience excruciating instead of exquisite. By performing these little services for your clients, you change their perception from simply receiving a workout to experiencing a professional personal training session.

We talk more about motivating and connecting with your clients in Chapter 9.



If you're happy, you exude confidence and excitement, and your client will pick up on your positive outlook. If you're blue, getting your client excited about doing crunches and lat pull-downs will be difficult.

We delve deeper into the topic of making a good first impression in Chapter 10.

Evaluating your client

Before you start your client on a program, you need to evaluate her medical history, current physical status, goals, and lifestyle. Knowing as much about your client as possible is important — after all, her health is in your hands. If you prescribe an exercise program that doesn't account for your client's schedule, her physical status, or whatever, she may become discouraged. You can't expect a woman with three young kids to succeed with a two-hour-per-day routine, or a client who's mainly concerned with heart health to get excited about doing exercises to boost his butt.



Put on your investigator hat and ask your clients as many questions as you can think of. For example, you can query them about their:

- ✓ Exercise habits
- ✓ Medical history
- ✓ Lifestyle
- ✓ Health goals

A lot of trainers skip this step. We can't overemphasize the importance — from both a professional and liability standpoint — of evaluating your clients. For more information on client evaluations, see Chapter 10.

Programming your clients

If you liked science in school, you're going to love this — creating programs is like coming up with a new hypothesis for each client you work with. You come up with a theoretical program based on your assessment of the client, and then you get to test your theory and see if it holds up. You need to take into account your client's time availability, equipment availability, strengths, weaknesses, and goals to create a program that he'll not only find doable, but also enjoy. Here is where you, the trainer, get to shine as you take your client from what he is to what he wants to be via the exercises you prescribe. (And if you didn't like science, don't worry — we make it easy for you in Chapter 12.)

Performing a training session

If you ask any trainer what the easiest part of his job is, you'll most likely hear "training clients." Performing the training session is fun! After all, this is why you got into personal training in the first place — to work with clients hands-on, showing them the proper way to exercise, spotting them and encouraging them, providing positive support. And now that all the hard work — finding your client, assessing her needs, planning the program — is behind you, you can actually put your plan into motion and see how it works for her!



The only trick is, you'll need to create plans for your clients that break their goals into manageable steps, that keep them motivated, and that get results. More on this in Part III.

Staying in touch

Every good salesperson knows that the follow-up is crucial to making sales and keeping customers happy — and so should you.



Call your clients, whether they're active with you or not. Follow-up calls to active clients can help you determine the effectiveness of your previous training sessions, or provide an opportunity to answer questions about a new workout routine. Follow-up calls to inactive clients can bring them back to you for more services. However you decide to handle following up, remember that doing so is the key to maintaining healthy client relations. The personal training industry is based on relationships, and nurturing your client relationships is vital to the success of your business.

Meeting your clients, evaluating your clients, planning programs, conducting training sessions, and following up — these are the basics of performing your art, and we delve into these topics in more detail in Part II.

Our Little Trainer's All Grown Up!: Growing Your Business

Eventually, you may want to kick your personal training business up a notch. Growing your personal training business means different things to different people. It could mean accepting a management position at a gym, or leaving a gym to start your own studio. However and whenever the bug bites, you need to plan, plan, and plan some more in order to be successful.

Preparing for growth

Getting ready to grow is exciting and invigorating. The prospect of tackling new business and career challenges excites a lot of trainers. But before you jump into anything, do your homework to make sure your vision is viable. Your future is at stake here, and a mistake at this point in the game can be costly.



List the pros and cons of making your change. Talk with people who have been in your shoes to see how they handled the decision. Make sure you have everything you need — financial support, skills, knowledge, and the right tools — should you decide to make the change. Involve those close to you so they can be prepared to give you the emotional support you need.

For more information on determining your career path, check out Chapter 4.

Adding profit centers

If you're looking to increase your income — and who isn't? — you don't necessarily have to increase your working hours. Trainers have plenty of ways to add dollars to their bottom line without spending more time. Selling fitness-related products that clients can use on their own, such as heart-rate monitors or body balls, is a great way to make extra cash while helping your clients. And creating specialty training sessions allows you to diversify and possibly garner more dollars for those sessions.

We give you the 411 on adding profit centers in Chapter 16.

Duplicating yourself

Another way to grow is to take on trainers who can handle additional clients. Because no one will be an exact duplicate of you (and if someone is, be afraid, be very afraid), before hiring, you need to create a list of attributes and qualities you feel the candidate should possess. Check with your lawyer and accountant to understand your state's laws regarding employment. Create a job description for the position so your new hires will have a clear understanding of what is expected from them.

You can find more information on hiring a staff in Chapter 17.

Creating consistency within your business

A successful business provides its customers with consistent quality and service. (And we probably don't need to say this, but the quality and service must be consistently *good*.) Have you ever heard people complain about the hot new restaurant in town? Some nights everything is fabulous, and other nights it takes forever to get seated, the service is horrible, and the food is colder than Vermont in January. That restaurant won't be open long.



If you can't give dependable service, your clientele won't be around long either. You want to strive to create a great experience for your clients each time they work with you. That means you must provide the same training to all your staff members; document your rules and policies; make sure everyone on board understands your company's vision, mission, and objectives; and most important, make sure that that you are the embodiment of what you preach — that you lead by example.