



**ENHANCING CLIENT  
CARE IN THE FITNESS INDUSTRY**

## **What is the Role of a Personal Trainer?**

Most modern personal trainers enter into this profession initially out of a strong passion and desire for being physiologically fit and healthy. The type of people that normally become a personal trainer are ones that cannot bear to be trapped behind a desk in a standard 9-5 job. To become a personal trainer it is imperative that you have a want and desire to help the client both physiological and psychological. The role that has to be adopted is to use exercise to condition the client's body and as a direct effect condition their mind in all positive aspects of their life. By using the therapeutic aspects of exercise can lead to psychological enhancements to the client allowing them to perceive the world in a different view point.

## **Why do individuals wish to become personal trainers?**

Most successful personal trainers enter into the fitness profession for a multitude of reasons. The unsuccessful personal trainers are solely motivated for reasons including *"hanging out in the gymnasium all day looking to making easy money off of the uninformed client"*. These unprofessional personal trainers will fortunately have to seek another profession as the clients will soon discover that the trainer is more interested in feeding their own narcissistic values.

Here are some common reasons why the successful personal trainer entered into this career path:

- Want and desire to help people live a healthy lifestyle.
- Convert the lifestyle into a career, or enhancement income with something that is enjoyable.
- Help educate individuals regarding the body and what it can be capable of performing.
- Seek employment that is truly rewarding and fulfilling.

## **What is a Personal Trainer expected to do?**

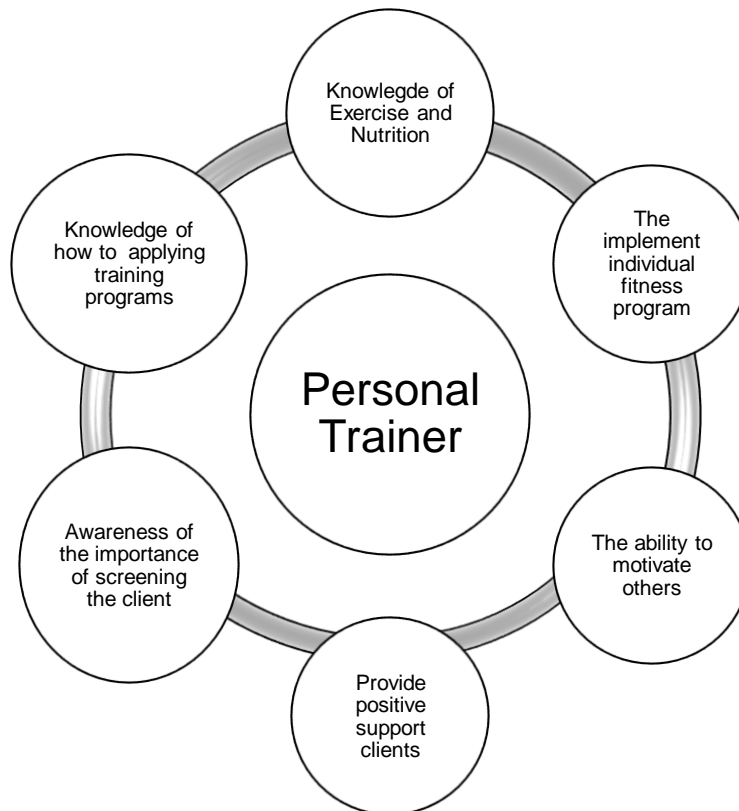
A personal trainer can be defined as an individual that possesses the knowledge, skills and abilities for constructing, developing and delivering an individually client driven exercise and fitness program. Furthermore, they have the knowledge to positively motivate the client to achieve their personal and physical fitness goals.

Unfortunately, the media have showcased the celebrity personal trainer with some good effects but also in the other had some bad. This has resulted in the trainer's role becoming more recognised regarding the part they play with the client. This leads to displaying the integration of the trainer's knowledge and alteration this has upon the client both physically and mentally. However the downside to the media spotlight is the increased distorted views and ideologies of unqualified trainers and the perception of what they should do.

The personal trainer should have traits including a strong passion, purpose to care and coaching a client- these qualities will have far more impact upon the client rather than the physique of the trainer. However upon the initial contact with the client there has to be a healthy outward appearance and the taking care of the 'cover'. *This cover (appearance)* of the personal trainer will initially attract the client.

## Scope of Practice

Figure 1 indicates the scope and depth of knowledge that the personal trainer should possess if they are to give the best customer care to the client.



**Figure 1: The scope and depth of knowledge that the personal trainer must possess**

The **scope of practice** as a personal trainer should include the following:

1. Knowledge of human anatomy and the concepts of functional exercise, basic nutrition and basic exercise science.
2. The ability to design individual and group exercise programs personalised to meet the needs and attainable goals of the clients.
3. The ability to conduct and understand the need and importance of screening and client assessment, initially and progressively.
4. The ability to implement individual fitness program design in a safe and effective way.
5. A strong desire to support clients helping them to reach their health and fitness goals through appropriate cardiovascular, resistance and flexibility exercise.

6. The ability to motivate others to improve their overall fitness and health.
7. The commitment to maintaining personal integrity and your own health and fitness.

## **Staying at the Forefront as a Personal Trainer**

A successful personal trainer must deliver safe, effective but most importantly enjoyable and interesting workouts to all clients they have. The training programs should be client centred and should be varied and also progressive in design, geared towards improving the clients overall health and wellness. The personal trainer ultimately should be highly motivational and supportive towards the client. This is to ensure that the client remains interested and stimulated which will improve exercise adherence.

As with anything in business it is important that the Personal Trainer has a constant stream of happy and motivated clients. For this to be achieved the trainer must be willing to go over and above what is required of them. The fortunate part of "*going over and above*" in the fitness environment is that the client will recognise this and continue to seek the advice of the motivated trainer. This investment in time with in due course leads to ascending the ladder in the career as a personal trainer. The following investment in time and energy should be considered as a personal trainer.

### **Education, qualifications and certification/s/:**

Personal trainers should actively seek to invest time and finances as to ensure that they have a long and sustainable career. The personal trainer should not stop gaining just one certificate but constantly have the up-to-date knowledge in the discipline of exercise science. Most modern trainers have fitness/ sport/ exercise related qualifications including undergraduate degrees. This does not however mean that the trainer knows everything to do with exercise and nutrition. A trainer with multiple certificates in addition to qualification shows that they are driven and motivated to go over and beyond what is necessary. Consistent advancement in their CPD (continuous professional development) is the standard if the trainer wishes to sustain a long term career.

### **Experience**

For a personal trainer to gain employment within most fitness/lifestyle clubs it is expected that the trainer has some personal history in training themselves. This is very important in the eyes of any potential employer and needs to be considered as equal to educational attainment. The reasoning behind this consideration is that you can be certified in a weekend course but the perception that an employer will hire you if you have no experience in the fitness environment is unrealistic. Just like any individual would expect, or assume that an accountant has gained the qualification if they were intelligent to pass the minimal standard. However the client would question the accountant if they couldn't balance their own financial accounts. The personal trainer should constantly read, study and train in which to ensure that the experience is developing and advancing.

### **Enthusiasm**

As the media have illustrated the job as a personal trainer is not for the introverts of the world. The trainer should be an example of motivation as they are representative of the lifestyle the client is aiming to achieve. The trainer is in the motivational self-help business and need to ensure that they radiate enthusiasm to the client regardless of how they feel intrinsically.

### **Personal Appearance**

Personal trainer does not have to have to look like a supermodel or have large vascular muscles or have the 'six pack' regardless what the inner ego says. But they do have to "*walk the walk*". The construction of the product (personal trainer's physical appearance) should illustrate to the client that they look like they care about themselves. A carefully constructed physique will speak volumes including the grooming of the hair and the clothing that they are dressed in as in any business they never fully know if a potential client is watching and interested.

### **Intellectual Growth and Business Development**

This area is the most neglected by most personal trainers and no matter who or what you are intellectual growth can in due course facilitate business development. This accomplishment is due to the personal trainer developing transferable skills that can make them "*business*

savvy". By continuing to invest in education can enable the trainer to recognise opportunities in the area of business. Examples of this can include performing a more thorough client assessment to identify pricing structures within specific demographics. This continuation and investment into education does not have to be expensive and the development of e-courses offers education at reduced rates. This then only leaves the trainer with the reason not to develop skills to grow in this area because they don't feel like it.

### **What NOT to do as a Personal Trainer**

The personal trainer assumes many roles with their clients and includes being a lifestyle coach, supporter and confident. However there are some roles that they should avoid. The lists below are examples, which are NOT expected or appropriate for a trainer to do:

1. No medical advice including physiotherapy or any attempt to give medical diagnosis unless appropriately trained to do so.
2. Do not touch the client inappropriately that could be construed in the wrong manner; this also includes body massages to the client or any similar service.
3. Do not intimately involved within the personal relationships of the clients nor serve as a psychological counsellor.
4. It is inappropriate to formulate or have inter-personal relationship with a client.
5. Do not dictate and push preferences for fitness goals on to the clients who do not actively seek those similar goals.
6. Do not allow a lapse in credentials, liability insurance or an appropriate training.

Avoiding these areas will help the trainer stay within the responsibilities and expectations and ensure maintenance of a high degree of professionalism, with reduced to no minimal risk for incident, as a personal trainer.

### **What is customer service?**

If you ask any leading business, CEO or president of a company they will tell you how important the customer is to their operational plans and success. Throughout countless



business meetings, heads of industry, the service sector try to convince the purchasing audience how much they believe in customer service.

*“There is only one boss, and whether a person shines shoes for a living or heads up the biggest corporation in the world, the boss remains the same. It is the customer! The customer is the person who pays everyone’s salary and who decides whether a business is going to succeed or fail. In fact, the customer can fire everybody in the company from the chairman (CEO) on down, and he can do it simply by spending his money somewhere else. Literally everything we do, every concept perceived, every technology developed and associate employed, is directed with this one objective clearly in mind – pleasing the customer.”*

Sam M. Walton, CEO Wal-Mart

### **What is Customer Care?**

Within the fitness business customer care is a central component of the business that seeks to deliver the ‘fitness product’ to the client. Once the client has made the decision to purchase the membership or participated in an exercise class (purchase a good or service), they will obtain an experience that could increase exercise adherence or withdraw from purchasing the product.

‘Meeting the expectations of the customers and giving them more than what they expected.’

#### ***Urban Dictionary***

The contemporary view of customer as evident by the Urban Dictionary is exceeding customer expectation. This adding value to the fitness product is a long practiced sales tactic in automobile sales and other customer orientated sectors to increase the likelihood of ensuring a sale. This method of delivering more added value than expected by the fitness client cannot be deemed as negative or even an unwarranted expense it should be embedded in the planned cost of selling the fitness product. Within the fitness sector excellent customer care should and must be a key business goal.

### **Who are Your Customers?**

The fitness consumer generally wishes to receive two types of results from the purchase of a gym membership: (1) tangible and (2) intangible returns (Patton, 1995). Tangible returns in the clients eyes are the marked and measurable changes that a generally vanity related

(alterations in muscle mass, reduction in body weight) that they believe engaging in exercise will deliver. It is important at this stage that the personal trainer knows the clients intrinsic desires allowing for a more effective delivery. This aspect of effective customer care is easily delivered and can be effectively demonstrated to the client when the initial contact is made. As you will be fully aware physical 'fitness' can be measured and the use of physiological measurements can help the client make tangible progress towards their own individual goals. Increasing the clients' satisfaction towards exercise will additionally increase retention of the client and increase the personal trainer's income revenue. Even when the client is more vanity focused the use of related client goals can be measureable and can create similar intrinsic motivational responses from the client.

A more difficult result to quantify is that of intangible benefits of physical activity and exercise. It is commonly believed that an intangible benefit of exercise participation is that it makes the client '*feel better*'. This benefit of exercise both physiologically and psychologically is difficult to measure due to the assessment of the clients' mood, self-efficacy, stress level and other criteria. This '*feel good*' client to the well trained personal trainer can help them educate the client to externalise the changes they feel. Good client care involves the personal trainer making well educated observations of the clients' behaviour and also allows the client to reflect upon the 'fitness journey'. These reflections can help to allow the client to associate the new positive feelings and emotions with that of exercise participation. The personal trainer must carefully identify and acknowledge these tangible and intangible results as this will allow the client to grow as an individual. This will lead to increased revenue to the trainer as the clients 'growing belief in the provided service will be discussed through their social network. This will create potential increase in potential sales due to the '*word of mouth*' ripple.

It is important to understand what the client would want to pay and it is important to establish a '*fair price*' for the quality of the service. The client should feel pleased they have paid for the exercise session and received what they have paid for in return. Essentially the personal trainer's or instructor s role is to '*take care*' of the client. The client needs someone to understand their needs both physiologically but also psychologically. They need someone to take them step by step through the process of helping them achieve their goals. It is important that the trainer starts the process of customer care with the ability to listen to their client and find out through polite questioning what they want. Increasing client satisfaction at an early stage will help in retention and increase the personal trainer's income revenue.

For anyone starting out within the fitness industry as a new fitness professional the minimum expectation in client satisfaction is the trainers' capacity to deliver training that improves the clients' fitness. This starting point with the correct knowledge is the easiest point to achieve regarding client satisfaction. It is important that the staff understand best practices of the '*shop floor*', ensuring that clients effectively and safely participate in exercise. The delivery of the exercise sessions should be designed in conjunction with the company's operational plans. The trainer should be able to offer the services to any client within the fitness facility and the delivery should be 'more than expected'. It is critical that if clients' expectations are not fully met, then they may leave resulting in a loss of revenue to the facility and the trainer. It is more cost effective in retaining the current membership and developing their progress. When clients are happy and proud of their time investment they will come back frequently and report this by social networking and more recently the use of social media.

Shilbury (1998) has suggested that the customer has been long forgotten by the fitness companies. This aspect cannot be tolerated and modern staff should be customer orientated delivering fitness and managing social needs of the client. Once this is achieved then an increase in customer satisfaction and retention will increase generating consistent income revenue. Exceptional client care leads to exceptionally high client retention and within the fitness industry some companies accept high attrition rates and simply employ aggressive marketing strategies to replace the clients'. However it is questionable what is being sold to the client and what the client actually requires to become fit and healthy. It appears that the large fitness companies and the serviced client groups are operating at different frequencies without thinking about the practicalities of usage and memberships. The current model employed with these large companies targets the new user at different periods of the year. These companies should attempt to adopt a moral responsibility regarding physical activity.

However the implemented model works financially as a reported 100 million plus Americans and 25 million people in the United Kingdom do not engage in exercise. With such a large number of inactivity individuals the present model is financially viable however there is a poor client satisfaction rate and little reward both financially and intrinsically for the fitness professional or client. There should be greater emphasis being placed on converting the 90 day '*dropout*' into the promotion of lifelong physical activity in order to improve the economic investment that attracted both staff and clients to this company. If personal trainers are

interested in establishing customer satisfaction and retaining them, correct staffing is the key. The days of employing fitness enthusiasts with limited experience or qualifications in delivering exercise or co-ordinating facilities are outdated (Bates, 1998). There is a need for instructors to have a passion for fitness but relevant and up to date training and experiences have also to be developed.

However modern fitness owners are starting to understand that there is more cost effective methods to retain the client than to externally market for, recruit or sign new clients. The common focus is the identification and promotion of brand loyalty rather than expending large sums of money to attract a new client base. This cost effective organic marketing (word of mouth) is the preferred method of client referral. This form of marketing actively allows the satisfied client to market and promote the business. This is through low cost incentives including distributing promotional products to the referrer (branded T-shirts, water bottles for example).

According to Martin (2009) the key to successful client retention is through effective communication. The personal trainer and facility must make the client aware of what can be offered to them and also what will be delivered to them. The client has to make a careful decision regarding what personal trainer or company to select. Martin (2009) proposes the following methods to enhance client retention rates:

1. Promote the health benefits of fitness and exercise to the health conscientious public.
2. Ensure that staff is appropriately educated/qualified to deliver fitness. Educational degrees and certifications of competency are also useful as marketing tools.
3. Evaluate local market competition to ensure that what is offered does not over-saturate the market.
4. Make deliverable promises to measurably increase fitness or performance.
5. Use personal programmes that allow the client to understand why and how training is structured.
6. Establish personal fitness targets so that progress can be readily be demonstrated.
7. Regularly communicate with every client.

## **Abandoning Tradition**

Fitness trends come and go but clients are more than willing to abandon traditional fitness concepts and training ideologies to explore trends that promise to alter individual fitness progression and increase their own motivation. This exploration into traditional abandonment has given rise to trends including Crossfit, indoor cycling, Zumba and other group exercise crazes. The American College of Sports medicine (2013) identified that the top twenty fitness trends an upsurge of high intensity interval training and such derivatives are one and two of the list respectively. This indication paints a clear message that if a company wishes to become successful then the delivery of the service and fitness must match the needs of the client's desires.

Recently, fitness providers have sought to identify cost effective and innovative training methods of exercise that would be more appealing to the client. The re-emergence of outdoor group fitness operations has now formed a strong following from clients. The military boot camp training has capitalised upon this market gap. These classes are attractive to some clients due to the military type training within a group exercise environment These providers have also utilised the natural environment with catching branding to capture the public's interest. These operations are relatively low cost and operate generally from public parks, needing limited equipment and no need to purchase expensive machinery.

It is worth evaluating why these classes have grown in the fitness market potentially due to a multitude of factors that fulfil the intrinsic needs of the client. Furthermore the International Health, Racquet and Sports club Association reported that home fitness participation increased by 82% between 1987 and 1996 in the USA. This was driven by the affordability of home exercise equipment and the over inflated costs of gym memberships with poor customer service. It has been reported that the most common reasons for client drop out of commercial fitness activities is due to the fitness coach or personal trainers' failure to teach them anything or help them improve on their established personal goals.

## **Group Fitness & the Trainer**

Humans are social animals and the popularity of group fitness classes addresses this human desire for social interaction and participation. The success in group fitness is providing what the client wants and due to this will increase retention, with client come back. Bates (2009) reported that clients who engaged in group fitness sessions generally had better retention rates than those who participated in exercise alone. It is important to remember that retention is paramount to all fitness operations as this equals consistent revenues. Group fitness has always been at the heart of most companies' fitness operations but a shift from a didactic, authoritarian communication and 'be as fit as me' delivery to a focus on client fitness development. Fitness professionals are now aware of the need to prevent clients' fitness by the quality of the delivered exercise ensuring the safety and welfare of the client is maintained throughout. If the delivered activities are not client centred, then a high likelihood of injury or abandonment will result. This will have an impact upon customer references and instructor income.

Group fitness is important to generate large amounts of income with one instructor providing a service to a large volume of customers at the same time. However it is important to understand that it may be efficient in terms of cost, space and human resources but it is very difficult to ensure that every client is giving the same level of customer care, quality of instruction and personal attention. The instructor should also be aware of the clients own boundaries and ensure that workload implemented allows their own motivational levels.

It is important to understand that not all exercise is focused on improving the clients' physical fitness. There is a growing trend of commercial exercise programmes that according to Brehm (2006) promote "activities that offer an inward, meditative state" rather than using physical fitness as a focus. There is an increase upward trend in the participation of activities including Yoga and Pilates, with the client expecting a quality product that provides a return on their financial and time investment. The client group that participates in this trend are predominantly well educated females with higher than average income.

## **Additional Consideration with Internal Customer Service**

Most customer service is defined by how a company or organisation treats the “*external customers*,” but you must also consider the “*internal customer service*” as well. While this module mainly addresses “*external customers*,” expanding the definition of customer service to include co-workers will lead toward even greater success. Remember, the internal customer chain is just like the external, we are all customers both inside and outside the company or organisation. As a Wall Street Journal article succinctly put it, “*Poorly Treated Employees Treat Customers Just as Poorly.*”

## **Develop a Customer Friendly Approach**

One commonality among all successful fitness companies or organisations is that they provide excellent customer service. This has been developed through the promotion of a ‘*customer friendly*’ oriented service. By “*customer friendly*” we mean viewing the customer as the most important part of the instructor’s job. The cliché, “*The customer is always right*” is derived from this customer friendly environment.

**Two** critical qualities to the “Customer Friendly Approach”:

- Communications
- Working Customer Relationships

The two main tasks of successful customer relations within the fitness industry are to communicate and develop client relationships. This process does not require the trainer to exert a huge amount of effort but the relationship with the client does not develop instantaneously. It is important that positive dialogue/communication with the client is maintained and ensuring the development of ongoing relationships with your client are perhaps the two most important qualities to strive for in customer service.

### ***What Customer Service Truly Means***

As discussed earlier, the customer service means providing quality fitness services that address the needs/wants of the client and most importantly keeps them coming back. Therefore effective customer service has a *'knock on'* effective to the personal trainer. It means continued success, increased profits due to client returns, higher job satisfaction and allows for greater market expansion of the personal training service/product. In addition in the gym based environment this success can also radiate and increase morale of instructors and clients enhance teamwork and create better job satisfaction.

#### **Key Points**

By identifying and understanding the customer experience will outline how the client feels. In the negative customer experience maybe marred by long lines of ineffective service, inefficient processing, impolite and unfriendly fitness staff, lack of flexibility and most importantly no empathy towards the customer. In these cases the client will feel aggrieved, unsatisfied and experience a wholly negative customer service.

Unfortunately, in some cases as outlined above there may not be any competition for this type of service/product offered. If they were competitors then the client would gladly not consider using the service. This is the advantage of a monopoly on a service because in a competitive marketplace, the unsatisfied client shops elsewhere.

Remember, good customer service results in consumer satisfaction and return customers and growth in business. Poor customer service, except for monopolistic strongholds, generally results in consumer dissatisfaction, lack of returning customers and dwindling business.



## Customer Service Qualities

### Professional Qualities in Customer Service

In the world of business all successful professionals who constantly deal with customers (inside and outside the company) possess certain qualities that help them address their client's needs.

<b>Customer Service = Accountability + Delivery</b>
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As the above highlights that in the fitness industry each staff member is held accountable for the effective delivery of a satisfied client. The qualities needed for effective customer service always relates to what the client wants. After years of market research, it has been commented on that clients are constantly internalising their customer service experience. What this means is they are grading their customer service during each transaction but rarely know it. While there are a multitude of client needs, **five** basics needs stand out:

## 5 Basic Client Needs in Customer Service

**Friendliness** – the most basic and associated with courtesy and politeness. This is paramount when delivering the initial *'meet and greet'*.

**Empathy** – the customer needs to know that the fitness service provider appreciates their wants and circumstances.

**Fairness** – the client wants to feel they receive adequate attention and reasonable answers.

**Control** – the clients wants to feel his/her wants and input has influence on the outcome.

**Information** – clients want to know about fitness products and services but in a pertinent and time-sensitive manner.

### Additional Information

It is also very important for customer service employees (commonly all leisure orientated staff) to have information about their facilities products or services. Fitness and Leisure service providers who answer, *"I don't know"* or *"It is not my department"* are automatically demeaned and demoted in the mind of the client. These employees can end up feeling hostile as well as unequipped. Clients want information, and they disrespect and distrust the person who is supposed to have information but does not.

## **Customer Service within the Fitness Industry**

Within the Fitness and Leisure industry customer service is at the heart of all promoted physical activity. In the highly competitive fitness industry, it is perceived to be the single most important factor that influences people's choice between one instructor and another. Customer service has also been identified as an area within the sector in which there are skills gaps that need to be bridged to ensure that the client satisfaction is maintained.

When employed within the Fitness Industry the Personal trainer/ Gym Instructor will be in contact with people throughout the day. Customers expect the trainers to be friendly, knowledgeable and efficient at their work. Good customer service will make clients come back into the leisure facility again and again. This is important to the personal trainer as without maintaining a constant client basis could lead to a very costly and ineffective business. It is imperative that the personal trainer responds to the client's needs

Customer service is not just about being polite to people and designing standardised nutritional and exercise programmes. It is also about understanding the clients' physiological and psychological needs and being prepared to engage in strategies to help them achieve their own sought after goals. Good communication skills are vital to ensure that clients are kept positive and motivated.

**Activity Task**

*In the table provided below are a set of essential skills need for good customer service. Identify by placing a tick at all the skills you feel you have already have and then look at the checklist again when you have completed the module.*

<b>Skills for good effective customer service</b>	<b>Now</b>	<b>Later</b>
Understanding the Client's Needs		
Communication Skills to the Client (face to face)		
Giving the client information on the phone		
Giving advice to the customer (face to face)		
Promoting personal training to the client		
Addressing client problems and complaints		
Responding to the client's needs		

## **Fitness Industry Setting**

Customer service is at the heart of the fitness and leisure environment and yet has been identified as an area where there are skills gaps in the sector. For customer service to be good enough to make a difference the PT/ Instructor has to be uniformly excellent; knowledgeable, practically competent and experiences are needed to achieve this. Many people who choose to be a personal trainer as a career do so because they enjoy dealing with people and this provides an excellent starting point. To achieve excellent customer service, employees need a good understanding of the wide range of customer needs, a positive and consistent approach to delivering service and an understanding of the consequences of their individual actions.

Customer service requires high-level speaking and listening skills and these will need to be carefully understood and practiced to ensure exceptional client care. These next two sections intended to spark awareness about different facets of dealing with customers, including such things as cultural and ethical differences and equal opportunities.

## **Key Points**

### **Recognising customer needs**

It is important to recognise that clients may show different signs and signals regarding their need for further assistance. Some clients may ask for help and assistance when they need it whereas other clients may just give non-verbal signals that show they need it. It is up to you to recognise these signals and find out if you can help.

Watch out for signals that show a client needs help or assistance, such as:

Wandering around the gym actively seek to be seen by staff.

Looking confused, angry or upset.

Constantly picking things up and putting them down again or randomly adjusting the machines trying to figure out how they work.

Sighing, frowning or muttering under their breathe.

It is important that you use the signals to help you decide what sort of help the client might need.

Then either:

Ask if the client requires any help

Offer particular help in a polite way.

### **BUT Don't:**

Make assumptions that the client does not know what to do

Say negative things about the fitness equipment or other staff.

## **How to communicate with customers**

It is important to be aware that effective communication is at the heart of the service provision of the fitness industry. The nature of this sector would not exist in the absence of conversation with the client. So the way we communicate with the client's or the potential customer is paramount.

Communicating with the client matters, their expectation and demands of exceptional customer service is continually increasing and so with this fitness companies that focus on customer service and ensure a satisfying customer experience. We know from our own personal experience as a client that a company must exceed our expectations in which will lead to better client retention.

### Activity Task

Complete the client communication skills table using the self-assessment and then reflect on the why each question has been included, and what you could do to improve.

Think about how you communicate. Score each statement:

**1: Not like me 2: Sometimes like me 3: Always like me.**

I like to listen as much as talking to the client.	
In conversation, I am interested in what people feel about things.	
I give people time and space in conversation to make their point.	
I often ask questions to get to the bottom of an issue.	
I find it easy to ' <i>step into another person's shoes</i> ' and see their point of view on an issue	
I am easily understood – I speak clearly at a steady pace.	
I use my body language to influence people.	
I use my voice tone to influence people.	
I can build a rapport with people easily.	
I often take the lead with a customer to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome.	
<b>Total Score</b>	

### Interpreting the result

10 -17: Your customer communication skills could be developed. Start by thinking about your attitude to people, your communications skills and how you conduct yourself in business conversation.

18 -25: You have strengths and weaknesses in your customer communication skills. Start by reviewing your lower scores and find new behaviours and ways of communicating that you can practice and gradually improve your habits.

26 -30: You have high level customer communication skills. To further improve assessment ask some key people to complete a questionnaire on you and to give you some useful feedback regarding communication skills



## The Listening Process

Most people often assume that communication is solely about speaking, however to be an effective communicator you firstly need to be an effective listener.

The listening process has three basic functional parts:

- **Hearing** – this is the physical sensory component, where sound waves travel from the client into our ear to our ear drums.
- **Listening** – this is the perception part of the sound waves that have processed into the ear. It is important that you give the client time and space to speak, so that they can process what has been said.
- **Interpreting** – This is the cognitive component, where the brain receives the information and starts to process this and where the client makes sense of it. If the instructor suddenly jumps to conclusions they stop listening and interrupt the speaking client. In addition when the instructor communicates with the client and they find the speaker boring they may switch their listening off and the conversation stops. How you interpret information therefore plays a big part in power to understand the client.

## 1. Why it is important to listen first then speak to the client

*Think about when you walk into a Doctor's surgery and you begin to tell him your problem. Immediately he interrupts you saying 'yes, yes' and writes you a prescription telling you what is wrong with you and what you need to do.*

*Would you accept the services of this Doctor?*

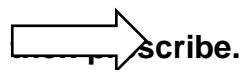
*Would you trust his diagnosis and treatment?*

This scenario is frequently found within the fitness environment. The prescription of exercise can be arranged without the actual input of the client. Fortunately in these times the fitness instructor is more aware of the need to listen to the client, prior to the design of the exercise programme. The communication process needs to start with genuine listening and yet most new instructors only listen with intent to respond, not intent to understand the client's needs. If however the ineffective instructor does listen, they either pretend or selectively listen, that is, they listen to small segments and make assumptions of the client's needs.

Like the Doctor scenario above, we have ready-made exercise solutions before we have heard the problem. We prescribe before we diagnose, with lack of empathy and comments such as. *'I know how you feel'*, *'Why not try this?'*, *'Yes, I had the same experience'*, *'I wouldn't do that if I were you'*. This is not the basis to building a solid trusting environment, or confidence to create a position of credibility and influence.

If we want to create trust, confidence, credibility and influence with the client the instructor must work hard to listen genuinely in order to fully understand them. The client must also perceive that we are doing so – it must be visible in the conduct and manner.

**The need to diagnose first**



Only once the instructor understands the client's needs, concerns, issues and feelings then the instructor can begin to serve them, meet their needs and resolve their health and fitness problems. Most importantly the instructor will be in a position of trust and credibility in order to influence and lead them to success.

### **How to powerfully listen and understand**

Within the fitness environment actively listening will suffice to overcome the issues and problems a client may have. This means the instructor should fully concentrate and put effort into the listening process. The table below provides basic advice when developing important communication skills.

Prepare well with a structure based around important open questions.
Build rapport and create a suitable environment for communication.
Take the initiative and make communication two-way and involving
Summarise regularly to establish clear understanding.
You may need to make notes. Let the person know you are doing so.
Focus on the customer and resist external distractions.
Keep an open mind and your emotions positive - don't be defensive or rush to making excuses.
Use the right voice tone to build trust and interest in the customer.
Analyse what is being said through how people say things and body language.
Look comfortable, use encouraging body language, maintain eye contact.
Allow silence and give people personal space.
Repeat back key phrases that they say in a supportive tone.
Rephrase / summarise the content of their communication to check understanding.
Reflect / summarise the feelings in their communication to check understanding.

## **Key Points**

### **Simple Actions Huge Returns**

Clients will spend up to 10% more for the same personal training product with better service.

When clients receive good service they tell 10-12 people on average.

When clients receive poor service they tell upwards of 20 people.

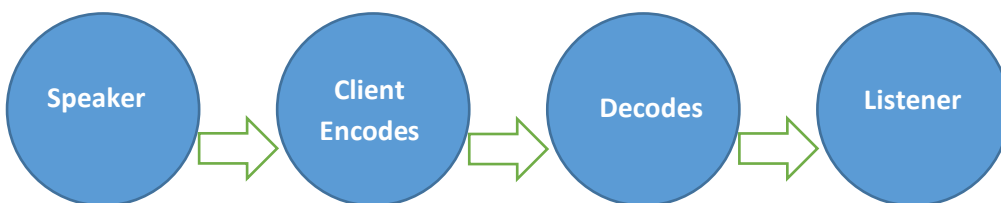
There is an 82% chance clients will return when they feel satisfied.

There is a 91% chance that poor service will dissuade a customer from ever going back to that specific gym.

## Developing Effective Verbal Communication

Effective verbal communication involves using spoken words to exchange information with the client. The usual process in the verbal communication method is via *'face to face'* meetings with the client or in the form of phone calls. The communications verbally maybe to exchange ideas, understands the client's points of view and help solve problems. The uses of verbal skills are the ones most valued by employers and there is a need to develop these skills to help advance careers and improve professional performance.

Verbal communication is the main form of communication within the gym environment, with one person sends a message to another person or group using speech. This form of communication is only successful when the speaker and listener can understand each other. This is because on average a person is exposed to thousands of messages every day and the instructor must ensure that they rise above the competing information to gain the listener's attention. After receiving this information the client must be able to interpret (decode) its meaning.



## Verbal Communication Feed Back Process

## **Organising your 'Fitness Messages'**

When verbally communicating to the client it is important to remember that the first and last parts of your message is the parts they will recall. Before you communicate with the client, identify the main purpose of your discussion and shape that to be your main idea. This is due to people having limited capacity to listen and decipher the spoken message. This is more apparent when they are distracted by nosy external environments, interruptions or other forms of communication obstacles. If the instructor attempts to '*package*' too much information into a conversation it may leave the client confused or only remembering only a part of what was said. It is very important that the information is limited so to convey a single interaction in a '*face to face*' conversation' for example the aim is to express one main idea and up to three associate ideas. If additional information is needed do so in separate discussions.

## **Excluding unnecessary words**

Most beginner clients in the fitness environment may be required to concentrate more to understand the spoken words than written instructions. When the instructor uses complicated language or unnecessary words, it will make it more difficult for the client to interpret what has been said by the instructor. With the new client it is important to use simple sentences with the avoidance of technical language and jargon whenever possible. Although within the exercise inductions it is natural to discuss subjects that the instructor deems important. However, if the listener (client) has different interests or priorities the delivered message might not be received correctly.

It is important to understand that any listener will have to manage multiple tasks as they listen to you convey the message. They have to pay attention to what is being said; interpret the non-verbal signal, whilst ignoring noise and other environmental distractions. The client can understand the instructor's message if it is clear and consistent with the presented body language.

Introduce the subject/message

Demonstrate/ Explain what is wanted

Identify the expectations (through the use of demonstration).

Show empathy and be polite

Use a tactful approach to ensure the client understands.

Always be aware that the client needs time to process all the incoming information and as the instructor communicates, inclusion of brief pauses should be implemented so the client can absorb the message. This is especially when an important point, requested physical action or are preparing to introduce a new subject. The instructor should use these short breaks to review the client's body language and gauge the clients understanding. However it is important not to have long pauses which may make the client feel uncomfortable

## **Effective Vocal Elements**

In a normal conversation the voice project is the channel that is used to communicate with others. The client not only listens to the words that are said, but the way they are said (vocal elements of the speech). The vocal element includes the rate of speech, volume and tone and can add interest and meaning to the message that is given. Using effective vocal elements that are appropriate for the client can make the words more powerful and appealing. These will potential cause the client to pay more attention to what is being communicated resulting in better performance from the client. Below are some key considerations that will help the instructor to be a better verbal communicator.

### **1. Alter the Speed of the Voice**

Instructors that verbally communicate at the same pace have a tendency to appear uninteresting and ineffective. However, instructors that vary their spoken words are more interesting to the client. In addition to this the rate of the instructor's speech can signal how the client should decode the spoken words. For example if an instructor speaks quickly and injects enthusiastic tone can excite the client. But if verbal communication is slow it can allow the client to absorb the words or anticipate the next idea.

### **2. Change the Pitch of the Voice**

The frequency of speech is commonly known as voice pitch. By having a variation of both high and low pitch can be an effective method to communicate. By lowering the pitch can give the voice more authoritative and influential character. Whereas increasing the pitch of the voice can signal uncertainty or may suggests a question.

### **3. Control the volume of your voice**

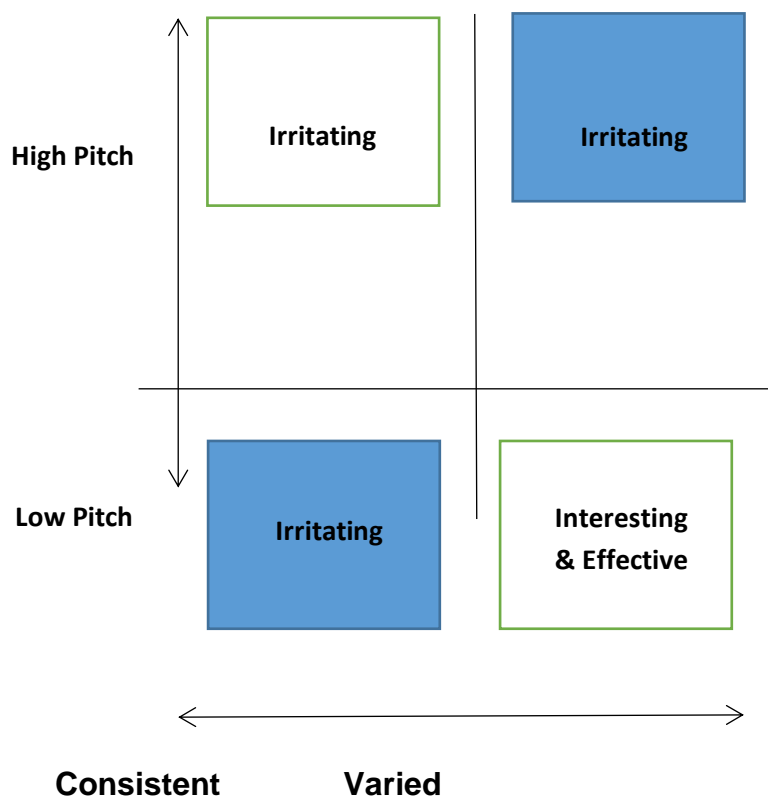
The volume of the voice of the instructor can affect the clients' ability to understand what is being communicated. It is important to speak loud enough so that the client can hear you comfortably. If the volume is too loud it may ultimately irritate the client and also disturb others around the gym. However, if speaking to quietly makes the words hard to hear and may communicate submissiveness and nervousness.



By varying the volume throughout the conversation adds character to the speech, so by raising the volume when the instructor wishes to emphasise a particular idea or key word. Lowering the voice will allow the client to concentrate on what is being said.

#### 4. Punctuate with Pauses

Effective communicators pause intermittently to allow a breakup of the flow of information and let the listeners' process and decode what was said. When a brief pause is implemented it can seek to create anticipation or even help to conclude an idea. As the figure below shows that the most effective combination of the vocal elements is low pitch with varied pace and intermittent pauses.



**Pace and Intermittent Pauses**

## **Non-verbal Language**

It is often not what is articulated but how it is presented. What the instructor wears and how they express themselves has a lot to do with how what is received. Besides verbal communication, non-verbal cues contribute to the spoken communication process to the client. The instructors' body language and nonverbal signals complements additional meaning to the message. Non-verbal language can include arm and hand gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, position of the instructors' body language and general overall appearance. The client will identify the non-verbal language as part of the message and may use it to determine how to interpret the instructors' words.

### **1. Maintaining Eye Contact**

It is important that the eyes of the instructor send appropriate signals that help to regulate the flow of information when communicating. The eyes can help to show interest, understanding but also confusion, anxiety and fear. When the instructor makes eye contact with the client it will help to establish credibility and help influence the client that you are engaging with them. The client will trust the instructor that looks directly at them when they speak and less sceptical due to eye contact.

### **2. Positive Facial Expressions**

A very powerful non-verbal cue in humans is the smile that helps to transmit friendliness, warmth and also acceptance. In the fitness environment the instructor that smiles frequently when they are engaged in a conversation is perceived to be approachable, friendly and overall appealing. A client will also more likely react positively to the verbal message and recall what has been said. However if the instructor has a frown or grimace it also sends out a message which can be interpreted negatively by the client.

### **3. Instructors' Gestures**

Effective instructors use powerful physical gestures to emphasise important points. This is usually in the form of movements from their arms, hands and fingers when they communicate.

When gestures are correctly used they can help to enliven and animate, communicating enthusiasm and sincerity. However, if there is no movement when speaking the client may have a perception of the instructor as being tense or even boring.

#### **4. Postural Maintenance**

How the instructor or even client '*holds*' or maintains their posture can convey their mood, attitude and interest in the topic. It is important that when communicating with the client that when sitting or standing with an erect posture can communicate competence and also confidence. By leaning slightly towards the client may be received as that you are being receptive and interested in what they have to say. It is important to avoid verbally communicating with the client when the instructors back is turned or if they are distracted with another task. This will show signals of disinterest and also insincerity.

## Key Points on Non- Verbal Communication

It is clear that just looking good will not produce the desired level of customer satisfaction. Below are examples of ways to enhance non-verbal communication

- **Smiling** – there is nothing like a smile and pleasant face to greet a customer, especially if he/she has a complaint.
- **Maintain eye contact** – always look into your customer's eyes. Directly address customers.
- **How you look** – personal grooming has a big impact on your customers. Dirty hands, messy hair and poor dress can mean the loss of an otherwise happy customer.
- **Shaking hands** – when shaking hands with a customer a firm and professional handshake is expected.
- **Be attentive** - when listening to a customer, slightly lean towards your customer and nod your head ever so slightly to indicate you are listening.
- **Tone of voice** – always convey friendliness and kindness. Do not raise your voice in frustration or anger no matter how difficult or tiresome a customer may behave.
- **Hand gestures** - use hand movements to emphasise what you to emphasise your feelings.
- **Personal space** – this is the distance that feels comfortable between you and another person. Adequate space is important to making customers feel secure and unthreatened.
- **Posture** – slumping in a chair or leaning against a wall while interacting with a customer are signs you are not interested in the customer. Your pose or posture should express attention, friendliness, and openness. Lean forward, face the customer and nod to let them know you are interested.
- **Observation** - notice how your customer behaves and what he/she reacts positively to while you are providing service.

## Motivation for Client Participation

Getting clients into the gym over the past 50 years has been increasingly difficult. Dumazedier (1960) suggested that fitness could only be participated in by the clients own free will. So it is important that a positive environment where people want to come into and participate into these leisure pursuits. This “leisure potential” as Godbey (1978) wrote that it is the potential of the individual to engage and pursue activities that they wished to do. It is important that in today’s society that we increase the marketing efforts and we recruit methods to increase individuals’ physical activity levels. However, this is a difficult undertaking due to other recreational pastimes including television, computer games and other inactive pursuits. Other potential issues are the concept of “time starvation” that describes the increase of disposable income in comparison with limited time to participate in leisure activities (Roberts, 1970). In the present society the lack of free time are the primary reasons given by people for them not to join gyms or even training themselves. To increase clients physical activity levels the fitness companies must be aware that the clients’ time is at a premium and the delivery of fitness must be presented in a time efficient manner. The “*bang for the buck*” concept of delivery in palatable time chunks to help establish efficient service and enhance client satisfaction.

To fully address the needs of the personal training or group exercise client it is important that we understand the reasons why clients wish to participate in exercise. According to Ellis (1973) there are three main reasons for participation:

1. **Arousal seeking**, this is when the client receives internal satisfaction from the experience of exercising. This arousal could have been from the sense of belonging to the facility or exercise group. This can be created also by the member of staff who effectively communicates to the client by name. In addition some clients may also obtain a sense of achievement following completion of the exercise session or completion of the exercise class.
2. **Learning and development**, with interaction with staff can lead the client to learn via passive learning through the shared exercises of staff and other experienced clients. Ellis suggests that this indicates the value of having competent and knowledgeable staff that can educate the client.

**3. Drive for client's optimal arousal**, client's accomplishment of new levels of physical fitness whether a reduction in weight or other self-targeted goals, helps create a sensation of specific success that produces the client's self-fulfilment.

It is important that the fitness organisation or trainers are progressively attempting to retain the business of the client. It is important that key motivations are being met each time the client visits the fitness establishment. Torkildsen (2005) suggested that the client has three core elements for their own leisure seeking experiences:

**1. The correct environment conditions**, this can be created with the correct tangible conditions including a well-equipped and clean gymnasium. The more intangible conditions are the atmosphere of the facility and the perceived ambience that maybe present in a high quality facility. The client may also consider other factors including other users, costs, staffing etc. But one thing is clear in the view of the client; if the conditions are not considered then the regular client base will be minimal.

**2. Client satisfaction** differs from client to client, while it has been frequently reported that you cannot please all the clients all the time. There is however nothing stopping the facility and staff for trying to satisfy the clients' needs. Some fitness businesses may specialise or even segment client groups, catering for specific client groups. However by implementing this strategy may narrow down the available market. For example if the business owner wished to develop a female only gym then they have dismissed an opportunity to sell to the male population. However, if there was a need for a female only facility it is essential that the obtaining the female clients satisfaction and providing a positive experience. This has to be accomplished prior to the member joining the gym of the users; this can be through the helpfulness of the staff and the process. Other considerations to client care are can be parking facilities, knowing the clients names to the training of the staff. These may seem to be relatively small issues but grouped together can contribute towards obtaining client satisfaction.

**3. Positive outcomes**, these are the clients' physical, psychological, emotional and social outcomes of participating in exercise. It is important that these outcomes are delivered as a package to actively drive the continued participation of the client.

## **Understanding the Needs of the Client**

As already discussed not every client is the same and their individual wants and needs is central to the overall success of the fitness business. It is important that the staff know what the customer wants and also how to deliver the product that they want. If you fail to understand the client then according to data from the Turner Centre for Entrepreneurship at Bradley University that 25% of all business will fail within the first year. Furthermore a further 50% will fail within the first five years ( see Table 1)

**Table 1 Failure rate in new businesses.**

<b>Year of Business Operation</b>	<b>% of Business Failure</b>
Year 1	25%
Year 2	36%
Year 3	44%
Year 4	50%
Year 5	55%
Year 6	60%
Year 7	63%
Year 8	66%
Year 9	69%

(Data from Turner Centre for Entrepreneurship at Bradley University).

Business incompetence is a leading factor with a reported 46% of all failures being attributed to this problem. The lack of experiences with the line of services is responsible for 11% of all business failures. The fitness professionals have two concerns that maybe problematic including the individuals think they are fit and can as a result make the clients fit without adequate training. Secondly they do not have the business experience and understanding in running a small fitness business. It is important to understand that the new personal training business requires both educational and practical experiences are essential in running a new business. This is due to the delivery in the delivery in client satisfaction and increasing foot fall and retention.

It is important to understand that failure to address the fundamental needs of the client can be catastrophic for the business. There are four leading reasons why a new fitness business can fail:



**1. Business Incompetence-** This is not an offensive term but a statement of the fitness business not been fully preferred for the needs of the client. Small or new fitness companies rely upon “emotional pricing” due to personal investment that may over inflate the price in the market place. It is important that the newly created company understands the key elements of the proposed pricing structure, operational planning or the lack of administration execution.

**2. Lack of managerial Experience-** Lack of experience regarding the expansion or growth of the business with inadequate requirements for payment collection, repayment planning etc.

**3. Lack of Experiences in Line of Provision of Services-** This relates to the lack of preparation of the need for educational and experiential preparation. Issues include carrying inadequate inventory to satisfy the needs of the client. The lack of understanding regarding the what is required to fully establish the success of the product (fitness equipment, marketing and advertising etc.).

**4. Business Neglect-** This could be due to issues regarding the absence of business development or conducting business using fraudulent methods and practices including false insurance claims.

## **Client Ready to Participate in Exercise**

As already discussed it is important that we that we review the services delivered to potential clients'. This information is important and helps to establish the client's SMART objectives that will seek to clarify to the clients what they want. A SMART target for a client maybe:

**Specific-** What the client specifically desires to gain from participating in exercise.

**Measurable-** Measurements in the form of fitness testing can track progress to the client.

**Agreed** – The client must have a desire to fully participate in the exercise session.

**Realistic-** The client must be able to achieve the targets that were set, as if the targets are too difficult to meet then drop out may occur.

**Time Considerations-** Goal setting must be implemented to allow the client to achieve set targets

Once the fitness professional and the client have agreed on the targets then a plan of action can be agreed with the following factors considered:

1. Develop an individual exercise program to meet the clients' personal goals.
2. Formally/ informally assess their fitness development through health and fitness consultations.
3. Provide expertise on key fitness components of the client
4. Provide advanced guidance for sport specific conditioning for recreational/developmental athletes.
5. Offer individual or group instruction.
6. Have knowledgeable and qualified staff that delivers individual personal training and group exercise instruction.
7. Be able to offer advice on specific fitness classes/programs relevant to achieving the client's goals.
8. Provide flexible hours of delivery to suit the client.
9. Provide motivational support for clients.
10. Know the customer and their needs.

Some clients' may also wish assistance in other areas including nutrition, lifestyle coaching and dietetics. For the new personal trainer, it may be necessary to avoid these areas until

you have gained relevant experience and have substantial qualifications. Always be honest with the client and that you may be unqualified in nutrition for example.

### **Attending to the Needs of the Client**

As fitness professional it is the duty and job to positively engage the fitness client, enhancing their individual process and satisfaction is the nature of the business. If the client is to be intrinsically fulfilled then they must be provided with both tools and guidance to progress themselves. For clients that are motivated in a social group exercise setting it is important that they are given palatable options that address their desires. The issues surrounding choice and opportunity must be applied to many clients in a somewhat daunting environment and the performance of the physical activity can make the client feel less than competent. Many clients have the same feelings of fear and incompetence and in general people dislike being classified as a beginner. It is important that the instructor makes the clients first initial experience a positive and rewarding one. If a client has a desire to train on their own it is important that support is provided in a non-judgemental and non-intimidating manner. A method to breakdown social barriers within the gym environment is by the introduction to other clients who tend to train at the same time. This shared social focus may result in a lower client dropout rate and increased client satisfaction.

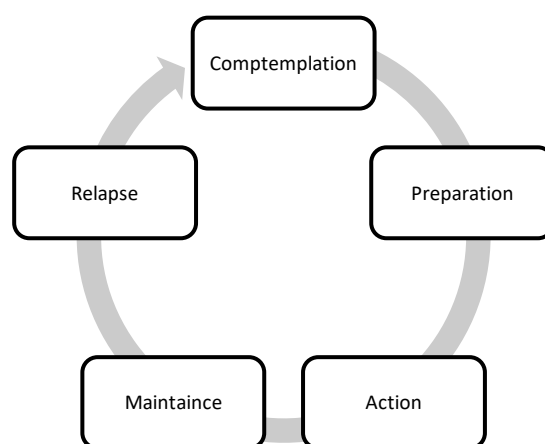
Most instructors will comment on the importance of ensuring the initial clients visit is positive. It is important that the instructor fully understands that the client may also visit other similar facilities. The client's facility visits show their own willingness to change their behaviour towards exercise. Most of what we do within the fitness industry centres on changing the clients behaviour. One of the classic and most useful models of behavioural change and the stages clients go through is the work by Prochaska & DiClemente (1993)

## Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM)

When the personal trainer is attempting to change a client's behaviour it is important to develop different approaches to their lifestyle. In the field of health psychology the most popular stage model is the transtheoretical model (TTM) (Horwath, 1999). This approach has been successful in modifying simple and complex health behaviours including weight reduction, reduction of dietary fat, increase exercise adherence and smoking cessation (Prochaska, et al 1994). The TTM model suggests that an individual migrates through a series of five changes (pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance) in the cessation of unhealthy behaviour to a more positive healthy behaviour. TTM has been researched on a variety of different inherit behaviours and it has been suggested that there may be certain predicators of progressions though different stages of changes (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), including clients decisional balance (Prochaska, 1994); self-efficacy (DiClemente, Prochaska & Gibertini, 1985); and the processes of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983).

### The client's stages of behaviour change

The stages of change based upon the TTM attempts to theories the intentional behaviour along a sequential length of time that operates both cognitive and perform based components (for review, see Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Based upon more than two decades of research, the TTM has suggested that individuals move through a succession of stages in the adoption of healthy behaviours in replacement of unhealthy traits.



**Figure 2** Transtheoretical Model of Behavioural Change

### **Pre-Contemplation Stage**

This is the stage in which the client has no intent to alter or modify their behaviour in the immediate future. The pre-contemplating client can be characterised as potentially resistant and unmotivated and tend to deflect any presented information, discussion regarding their present physiological condition (Prochaska et al, 1992). The personal trainer has a very difficult task in modifying a client who is presently at this stage due to the deflection of information. It is important that the trainer adopts approaches regarding making the client aware of their present health status. This may be performed within the review process and the initial health assessment as the information obtained may help to create an understanding regarding their physical characteristic.

### **Contemplation Stage**

Clients at this stage openly express a desire to change their behaviour within a six month period. They are also aware of the benefits of changing the present lifestyle habit, but remain acutely aware of the challenges that are presented along the way (Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 1997). Personal trainers should be tentative with the contemplating client as the client is often hesitant to lifestyle change. The inclusion of correct and client centred exercise prescription should be applied at this stage as to strenuous an exercise session may have a negative impact towards change.

### **Preparation Stage**

Clients at this stage intend to purposely take decisive action to change this usually occurs within a month (DiClemente et al., 1991). This stage is also referred to as a transitional stage prior to an established stage where exercise is integrated within the client's lifestyle. Grimley, Prochaska, Velicer, Blais, & DiClemente (1994) predict that individuals would progress to the action stage within a 30 day period.

### **Action Stage**

This occurs when an individual has made and evident change within their lifestyle in which to modify behaviour to a [positive change but this has only occurred within a 6 month period (Prochaska et al., 1997). The personal client will frequently participate in physical activity and

will have a sense of achievement after each session. The trainer should actively seek to reward the client with positive reinforcement to ensure positive behaviour is sustained.

### **Maintenance**

The trainer and client will be actively working to prevent a relapse and also attempting to secure and consolidate the fitness gains that were initially achieved during the action phase. According to Prochaska & DiClemente (1984) clients that maintain physical fitness are different from those in the action stage as they are frequently tempted to relapse into physical inactivity.

**Table 3: Summary of TTM**

<b>Stage of Change</b>	<b>Clients Characteristics</b>	<b>Techniques</b>
Pre-contemplation	Not currently considering change: "Ignorance is bliss"	Confirm lack of willingness. Clarify: choice is theirs Encourage re-evaluation of present behaviour Encourage self-exploration, not action Explain and personalize the risk of current lifestyle
Contemplation	Hesitant about change: "Sitting on the fence" Not considering change within the next month	Confirm lack of willingness Clarify: choice is theirs Encourage appraisal of pros and cons of behaviour modification Identify and promote new, positive outcome opportunities
Preparation	Some experience with change and are trying to change: "Testing the waters" Planning to act within 1month	Identify and assist in problem solving re: obstacles Help client identify social support Confirm that client has underlying skills for behavior change Encourage small initial steps
Action	Actively Involved in new behaviour for 3-6 months	Focus on restructuring cues and social support Reinforce self-efficacy for handling potential obstacles Overcome feelings of loss and reiterate long-term benefits of physical activity
Maintenance	Continued commitment to sustaining new behaviour Post-6 months to 5 years	Plan for follow-up support Reinforce internal rewards Discuss coping with relapse
Relapse	Resumption of old behaviours: "Fall from grace"	Evaluate trigger for relapse Reassess motivation and barriers Plan stronger coping strategies

## **Identifying issues underpinning screening procedures, including informed consent**

The inclusion of the health assessment is a contemporary holistic health assessment that aims to promote a higher level of engagement with clients at various stages within their physical activity journey. If the procedures are followed then this will help provide a highly personalised and professional service that will differentiate program from other leisure based facilities. This will therefore enable you the fitness instructor to support client recruitment, retention and the most important factor the health improvement of each individual client.

The nature of our own society is facing a growing epidemic of preventable ill health together with a significant proportion of the population living a lower quality of life as a result of health and lifestyle related issues. As a consequence of this and inadequate health literacy these individuals are often unaware of any health concerns.

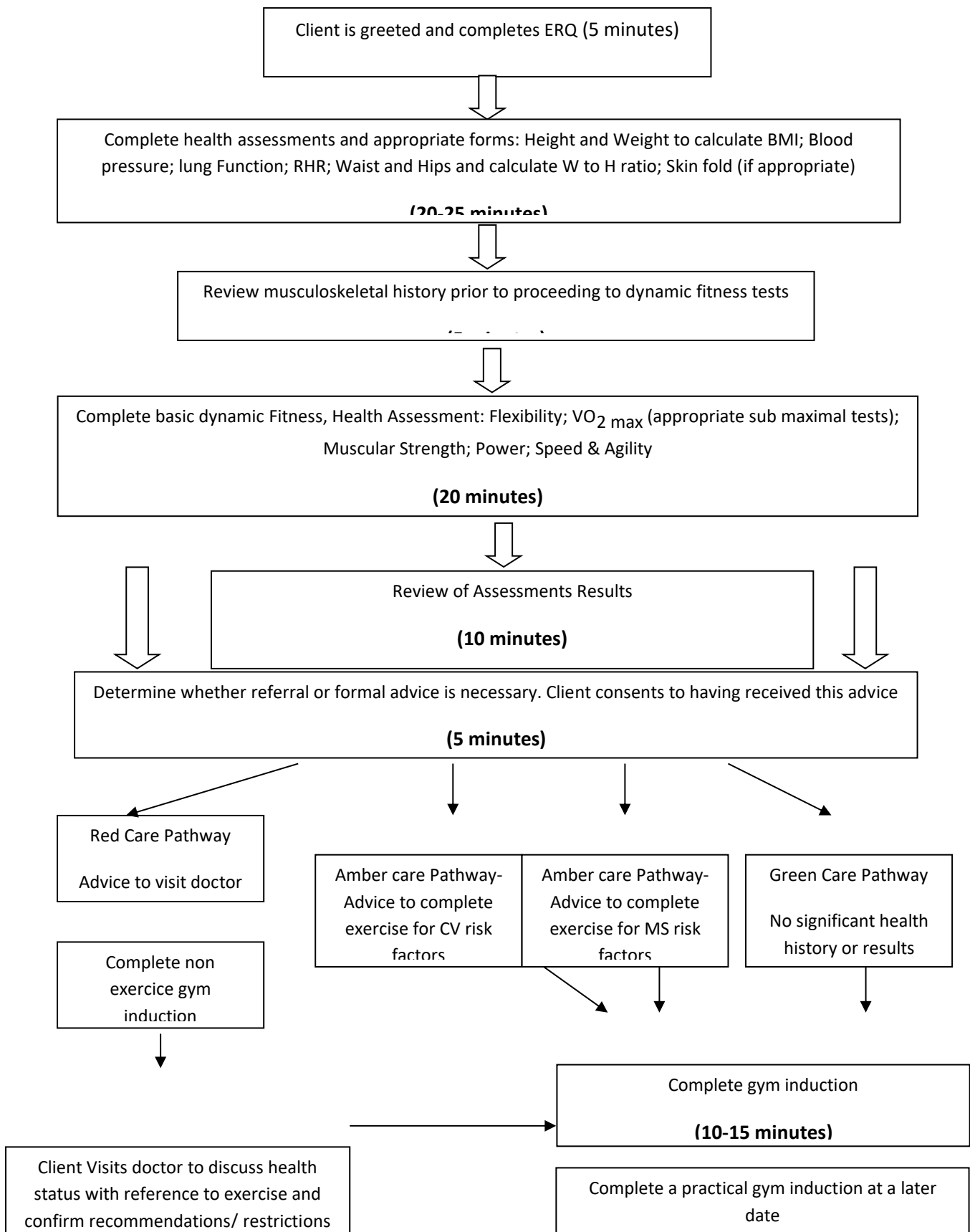
### **The Nature of the Health Assessment**

The aim of conducting these health assessments can help counteract the below problems by:

1. monitoring key health and well-being issues and parameters for the client (i.e. measuring client's blood cholesterol levels)
2. Educating clients regarding the significance of these issues of health (i.e. ensuring client's understanding that high cholesterol levels increase the risk of coronary artery disease and why this occurs)
3. Allowing clients to take a more positive step where their health or quality of life could improve by helping them select the lifestyle and behaviour changes that will improve their health and are correct for them.
4. Overall this will provide the client with the correct amount of knowledge that they need to help improve their health.



## Structure of the Health & Fitness Assessment



## The Health Assessment Process

The role you play is an important one, with your responsibility for the collection of health and lifestyle history and the measurement of physiological parameters in a health and fitness assessment. You should ensure that all information that is collated and collected is accurate and be completed in a sensitive and supportive manner. The trainer is responsible for guiding the client to an appropriate lifestyle change that would reduce any risk of the physiological parameter affecting their current and future health. All results that the trainer collects should be presented in a motivational and empowering manner, using language that the client can understand to maximize the chances of the client taking positive action to improve their overall physical and mental health.

The initial contact with the client should provide a welcoming environment for the potentially intimidated new member and to complete all of the required stages of each assessment within the allocated time frame. The personal trainer is responsible for the recommendation of any lifestyle changes to the client that may increase their short and long term well-being. This will aid in facilitating behavioral change but offering support and suggestions in case the client wishes to discuss any barriers following the recommendations.

It must be clarified that your role is **NOT TO DIAGNOSE**, this is the role of the clinicians. Be sure to refer clients or seek further advice whenever necessary. It is important that you should not imply that the client may have a disease based on one isolated assessment measure; all that can be concluded is that the measured factor was outside the recommended norms at that moment in time. This may however as a result of the test uncover an underlying health problem, but may also be a transient result as a consequence of possible unrelated factors.

*Note: If you ever unsure of what actions to take in any situation or cannot answer a question with confidence then explain this to the client and explain that you will follow up on the issue or query and contact the client in due course.*

## **The Initial Appointment with the Client**

Prior to meeting the client, it is important that all the room is equipped with the assessment equipment and any other consumables that maybe used. Once this is established it is then important that the initial contact is positive thus establishing creditability and competence. A poor first impression can shape the client's impression of you and the facility. However, a positive introduction should focus on both a verbal and visual welcome and create a comfortable, non-threatening environment. You should always be **H.O.N.E.S.T**

1. Hand shake- A welcoming, firm but not aggressive hand shake
2. Open body language
3. Name- use the client's name as well
4. Eye contact should be maintained throughout
5. Smile when you welcome the client
6. The verbal greeting should introduce you and ask how the client is prior commencing the health/ fitness assessment.

When conducting the health/ fitness assessment it is important to ensure that you maintain a positive environment by continuing to use the client's name; maintaining eye contact as often as possible. It is also important that you regularly ask/ confirm that the client is content and comfortable. Try to engage the client throughout the assessment by asking questions to check their level of understanding. However, it is important to establish if the client is wary of getting asked questions and some may not be able to understand what is being asked.

The workstation that is set in the room should have everything to hand and if inputting information into a computer then ensure the monitor is oriented towards you so that it is not easily readable by the client until you get to the point at which you review the results.

## The Standardized Introduction to the client

Take them into the assessment room, making sure they are comfortable and then explain the stages that you will work through during the session.

What to say:

- Today we are going to be conducting a health/ fitness assessment
- The steps that we will be completing are:
  - *A review of lifestyle history*
  - *Measurement of height and weight to calculate body mass index*
  - *A measurement of blood pressure*
  - *An estimation of  $VO_{2max}$  or aerobic fitness and a measurement of resting heart rate*
  - *Measurement of waist and hip circumference in order to calculate a waist to hip ratio.*
  - *A collection of musculoskeletal (MS) history*
- Optional tests that also maybe included (these are very much individually based):
  - *A measurement of the clients lung function*
  - *Limb circumference sites*
  - *3,4 or 7 site skin fold measurements*
  - *A measurement of flexibility*
  - *Measurement of strength*
  - *Measurement of local muscular endurance*
  - *Measurement of explosive power*
  - *Measurement of speed and agility*

## **Why the advisor would conduct assessments in this manner:**

The results of the assessment will enable the instructor to:

- To assess the client's current health status and to identify opportunities for the instructor to help improve wellbeing.
- To help identify any health or lifestyle issues that could lead to higher than normal risks of illness or injury and advise accordingly.

## **Confidentiality of the client's personal information**

Some of the information is detailed and is extremely personal and some client's may appear reluctant or embarrassed to impart such information. As a result it is important to remain impartial and adopt a professional manner when completing this section of the health/fitness assessment. It is important to ensure the client that all of the information is important in order to assess their state of health and well-being and that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence.

1. Explain to the client: 'before we go on I need to confirm that the personal and clinical data collected during the assessment will be recorded by the advisor and stored in a secure filing system. The information would not be shared with any other persons. Do you consent to this storage and use of information?'
2. The initial stage of the session involves the client completing all relevant lifestyle history information.
3. The advisor should remain sympathetic and realize that the client may be sensitive about past or current medical issues. Reassure them that all information is confidential and will be treated this way.

## Conducting Health Assessment with Client

### Example of Personal Training Client Pro-forma

<b>Last Name:</b> _____			
<b>First Name:</b> _____			
<b>Address:</b> _____			
<b>Postal Code:</b> _____			
<b>Date:</b> _____			
<b>Home Phone:</b> _____			
<b>Mobile Phone:</b> _____			
<b>Email:</b> _____			
<b>Occupation:</b> _____	<b>Male</b> ___	<b>Female</b> ___	<b>Birth date:</b> _____
_____			
<b>Emergency</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>Number:</b>
_____			

**Fitness Related Questions**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your present fitness level

(1: worst—10: best)? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you satisfied with your current level of fitness? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

How often do you currently participate in physical activity?

5-7 times/week\_\_\_ 3-4 times/week\_\_\_ 1-2 times/week\_\_\_ not in the past 6 months\_\_\_

If active, list your activities (Cardio, Sports, Strength Training, and Stretching).

Activity	Frequency/ Week	Average Duration	Intensity Easy/Moderate/Hard

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## Goal Setting

In order to increase your chances of being successful at achieving your goals, our Personal Trainers believe all your goals must be 'SMART' – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time calibrated. Circle what goals you would like to accomplish.

Reduce Fat	Tone Muscles	Improve Sport Specific Skills	Increase Flexibility
Muscular Fitness	Build Muscle Mass	Improve Exercise Technique	Increase Motivation
Improve Health	Improve eating habits	Pre/post natal care	Rehabilitation
Reduce Stress	Add Variety to Exercise Regime	Other	

Please rate on a scale from 1 to 10 how important it is for you to reach your goal(s) \_\_\_\_\_



**How would you like us to monitor your progress?**

Body Weight	Limb Measurements	Girth	Body Fat Measurements
Training Log Book	Other		

**Integrating YOUR Ideal Fitness Program into your week**

What would an ideal exercise and work week look like for you? Please be specific. List your favourite classes, work outs, machines, activities, rest days etc.?

Days	Work Hours Approx.	Other Commitments	Your Ideal Time & Type of Exercise
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

**Potential Barriers To Participation**

Lack of Interest	Boredom of exercise	Illness or injury
Lack of time	Motivation	Other

Do you have a plan to overcome these obstacles? No Yes \_\_\_\_

If  yes describe  plan

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What do you expect from a personal trainer?

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How can your personal trainer motivate you?

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Are there any programs or services that we do not offer that you would like us to offer?

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**Lifestyle and Behaviour Related Questions**

**Overall, how would you rate your nutrition?** Low \_\_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_\_ High \_\_\_\_

Do you consistently and regularly eat four to five "meals" a day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_

Do you drink 8 glasses of water each day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_

Do you eat at least 4 servings of bread, cereal, rice or pasta per day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_

Do you eat at least 2 servings of fruit per day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_

Do you eat at least 3 servings of vegetables per day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Do you have at least 2 servings of quality protein per day? Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_

Do you consume foods high in saturated fat, high in refined sugar and/or high in salt content more than 2-3 times a week?

No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ please specify \_\_\_\_\_

How many cups of tea/coffee do you have per day? 0\_\_ 1-2\_\_ 3-5\_\_ more than 6\_\_

How many glasses of alcohol do you drink per week? 0\_\_ 1-2\_\_ 3-5\_\_ 6-9\_\_ +10\_\_

Do you take any vitamins or supplements? \_\_\_No \_\_\_Yes, please list:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you smoke?** No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ indicate how many per day \_\_\_\_\_ number of years

\_\_\_\_\_

How many hours do you regularly sleep at night? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate the quality of your sleep? Low \_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_ High \_\_\_

How would you rate your energy in the morning? Low \_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_ High\_\_\_

How would you rate your energy in the afternoon? Low \_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_ High\_\_\_

How would you rate your energy in the evening? Low \_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_ High\_\_\_

How would you rate your stress levels? Low \_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_ High\_\_\_

How do you cope with stress? \_\_\_\_\_