

Norm Cates'

# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

## *Cover Story Classics:* **Red Lerille**



**JANUARY 2025**

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# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

## Cover Story Classics: Red Lerille

By: Norm Cates

**Publisher's Note:** Some things are timeless. A sight. A smell. A good story. Sage advice. In this case, we are going to go with a good story, and within, you will certainly experience some sage advice. Throughout 2025, we will be presenting something we are calling: *Cover Story Classics*. From our library of 300+ case study cover stories, featuring many of the greats of this industry and how they got there, we will be selecting those that truly stood the test of time to re-present to you. We are doing this for several reasons:

1. As already mentioned, these stories and the advice within are timeless. Like they did when published, they can help readers today.

2. Though you may have read one of these stories years ago, many of our newer readers have not. And, even if you have read them, reading them again with the new perspective of time passed can be illuminating.

3. We want to remind everyone of the power found within the *Club Insider Archives*. It's the power of knowledge and experience, and with it, you can accomplish anything in this industry that you set your mind to.

This month, to kick off this year-long series, we go back to where it all began for *Club Insider*. Our first case study cover story, which actually appeared in **Editions #3 and #4** in February and March of 1994. That story featured **Red Lerille** and his mammoth facility in Lafayette,

Louisiana, which at that time, had been in business for 31 years. Fast forward to today, double those years in business to 62 this month (**Happy Anniversary Red!**). Many of the things Red discussed then are pertinent today, and thus, they have led to his continued experience and success in this industry. At the end of this classic, we will update you as to where Red's is today.

♦ ♦ ♦

February and March 1994

You are about to be exposed to an in-depth *INSIDER* examination of one of America's leading health and racquet clubs. *Red Lerille's Health And Racquet* clubs. *Red Lerille's Health And Racquet* (See *Red Lerille* Page 9)



February 1994 Edition of Club Insider

## Crunch Fitness Celebrates the Three-Million-Member Mark and Launches Crunch 3.0

**NEW YORK, N.Y.** - *Crunch Fitness*, a leading high-value, low-price gym, has marked the milestone of reaching three million members and unveiled its latest gym design, *Crunch 3.0*, a brand-new layout to elevate and energize the gym-goer's experience. Through meeting the members' evolving needs and understanding where the wellness industry is heading, Crunch has selectively curated the updated design elements in *Crunch 3.0* to amplify the member experience.

Leveraging deep consumer insights, Crunch designed the new 3.0 format to motivate its members along their fitness journey, fusing fitness and entertainment in a "No Judgments" environment. This latest

prototype includes engaging environmental aesthetics; an inviting new approach to the brand's first moment of truth with the member--the entry-- via a redesigned front desk, reception and lobby area; expanded and improved *HIITZone* and additional functional training areas with indoor turf; increased emphasis on strength training; enhanced personal training areas; and an all-new, reinvented *Relax & Recover* wellness studio.

"After 35 years of success, we're excited to reach three million members. This momentous achievement further cements Crunch's leadership position in the high-value, low-price gym category," said **Jim Rowley**, *CEO of Crunch Fitness*.

"As we reflect on the past year, we are confident that we offer the most innovative fitness experience under one roof and the best gym membership value on the market."

Highlights of the new layout include:

**Entry, Reception and Locker Room Experience:** Enhancements to the entry, front desk and reception area create a vibrant and welcoming arrival experience for members. Improved lighting and aesthetics give more visibility into the club, put the brand front and center and energize members when they set foot in the gym. *Crunch 3.0* also offers modernized locker rooms with an upgraded finish.



**Group Fitness:** With *Crunch 3.0*, modernized group fitness studios will complement the quality and uniqueness of Crunch's proprietary group fitness programming, creating an elevated mood through updated color palettes, enhanced (See *Crunch* Page 6)

## Inside the Insider: Edition #373

- When Struggling Becomes Comfort: Breaking Free from Familiar Chaos in the Gym Business - **By:** Jim Thomas
- Use PIPs to Address Culture Fits Who are Falling Short - **By:** Chris Stevenson
- Beyond the Finish Line: The Evolution of Running from Niche Sport to Mainstream Movement - **By:** Nancy Trent
- A Strength Training Resolution Revolution - **By:** Terry Browning
- ACE and the Mental Wellbeing Association Introduce a New Certification Focused on Mental Wellbeing
- Health, Exercise and Fitness Dominate Americans' New Year's Resolutions
- And, of Course, Norm's Notes

## Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **373rd monthly edition of this 32+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of "Telling-It-Like-It-Is!" I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

■ **Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT!?** Hmm... hmm... hmm! And, as usual, let me start these **Norm's Notes** with my normal monthly salutation to you all: **GOD BLESS AMERICA and GOD BLESS YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR BUSINESS!!!**

■ Folks, this month, we are introducing our *Cover Story Classics* series, and we are starting it off with how *Club Insider* began, the truly incredible case study cover story featuring the one-and-only **Red Lerille**. Now, 89 years old and having run his facility simply known as *Red's* for 62 years

this month (**Happy Anniversary Red!**), there is almost nothing Red has not seen or experienced running his club. Within this classic cover story, he shares much of that, but be warned, it is a long story (and we are only re-publishing half of it)! Make sure you have a comfortable spot to read as well as a cold beverage to sip on. But, you will not be disappointed with how you spent that time! Check it out on **Page #3**.

■ We are excited to **Welcome Back** previous *Club Insider Advertisers*, **FlexIt** and **Step Fitness and Recreation!** As they enter our *Directory Tier of Advertising*, you will see their logos on our website and in all weekly and monthly eblasts. Be sure to click on those logos to learn more about how these great companies can help you!

■ I'm writing this *Norm's Note* on Friday, January 10th. I inserted this Note near the top of my January writing because the disaster I am about to write about started happening yesterday, January 9, 2025. Please consider the following and **DO ANYTHING YOU POSSIBLY CAN TO HELP** our fellow Americans who live in Southern California and have been hit by these wildfires. **It's VERY SAD...** at

last count I have heard 10+ people have been killed and thousands of people are *now completely homeless* in Los Angeles, Palisades, Malibu, Eaton and other areas of Southern California.

I am proud to write that our industry is stepping up. To date, some big club companies have volunteered facilities and amenities to those who have lost everything to the wildfires *and* to those who are helping fight the fires, preventing others from experiencing such loss. Our good friends at *Crunch*, *long-time C.I. Advertisers*, as well as *24 Hour Fitness* and *UFC Gym* are doing so. I am sure there are many others, and we would love to hear about that if you are in California.

**ADAM SEDLACK**, CEO of *UFC GYM* commented: "We want to provide a safe, welcoming space for those in need during this difficult time. Whether it's a place to recharge, take a shower or simply find a moment of respite, we're here to help our community members who are facing these challenging circumstances."

Folks, to close this Note, please pass this on to others you know in our industry who might be able to help the impacted club folks in SoCal. I also welcome other stories of industry folks



Norm Cates

helping this cause. Please report on it by calling me at **(770) 635 - 7578**. I am here most of the time, so you can call 24/7. If I don't answer, please leave a message.

■ Before I move on to my other monthly *Norm's Notes*, let me mention something I've not brought up to y'all lately, but I should have. **IF** you are in the health and fitness club business (or anything that is close to *(See Norm's Notes Page 7)*

### About Club Insider

## CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

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### Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **32nd Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love*, and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin*, is still *intriguing and amazing* to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 30+ year run possible.

Very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to **Rick Caro**, the late **Dr. Gerry Faust** and the **Faust Executive Roundtable #1** for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. *Thanks and Appreciation* to my long-time friends, **Ron Hudspeth** and **Cathy Miller**, formerly of **Atlanta's Hudspeth Report** for the tremendous assistance they provided. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of the folks at **Walton Press** in Monroe, Georgia. They did an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and printed every one of our monthly printed editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers!

Now, as we have gone all digital, *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **READERS**. Sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to our **Club Insider Advertisers**, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **Club Insider Contributing Authors**, past and present. *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **Health & Fitness Association** for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, our *Publisher*, who is a truly great business partner. You name it and Justin does it each and every month!

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,

*Norm Cates, Jr.*



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## Health, Exercise and Fitness Dominate Americans' New Year's Resolutions

WASHINGTON, D.C. - As 2025 begins, a nationwide survey by the *Health & Fitness Association (HFA)* reveals that health, fitness and exercise are at the forefront of Americans' New Year's resolutions. Of the estimated 159 million adults planning to set goals, 60%, or approximately 96 million Americans, intend to focus on health, fitness and exercise, making it the most popular theme for 2025 goals.

Among these fitness-focused individuals, the top aspirations include building muscle or strength (50%), establishing a regular exercise routine (44%) and improving mental health through physical activity (42%). These goals reflect a holistic understanding of fitness, highlighting its benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing.

To turn these ambitions into action, Americans overwhelmingly recognize the importance of structured exercise spaces such as gyms, studios and health clubs. Nearly nine-in-ten (88%) say access to fitness facilities will be important to achieving their goals, with 61% rating it very important. Consequently, most plan to maintain their existing membership (58%) or join a new fitness facility in 2025 (23%).

Despite the enthusiasm for fitness and exercise, affordability remains a concern. Nearly one-third cite cost as a top factor that might prevent them from achieving their fitness goals in 2025. This tension between ambition and accessibility underscores a broader issue in making health and fitness achievable for all Americans.

"Americans are entering the new year with strong ambitions to improve their health and fitness, but financial strain is a real obstacle for many," said **Liz Clark**, *HFA President and CEO*. "This represents both a challenge and an opportunity to explore strategic solutions that can make fitness more accessible to everyone."

The survey coincides with the release of a new HFA report, *Reversing the Physical Inactivity Crisis - Fitness Affordability as Strategic Policy*. Conducted in collaboration with *Portas Consulting*, the report explores how public investment in strategic pricing policies, such as those proposed under the PHIT Act, could expand access to structured exercise and deliver transformative health and economic benefits.

Key findings from the report reveal:

- U.S. fitness facility customers are almost 50% more likely to meet the *World Health*



# HEALTH & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

*Organization's (WHO)* recommended levels of physical activity compared to non-customers.

- This modest adjustment could prevent 500,000 chronic disease cases annually, saving \$12.2 billion in healthcare costs.

- The resulting growth in fitness participation could stimulate \$12.3 billion in consumer spending, create 230,000 jobs and enhance life satisfaction and community trust for millions.

Together, the new survey and report present a roadmap for aligning

Americans' fitness goals in 2025 with actionable solutions.

"Making fitness affordable is not only about helping people meet their personal goals," Clark emphasized. "It's about fostering healthier communities and unlocking the far-reaching societal benefits that come with increased physical activity."

**Methodology:** *Kantar*, on behalf of the Health and Fitness Association (HFA), conducted an online survey December 19 - 27, 2024 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adult Americans aged 18 and over related to new year's resolutions and 2025 goals. The margin of error is +/- 2 percent and greater among subgroups. The report, *Reversing the Physical Inactivity Crisis - Fitness Affordability as Strategic Policy*, explores the impact of targeted price reductions for fitness facility memberships. Conducted by the Health & Fitness Association in collaboration with *Portas Consulting*, the study integrates consumer surveys with *Portas'* proprietary Social Return on Investment (SROI) model to estimate the health, social, and economic impact. The consumer survey, conducted in September 2024, included 1,517 adult Americans.



# Make It Fun!

### ...Crunch

continued from page 3

overhead lighting, backlit mirrors, a lit instructor platform and digital timers. For members seeking holistic offerings that optimize their overall wellness, mental health and longevity, Crunch 3.0 franchisees now have the option to add a dedicated hot studio to their clubs. Called "Hot Stuff," this studio will offer heated group fitness classes, including yoga, Pilates, Barre, HIIT, mobility and core, enriching the member experience and providing the benefits of reducing joint pain, increasing circulation, easing anxiety and improving heart health.

**Enhanced HIITZone and Personal Training Areas:** Members sought more space for functional training. Crunch expanded with a second turf area and an improved HIITZone functional training area for personal training sessions and individual workouts.

**Strength Training for Everyone:** Crunch saw an increased interest in lifting and strength training from young, strong and social customers to more mature members, so Crunch 3.0 includes additional free

weights, resistance equipment, machines and Olympic lifting platforms. In reimagining the gym floor, Crunch 3.0 ensures the availability of strength training equipment for everyone during peak times in the gym.

**Relax & Recover Services:** Our members have increasingly prioritized recovery, longevity and a holistic approach to wellness. With Crunch 3.0, members can end their workout with a range of new *Relax & Recover* services, including *Hyperice* percussive and compression equipment, red light therapy and the infrared sauna. The Relax & Recover wellness studio at Crunch 3.0 clubs includes a dedicated stretching area, dimmed lighting and speakers with soothing music to create a true oasis inside the gym. With encouraging signage that says, "You Deserve This," this new space allows members to take the time to escape from their concerns and take care of their minds and bodies.

**Team Member Experience:** Crunch believes in being the best place to work out and the best place to work. The innovative Crunch 3.0 design strengthens the work experience for Crunch team members and provides them with a more seamless

flow from the front desk to personal training areas. The new layout allows team members and trainers to better serve members, offers more privacy for member/trainer consults and provides team members and trainers a more prominent presence throughout the gym.

"With Crunch 3.0, the value we provide our members is truly unparalleled," said **Molly Long**, *Chief Operating Officer of Crunch Fitness*. "Between the lighting, music, equipment, group fitness studios and overall aesthetics, the most in-demand offerings are coming to life under one roof at Crunch 3.0. We're evolving the physical format of our clubs to meet the members where they are and taking a leap forward from an experience standpoint."

"With Crunch 3.0, we're continuing to make serious fitness fun and making sure gym-goers feel good, physically, mentally and emotionally," continued Long. "The new design will make it even more enjoyable for members to create community and embark on their fitness journey at Crunch. This legendary new layout combines innovation, curation, and motivation that will transform a member's day from the moment they step through our doors."

Crunch Fitness will officially unveil Crunch 3.0 at the grand opening party of the new *Crunch East Plano* gym in Plano, Texas. The three-millionth member signed up at Crunch East Plano and will be surprised with a special celebration and awarded \$3,000 worth of prizes, including a complimentary three-year gym membership and various gifts. **Dak Prescott**, *Crunch franchise owner and star quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys*, will make a special appearance at the event to celebrate Crunch 3.0 and the three-millionth member. Crunch will expand the new gym layout to various locations across the U.S. in 2025.

Hitting this three-million-member milestone at such a rapid rate underscores Crunch's current path for growth. While it took Crunch approximately 28.5 years to reach one million members, the company hit two million members under five years later (despite dealing with a global pandemic) and reached three million members just over two years later, in less than half the time.

Crunch Fitness ranked #1 in the fitness category and #29 overall in the annual *Entrepreneur Franchise 500*, the world's most comprehensive franchise ranking. For more information, please visit [www.crunch.com](http://www.crunch.com).

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### ...Norm's Notes

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it), and you have news happening in your business, or if you know of news happening in other club businesses that you think our industry will benefit from learning what *YOU* know, then please let me know so I can help let the world know what's going on. My plan is as simple as that. **IF YOU KNOW IT...** and **IF** what you **KNOW** is something you want to see published here in these *Norm's Notes*, then fire away, Folks! Send me an email ([norm@clubinsideronline.com](mailto:norm@clubinsideronline.com)) with your news! Or, alternatively, call me at (770) 635 - 7578.

**REMEMBER... ANYTIME** and **EVERY TIME** you send me a scoop, be sure you also send me your contact info so I can contact you for details of your breaking news item(s). I repeat, in your contact to me, please don't forget to send me your name, your phone numbers and your email address. Then, **AFTER WE COMMUNICATE, HOLD ONTO YOUR HAT FOR YOUR SCOOP BE APPEARING HEREIN!** And, of course, folks, if you wish for your name to remain confidential, that is no problem at all.

■ **ROLLING ALONG...** So, here I sit at my desk on Thursday, January 9, 2025, just eight days away from further increasing my hold on the world of **AGING!** haha Y'all,

**IF** the **Good LORD's** willin' and the creek don't rise, I'll be **79 years old** on **January 17th!** Let me add, if that's not clear proof there **IS** a **GOD**, then I don't know what is! More clear proof is that **JUSTIN**, my fine Son, and highly esteemed *Club Insider Partner and Publisher*, will turn **40 years old** on **January 18th!** **HAPPY BIRTHDAY JUSTIN CATES!**

■ Folks, I know *full well* that what I'm fixin' to write here to y'all *does NOT* have a *Dadgum thing* to do with the health and fitness club industry! **BUT... IT DOES HAVE A LOT TO DO WITH AMERICA!** So... there ain't a snowball's chance in hell that I'm going to fail to make this special news report in this *Norm's Note* for **ALL OF YOU!** As I sit here on the very cold morning of January 9th, writing these *Norm's Notes* for y'all, I'm also keeping an eye on my big screen TV showing the funeral services for **Georgia's own JIMMY CARTER... the late former PRESIDENT of these United States.** And, I'm writing this report for you because, to me, as an American, this event was something very special to witness. In case you missed seeing this funeral service, which by the way, was broadcast live nationwide on TV, let me describe for you the scene at this special funeral service. And no, I'm not inclined to write about Jimmy Carter's funeral because of politics. I'm writing about it because I'm

an American!

All of the five living *past Presidents of these United States* were there with some of their wives, including: **BILL CLINTON, GEORGE W. BUSH, BARACK OBAMA, DONALD TRUMP and JOE BIDEN.** And, as I tap on this keyboard in my office, *former Atlanta Mayor, U.S. Congressman and U.N. Ambassador during the Carter administration, ANDREW YOUNG*, my good friend of many years who used to be a regular exercising member of my 46,000 square-foot *Downtown Athletic Club* in the *Omni* in Atlanta, and a very special man indeed, said some obviously studied words about President Carter.

Ambassador Young began: "The Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians, wrote: 'Be kind and compassionate to one another. Forgiving each other just as in Christ, GOD forgave you.'

Ambassador Young continued: "Jimmy Carter, for me, was something of a miracle. I was born in the deep South a few years after him. It was always a place of miracles. I couldn't see how we could have had the differences in background... coming from different places on the Planet... the experiences of slaves and slave owners... the diversity of color and creed and national origin and still become the great nation that we are in the United States of America. It was something of a miracle. And, I don't mean my following

comment with any disrespect. *BUT, it is still hard for me to understand how you could get to be President from Plains, Georgia!*" (Folks, Mayor Andy, which is what I used to call him when he was a member of my *Downtown Athletic Club* many years ago, got a really good laugh from the funeral audience when he said that!)

You may view Ambassador Young's comments on video by going to YouTube and searching: *The Rev. Andrew Young Remembers Jimmy Carter.* There is no charge to view it. Folks, Ambassador/ Mayor Andrew Young's comments were remarkable for a 92-year-old man! Heck, they were remarkable for *anyone of any age!* Way to go Mayor Young!

The funeral coverage ended with: "Everybody is now saying our **LORD'S PRAYER.** Now, a group of six officials have surrounded Jimmy Carter's coffin, which is covered by an American flag. The funeral service ended with these words: 'Let us go forward in the name of Christ.'

The huge Cathedral was slammed full of people (Google says: "the Washington National Cathedral can seat 4,000 people"). After the funeral at the Cathedral, President's Carter's body was flown back to Georgia, where a century ago, **JAMES EARL CARTER, JR** was born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, at the *Wise Sanitarium*, where his mother worked  
(See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)

## ...Norm's Notes

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as a registered nurse. Thus, Jimmy Carter became the first American President born in a hospital! The country's **39th President** was buried in his beloved hometown of Plains, next to **ROSALYNN CARTER**, his wife of 77 years. **MAY PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER REST IN ETERNAL PEACE!**

■Alrighty, folks, back to industry news! We are happy to report that our friends at *Crunch*, long-time C.I. Advertiser, have announced they have reached the **three-million-member mark!** Think about this folks, it took Crunch 28.5 years to reach one million members. Then, the company hit two million members less than five years later. Now, just over two years after that, they are celebrating the three-million-member milestone! Celebrating this occasion, Crunch has also announced the launch of *Crunch 3.0*, bringing many new changes and innovations to their model. Check out the **Press Release on Page #3**, and be sure to check out the **Crunch Ad on Page #2. Congrats!**

■*HFA 2025* is on the near horizon, taking place in Las Vegas, March 12 - 14. This show is shaping up to be a great one! If you haven't registered yet, be sure to do so by going to [healthandfitness.org/show](http://healthandfitness.org/show). And, be sure to visit us at **Booth #975**. Check out the **HFA Show Ad on Page #11**.

■The *2nd Annual SportsArt Campus Challenge* is live and is running from January 1 until March 15, 2025. SportsArt, a leader in sustainable fitness equipment for nearly 50 years, is once again inspiring the next generation of eco-leaders on college campuses, as this sweepstakes encourages students across the United States and most of Canada to live more sustainable lives. The sweepstakes awards three winning college campus recreation

centers with SportsArt ECO-POWR energy-generating cardio equipment. Winners of last year's inaugural Campus Challenge Sweepstakes were *Cleveland State University*, the *University of Michigan* and *Indiana University*. The next three winning college campuses will be announced at the *2025 National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) Conference* in Orlando, Florida, April 23 - 26.

"This year marks NIRSA's 75th anniversary. So, in a nod to this venerable organization, we've raised the Campus Challenge grand prize equipment package to \$75,000," said **Ruben Mejia**, Executive Vice President of SportsArt. In addition to the equipment packages, each of the three winners will be awarded cash for themselves and for their chosen on-campus sustainability organizations. The Grand Prize winner will receive \$3,000 for themselves and another \$3,000 for their chosen student organization. Second place will be awarded \$2,000 each and third place will receive \$1,000 each. For more information on the Campus Challenge Sweepstakes, please visit [sportsart.com/campuschallenge](http://sportsart.com/campuschallenge).

■Here's an interesting item I want to share with y'all. But, before I do, I want to give credit where credit's due. The credit goes to two sources: The first credit goes to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC)*, which is truly a world class newspaper. And, beyond that, credit is due to the actual original sources of the article, *The New York Times*, and their author, **SARAH WOOD-GONZALES**. This was a very well-done article. If you want to read it, just Google: "**New-old-way to work out: Join a Sporting Club**," and it should pop up.

■As I sit here on Sunday, January 12th, a *Special TV Report* about and showing a match at *The ZIMMER BIOMET Masters Men's Doubles Pickleball Match* came on the *ESPN-HD TV Network*. That brings to

mind my previous occasional coverage of Pickleball, and now, I want to reach out to all of you who are Pickleball players OR Pickleball facility providers. Where ever you might be, I want to hear from you folks. Simply send me an email at [norm@clubinsideronline.com](mailto:norm@clubinsideronline.com) with the *Headline: Pickleball Update*, along with your name and phone number. I will take it from there. By the way, the **WINNERS of The ZIMMER BIOMET MASTERS GOLD MEDALISTS in Men's Doubles** were: **BEN and COLLIN JOHNS**. Congratulations Gentlemen! Folks, be sure to check out: [www.pickleballcentral.com](http://www.pickleballcentral.com).

■This from **DIANA POLK**, who wrote: Given that "exercising more" and "losing weight" are among the top New Year's Resolutions for 2025, the personal-finance website *WalletHub* released its report on the *Best & Worst Cities for an Active Lifestyle in 2025*, along with expert commentary, to identify where Americans stand the best chance of staying fit in the New Year. *WalletHub* compared the 100 biggest U.S. cities across 35 key metrics. The data set ranges from the average monthly fitness-club fee to the city's bike score to the share of physically inactive adults.

**BEST vs. WORST...** Below are samples of some findings from Diana's report:

**Orlando, Florida** has the most **sporting goods stores per capita**, 10.5 times more than in North Las Vegas, Nevada, which has the fewest.

**Scottsdale, Arizona** has the most **public golf courses per capita**, 49.3 times more than in Bakersfield, California, which has the fewest.

**Denver, Colorado** has the most **fitness trainers and aerobics instructors per capita**, 5.8 times more than in Corpus Christi, Texas, which has the fewest.

**Las Vegas** has the most **playgrounds per capita**, 22.2 times more than in Hialeah, Florida, which has the fewest.

The three *Best Cities for an Active Lifestyle in America* are: **Honolulu, Hawaii; New York, New York and San Francisco, California**.

The three *Worst Cities for an Active Lifestyle in America* are: **Fort Wayne, Indiana; Irving, Texas and North Las, Vegas Nevada**.

■**JUSTIN** and I want to **THANK YOU** for reading *Club Insider*! We appreciate you being with us. And, in particular, **WE VERY SINCERELY APPRECIATE ANY and ALL SUPPORT OF OUR ESTEEMED Club Insider ADVERTISERS! PLEASE DO BUSINESS WITH THEM and WHEN YOU DO, PLEASE TELL 'EM Club Insider SENT YOU! THANK YOU ALL!**

■**God bless our troops, airmen and sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!**

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50+ year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of *Club Insider*, now in its 32nd year of monthly publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with *Club Insider's Lifetime Achievement Award*. You can reach Norm by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at [Norm@clubinsideronline.com](mailto:Norm@clubinsideronline.com).)

## ACE and the Mental Wellbeing Association Introduce a New Certification Focused on Mental Wellbeing

**SAN DIEGO, CA** - The *American Council on Exercise (ACE)* and the *Mental Wellbeing Association*, an initiative of the *John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation*, announce the launch of the *Mental Wellbeing Certification*. This first-of-its-kind program focuses on mental health and wellbeing through established self-care practices in exercise, nutrition, mindfulness and social connection. This 10-module certification emphasizes the four pillars of mental wellbeing, empowering health and fitness professionals with the tools they need to help clients manage stress, enhance mood and build resilience through physical activity.

"The growing interest on mental health highlights the undeniable link between movement and mental wellbeing," said **Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, FACSM**, ACE President and CEO. "Health

and fitness professionals are uniquely positioned to guide clients in leveraging the mental health benefits of exercise as part of a comprehensive approach to overall wellness."

The *Mental Wellbeing Certification* for Fitness Professionals, developed by the *Mental Wellbeing Association*, is rooted in evidence-based research and offers practical coaching techniques that prepare professionals to assist clients in managing stress, sleep and emotional health, a holistic approach to training often overlooked in traditional fitness education.

"This certification empowers health and fitness professionals with the essential knowledge and tools needed to support the increasing number of individuals seeking exercise to enhance their mental and emotional health," stated **Lynne Brick, B.S.N, M.A., Co-Founder of the John W.**

*Brick Mental Health Foundation and The Mental Wellbeing Association*. For many, the motivation to improve mental health through fitness can be more significant than the pursuit of physical improvement.

Upon completing this certification, health and fitness professionals will be able to:

■Understand the interconnectedness of physical and mental health.

■Utilize coaching techniques to help clients manage stress, sleep and emotions.

■Recognize and challenge mental health biases and stigmas.

■Create a safe, inclusive space for discussing mental wellbeing.



■Know when and how to appropriately refer clients to mental health professionals.

ACE continues its commitment to advancing health and fitness education programs that reflect the evolving needs and interests of clients. This certification not only enhances professional credibility but also enables fitness professionals to expand their service offerings and elevate their careers.

For more information about the new ACE Mental Wellbeing Certification, visit [acefitness.org/continuing-education](http://acefitness.org/continuing-education).

## ...Red Lerille

continued from page 3

Club has been in operation in Lafayette, Louisiana for 31 years. This Club Case Study will examine all aspects of one of America's most successful multi-sport clubs. This study is the first of what will be an ongoing series, which will be published each Quarter by *The CLUB INSIDER*.

### Red Lerille... the Boy... the Dream... the Man... the Legend

Lloyd Joseph "Red" Lerille was born in Harvey, Louisiana in 1935. When Red was ten years old, he was inspired to take up weightlifting by his uncle, Harold Lerille, who was in the military at the time. Each time Harold would come home to visit, Red was impressed with Uncle Harold's "new" muscles. At age 10, Red took up weightlifting, building his first weights himself using paint buckets filled with concrete attached to a bar. At an early age, Red began a lifelong habit of cutting and placing a picture of his goal on the wall where he could look at and be motivated by it.

As a boy, Red placed a picture of a Mr. America contest winner on the wall and used that as his driving motivation to become Mr. America someday. His goals seemed simple to him. He wanted to someday become Mr. America and then to open his own health club. Fourteen years later, at 24, Red Lerille reached part of his childhood dream... he WON the 1960 Mr. America Contest.

A couple of years later, he founded *Red Lerille's Health Club* in a small store on Johnson Street in Lafayette, Louisiana. His original location was started with a \$250 loan from his father. With that money, Red built his own benches and racks, and he was up and running with one of the first health clubs ever built in Lafayette. From that meager beginning, Red's place has grown to 120,000 square feet sitting on 15 acres and producing in excess of \$5 million per year in revenue!

Red Lerille is a dedicated fitness enthusiast who has gone from being Mr. America and Mr. Universe to a highly successful businessman. Red still puts up pictures of his goals on the board in his pro shop... and when he puts a picture up, he will always reach that goal. Goal setting, determination and dedication combined with being a very hard worker have been the keys to Red's success. Red's total dedication to his family, his club members, his employees and his community have carried him a long way. There are a number of habits that distinguish Red Lerille from just about anyone you will meet anywhere. Red is still a devoted bodybuilder, hitting the iron at 4:15AM four days a week. He rises daily at 3:45AM and pedals his bike to his club, which is located about one and a half miles from his home. Red finishes his workout on weights daily by 6AM and then goes immediately to *St. Mary's Catholic*

*Church* for morning Mass and Communion. From there, he pedals home, has breakfast and usually goes to the airport to check on his antique airplane collection. By 9AM, Red is stationed in his club's pro-shop, *on time and ready to work*, having already done more than most people do in an entire day. He works a regular split schedule Monday through Friday from 9AM to 2PM and from 4PM to 7PM in the evenings. From 2 - 4PM, he will usually go back to the airport to fly his planes, or he will be in his shop in the garage behind his home applying "dope" (airplane paint) to one of his airplane wings.

Red Lerille has NO OFFICE and never has had an office. He feels that, if you are locked in an office, then you can't do what you need to be doing, which is tending to the needs of the club and its members. The closest thing he has to an office is a corner table in the snack bar area where he will sit briefly to talk to members and guests. Red sells memberships every day, and on an annualized basis, he sells about one half of all new memberships sold. He also vacuums the carpet, picks up towels, cleans the locker room and picks up scrap trash anytime he sees it. It is Red's daily presence and dedication to totally clean and well-kept facilities which makes Red's club remarkably clean for a place that is 31 years old and that has between 2,000 to 2,400 in daily traffic.

### A Change or Improvement for the Club Every Month

When Red first started his club, he made a vow to himself which he has kept religiously. That vow was that he would make a change or improvement to the club EVERY MONTH. Some changes might be small, and some might be huge, such as the addition of his huge basketball gym/running track facility. For 31 years, change has been a key to his success. Red attributes a great deal of his success to this constant change and improvement process.

Every year, Red puts a large percentage of his profits back into the business. This constant commitment to change and improvement has been influenced by Bill Pearl, one of Red's friends and a boyhood idol of Red's. Long ago, Pearl told Red: "*Don't get greedy. Take one thing and make it successful.*" Red has heeded and followed that advice carefully. When asked about opportunities to expand to additional locations, Red says: "*I am only one man... I can't really operate two clubs.*"

### The Member is Boss... Don't Forget to Say "Hello" and "Good Bye"

Red believes and teaches his staff to believe that his members are the real bosses of his club. He does everything he possibly can to make each and every one of them feel cared about. He teaches his staff to always remember to say "Hello" to each member when he arrives and "Goodbye" to each member when he departs. Red explains that this constant warm and friendly greeting for members and guests boils down simply to: "*It just means be nice to people.*"

Red is nice to EVERYBODY. He is even nice to his members who are unhappy and want a refund of their money. If a member is ever dissatisfied and wishes to be released from his one year membership agreement before the term is complete, then Red is the first to want that person's obligation to be cancelled and that member to have his money back. This philosophy of accommodation has served him well over the years. He says that many people who have quit and asked for their money back end up coming back and joining at a later time. He firmly believes that, if he had enforced his contract and not given the member his money back when the member was unhappy, he would never have been able to get them to join later.

Another factor in Red's success has been his temperament with those

who have not paid their bills. In the mid-1980s, the city of Lafayette was hit by massive layoffs in the oil-based economy. Many people were moving out of town, and Red was losing members at a record pace. Some people who wanted to remain as members of Red's found themselves unable to afford to pay their club bill due to their own economic problems. Red extended credit to some of his members for as long as one year so that they could continue to exercise throughout their period of economic duress. This caring and giving policy by Red endeared him to many in the community.

Red donates his time to his community, delivering 35 or so public speaking engagements. His presentation and slide show that he gives to civic groups is outstanding and is highly motivational to people who attend. He credits this regular community outreach program with being one of his keys to success. While the presentation lasts for about one hour, it is full of wisdom and anecdotes by Red. In his presentation, Red teaches "*Ten Hints For Getting Into and Staying in Shape*" and he teaches the "*Five Suggestions for a Successful Life*" that he would share with his son. Both of those follow:

### Ten Hints For Getting Into and Staying in Shape:

1. Pick a regular time to exercise and stick to it;
2. Find a partner to exercise with (Red says, "misery loves company, and you should have someone there to enjoy the fun," says Red);
3. Stick to a high carbohydrate diet, one that is high in fruits and vegetables and low in "meat, chicken, fish and eggs;"
4. Get regular cardiovascular exercise at least four times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes per session;
5. Write down your goals (Red says, "it is good to put a picture of how you want to look on the wall");
6. Participate in weight training three times a week;
7. Get into the right attitude for exercising by "dressing to sweat" (Red says, "you should go in with the right mental attitude and commitment");
8. Find a method of checking your progress, such as weighing in daily (Red weighs every day, and if he is up on weight, he adjusts his diet and/or exercise program to compensate for it).
9. Don't miss a workout (Red says, "It only works when you do it");
10. JUST DO IT.

### Five Suggestions for a Successful Life:

1. Show up on time and ready to work;
2. Say "hello" and "goodbye" to everyone;
3. Make a change every month;
4. Learn as much as you can; and,
5. Stay in shape the rest of your life.

(See Red Lerille Page 10)



Red's

## ...Red Lerille

continued from page 9

When discussing his generosity, Red explained that he tries to give to his church and community whenever he can. He estimates that he gives away \$80,000 per year to worthy causes. He explained that he often has had employees and even members come to him in the past for small loans. He says he always tries to help younger people whenever he can, and sometimes, he never gets his money back. Red has established a Profit-Sharing Program for his key full-time employees, which gives them all a vested financial future with his organization, and he has established what amounts to an employee credit union for small loans for autos, boats, etc.

When quizzed about his involvement in the financial matters of his club, Red confessed that he doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about or worrying about the club's financial performance. He even admitted that his staff sort of keeps the club's cash position a "little secret" from Red to combat his spending it all on club improvements for his members. Red feels that he has the greatest job in the world, and he wouldn't trade it with anyone. The thing he cares about the most is that he is able to do what he wants to do. He says: "I was put on this earth to run a gym, and as long as I'm alive, I will." Red loves his work and his play. In addition to his hobby of collecting and totally restoring pre-World War II airplanes, he and his wife, **Emma**, enjoy riding their *Harley Davidson* motorcycles on extended road trips across America. Also, Red is the proud owner of an awesome white *25th Anniversary Collector's Edition Lamborghini*, which causes major head turns when Red drives around town.

Red has had some interesting experiences. Years ago, he bought the first *Nautilus* machine that **Arthur Jones** ever built. Arthur was traveling across America with a U-Haul on the way to California and stayed with Red in Lafayette for a couple of weeks. Since then, Red has bought over a hundred *Nautilus* machines and the new *Med X* equipment invented by Arthur. Recently, Red had a visit with **Frank Borman**, former *Astronaut* and *Chairman of Eastern Air Lines*. He came just to get a ride in Red's incredible *Waco Bi-Plane*.

Red has had two aircraft accidents. The first was when he flipped one of his planes while landing. He walked away. The second was when he was on the landing roll with one of his planes and the wing strut collapsed, sending the plane into a ground loop. His son, **Mark**, was watching at the time and actually saw the accident in which Red was seriously injured. Red was taken to the hospital and had to receive several hundred stitches on his face and head. Through all of that, Red only missed two days of work and two workouts!

When Red decided to install a gym for kids aged 9 to 14, he had specially

sized weight machines made up by his friends down the road at *Body Masters*. Red predicts that weight training will be the single largest draw for clubs in the 1990s. His weight training areas total close to 20,000 square feet currently, so he is well prepared for the future. Red at age 59 is in incredible physical condition... testimony to his lifestyle. He demonstrated how strong he actually is by lifting himself into a rigid handstand on top of two handgrip devices attached to metal poles. In 1987, Red was named by *IRSA, The Association of Quality Clubs* (now the *Health and Fitness Association*) as the *Person of the Year*. This was just one of many awards and honors that he has earned.

**Connie Tomino**, one of Red's five top managers has summarized the philosophy of Red Lerille and his organization in a simple statement. Red Lerille and his team live by this concept... it is not new... it is as old as time:

**"TREAT PEOPLE THE WAY THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED (OR BETTER) AND EVERYTHING ELSE WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF."**

### An Interview With Red Lerille

**Club Insider (C.I.)** - Red, you have quite a history. Could you tell me how you first got involved in weightlifting and the club business?

**Red Lerille (RL)** - My uncle, Harold, used to come home from the military all the time and show me a new muscle or two. He was 10 years older than I was. Every time he would come home, he was kind of my idol. I used to make my parents take me to the Mr. New Orleans contest. That was a big inspiration for me. And, of course, reading magazines like *Strength and Health*. I'm not even sure it's in existence anymore.

**C.I.** - I think I've figured out by looking at your *30th Anniversary Newsletter*, but how

long were you at the original location where the country boot store is now?

**RL** - A little over two years. I opened up in 1963, and here, I opened up in 1965. Two years. About a year and a half after I opened up, I bought the land here and started construction.

**C.I.** - How much land did you buy?

**RL** - Two acres.

**C.I.** - And it's now how many acres?

**RL** - Fifteen acres.

**C.I.** - How much did you pay for the two acres?

**RL** - \$25,000.

**C.I.** - How about the building?

**RL** - That was about \$60,000.

**C.I.** - Did you finance the first 4,000 square feet or build it with cash?

**RL** - I financed it with the people who just refinanced it for us, the *Lafayette Builders and Loan Association*.

**C.I.** - How about all the other expansions?

**RL** - Everything was built with loans... until recently. All the recent work we've done with no loans, like taking out the racquetball courts. We haven't borrowed money since the refinancing.

**C.I.** - The first location was 4,000 square feet. What's the size now?

**RL** - About 120,000 square feet indoors, plus the outdoor four-pool complex, 16 outdoor tennis courts with the jogging track, so we have more outdoor facility space than indoors. And, six hundred parking spaces.

**C.I.** - When you did the most recent refinancing package to roll your bank notes together, how much did the club appraise for at the time?

**RL** - The appraised amount in 1992 was \$10,750,000.

**C.I.** - In regard to racquetball court



Red Lerille

conversion, you've built up to how many racquetball courts total?

**RL** - Twelve.

**C.I.** - And, you're down to how many racquetball courts now?

**RL** - Six. The next move is to take one more racquetball court out. We'll probably end up with five.

**C.I.** - What advice would you give a club owner who has racquetball courts and is looking to expand but is afraid to take racquetball courts out?

**RL** - I'd take 'em out. We have six courts now and rarely are we ever booked. You can get a court almost any day and at any time if you call in the mornings. They might be booked at six or seven o'clock, whereas years ago, we had twelve courts and you could never get a court. The only time you could get a court was maybe between one and four. That was the easiest time. We had 12, and right down the street, there was a place that had seven. And, they're gone. And, there was another club across town with six courts. I don't know how many are being used now. But, we are down to six, and we don't even need six. Compared to the level of occupancy that we were at twelve years ago, we now only need three courts right, maybe two. In other words, when you look at that, racquetball is down by about 90%.

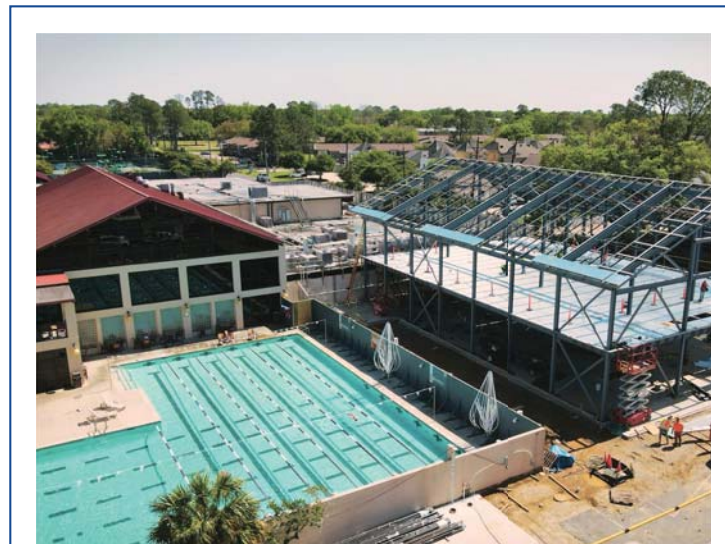
**C.I.** - Did we as club operators fail to properly teach racquetball?

**RL** - I don't know. I don't study things like that. I don't try to figure stuff out. I just try to go with whatever is going. Try not to buck it. It's not worth fighting. It is better to do what the common stuff is, and right now, it's definitely workouts and cardiovascular machines, treadmills, bicycles. I think that's the trend now, and actually, in our club, it probably always has been our leader. And, that's where I'm putting all my bucks.

**C.I.** - What about aerobics? When did you first install aerobics?

**RL** - That would have been about 15 years ago when we built this row of racquetball

(See *Red Lerille Page 12*)



Red's Always Expanding and Improving



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## ...Red Lerille

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courts, right before the racquetball court decline started. We were going to 14 courts, and I saw a man leading an aerobic class in a club in Las Vegas. It was more than an aerobic class, rather a dance class, which kind of excited me a little bit. And, at that point, I decided we were not to go to 14 courts, but to 12 instead, taking two out for an aerobics room. So, we never did get to the 14 courts. The courts were basically constructed when I told our builder to put some framework up here so we could span two courts so we wouldn't have any walls.

**C.I.** - How much did it cost you to take out a racquetball court and double deck it?

**RL** - It's going to be a wild guess, but I think it's costing us about \$60,000 or \$70,000 to take a court out. And, I think we did it pretty classy. It blends in with the building. I really feel good about the way we have done things. If a person didn't know it had been a racquetball court, he would think it was just another room to work out in. I think we've done a good job with it. And, upstairs, where the bikes are, there's no way in the world that you'd know it was a racquetball court. That room is about 4,000 square feet plus the passageways... close to five thousand square feet of bikes, treadmills, Stairmasters and Cross trainers.

**C.I.** - Describe your management philosophy.

**RL** - I'm very loose as a manager. In other words, I would like to consider myself and all my managers more as workers than actually managers. And, I think we do it on a very casual basis where we all work, myself included. I think I manage much like my managers do, sort of on the job, hanging around, doing little odd jobs, doing whatever has to be done, you know. But, I don't really consider myself a manager; I just work here. And, I just happen to own it! So, I don't know if I have any management style. I just do basically the same thing that I've always done here, which is everything that needs doing that's not being done at that time. And, I think that's basically what a manager should do. I mean, you want all your workers to be extremely efficient so you have no loose ends, but you've got to be realistic. That's never going to happen. Your managers are going to drop the ball. I drop the ball sometimes. You know, sometimes I come in and it's a total day of day dreaming. I'm just like everybody else. We all are. And, other days, I'm really focused on what I'm doing. I find I have a tendency to focus more if there is a problem and focus less when things are running smoothly. And, I think that's probably healthy. I think it keeps you from being under tension all the time. As far as a philosophy of operating, I don't really have one. I don't quite know how to describe it. But, that's basically how we operate.

**C.I.** - Describe for me your philosophy about

dealing with your members. Say, if they are unhappy and they want their money back.

**RL** - If anybody wants his money back and doesn't want to be a member, I'm the last one that wants them to be a member. I'll give him his money back. If somebody comes in, has been a member for a few months and is totally dissatisfied or says he was transferred out of town, I'll give him his registration fee back with no hassle in cancelling the contract. But, if a guy's been a member for a while, it may be seven or eight months and he decides to cancel, I won't give his registration fee back, but I'll let him cancel the contract. We've done that forever. We try to take care of people as best we can. If anybody has problems in the snack bar, we give them their food. I want everybody that works for me to realize they can do that.

**C.I.** - So, you fully empower people?

**RL** - Yes, I'm not saying they do it, though. Sometimes, it is hard for some of the younger workers to do that. I wish all of my workers at every level could learn to be that flexible. Yes, they have the power, but they don't all use it. I try to make them (members) as happy as possible. If they want out, I try to make it as smooth as possible. One day, they may come back.

**C.I.** - Over the years of dealing with people in that manner, how rewarding has it been to see a person come back in after two or three years?

**RL** - Many do. But, if you don't treat them properly, and they have a bad feeling when they leave, they are never coming back. They will never go to anybody else's health club either, and that's really bad. You know, a lot of people come here, and often, I know they have not been treated properly at somebody else's club when they start asking the questions like how do you handle this, how do you handle that, do you sell the contract to a finance company... So, when they start asking all those questions, I know

that they have had problems somewhere and I try not to do that. I'm not saying we make everybody happy, but I think by and large, we shoot to make everybody happy. And, I want a place that I feel like coming to work at. I don't want a place that's so structured. I'm not a very structured person. I lead a certain structured life: I wake up at a certain time, work out at a certain time, because I want to get a lot of things in.

**C.I.** - You have a policy that, if one of your people has a problem with one of your members, you want to be informed first before that person gets to you. Could you elaborate on that policy?

**RL** - The reason is that I'm very easy to find here, so nine times out of ten, I may know the member very well. I know that the member's coming to me. I want to know what is happening, so I want to know in advance about why a person is calling or if they are going to come and approach me. I don't like to be surprised. But, I mean, I'm listed in the phone book... they can call me anytime.

**C.I.** - You have a new member sheet which explains your club's account system and covers the ten most asked questions on the bills for members. What I want to understand is your policy on dealing with members who don't pay their bill to you. How do you handle that? What is your philosophy for dealing with people who have come on hard times and really want to be a member but can't afford to due to some financial setbacks.

**RL** - I'll work with anybody who comes and talks to me. But, I don't like when a person gets way, way behind and then comes and talks to me. If they get a little behind, I'll work out anything with them. I just don't like it when someone runs up a big bill, then says he can't pay. He might charge a few tennis racquets and eat for two or three weeks and not pay his bill. That's not too good. I don't like that. But, if a guy has

a little problem, I'll let him ride for a little while. I've done it before.

**C.I.** - What would you say has been the most dominant factor in your membership dues pricing?

**RL** - It is a mix of things. There are weightlifting places where a guy can work out for less. I guess the biggest thing is that our cost of operation is always something to contend with. Plus, we do constant maintenance and are constantly adding improvements. In most clubs, they don't do what I am doing by adding and changing. I mean look what has happened since you were here in August (6 months). We converted a racquetball court, we've added about 30 machines, we are tearing out the outdoor jogging track and resurfacing it, we've refinshed the entire basketball gym floor. We put in that huge drinking fountain/ice distribution machine that cost us \$11,000! All that's happened since August. So, we've done a lot of things. The equipment is probably the biggest thing.

**C.I.** - You don't try to get corporations to pay for all of its employee's memberships because it is better if the person is investing something. Why is that?

**RL** - If I decide I want to buy free passes for a local restaurant and give them to my employees for free, they will all probably take one, but not all of them are going to go there. The same thing with a health club. If you just give the membership away, everybody will take one, but they won't necessarily use it. I think it's better for us if they use it. In the old days, you wanted people to join and not come, and that was a good member. But, it really isn't a good member. He's not bringing his friends, and the only way you're going to prosper is by people bringing their friends. And, they are only going to bring their friends if: (1) they are getting in shape and their friends notice it, and (2) they have a good attitude about coming here and WANT to bring their friends. The BEST method is if they are getting RESULTS and their friends see it. The results will bring the friends. That's the way to get new members, I feel.

**C.I.** - If you were to be advising an upcoming young operator about the constant improvement concept, how would you advise them?

**RL** - Do an improvement monthly. The biggest reason is that it excites the member, and he brings his friends and that's how you get members. There's no question, that's the most important reason. Second, it excites the hell out of all your workers. Third, it excites the hell out of the owner! I mean you've got to be excited about things. And, if you're adding new things all the time, especially if you are a person who likes to work out, I like new little trinkets to play with. And, I think nothing can be more important than an owner working out and staying in shape, because then, he at least

(See Red Lerille Page 14)



Red's Outdoor Courts



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**venmo**

## ...Red Lerille

continued from page 12

knows what's going on a little better than if he doesn't exercise at all. The guy who exercises and goes to a convention is a better trained eye for buying equipment than the guy who doesn't.

**C.I.** - If you are in a situation in a club and you want to make improvements but you can't afford to make improvements, what other alternatives would you suggest?

**RL** - My opinion is if you can't afford to make improvements, then you will go out of business, so it won't matter anyway. I would make the improvements, I don't give a damn whether you can afford it or not. I set a little law when I went into business that I never go one month without making an improvement of some kind.

**C.I.** - 31 years ago... that would work out to at least 372 improvements in the club since the beginning.

**RL** - An improvement to me might be something as small as a new piece of equipment in the gym, it might only be a bench. Or, it could be a \$1 million dollar basketball gym one year, it could be new tennis courts or a pool. The important thing is that you have this feeling that you're growing no matter what. I use the same concept when I'm working out... always progressive weight training... always adding a little weight or another rep, but always, I feel like I made some little improvement. And, the same thing with my facility, I feel like I'm always doing something...

**C.I.** - What about rearranging and moving things?

**RL** - I think that's good, too... but don't think you are fooling anybody. Then again, you might fool adults, but don't try to fool the kids. You can't fool kids. Again, it's real important to make those changes, if nothing else, it keeps them enthusiastic. You feel like you are growing. In tough times, when we were losing big time numbers of members --one time, we lost 1,700 members in a short period because of the oil crisis-- I still made that monthly improvement of some kind, because I know that the losses wouldn't last, and if it did last, what the hell, I was going to go out swinging.

I feel if you don't do these things, you are going to go out, you know... you only have to look back at the corner grocery store. Now, why didn't that guy become the supermarket? Why did he let the other guy come in and do it... why couldn't he be the big supermarket? He was there first, but chances are he was selling the same kinds of foods on the same shelves with the same linoleum floor. All of that stuff was probably the same because he did not believe that he had to make improvements, he *thought* he would *always* be there. Nobody goes into business thinking they are going out! Everybody thinks they are going to finish their life in that business. They really do.

I opened up a health club here, so I'm going to do this the rest of my life. I'm not going to open up and go out of business in two months. Or, five years and go out of business. I think I'm going to be a success. Everybody does, and I think the difference between those who do and those who don't is those who keep plugging away. And, plugging away to me is making those changes. I will make a change every month; sometimes I make 10 or 15 changes. I don't even write 'em down. I'm just going to make changes. If it gets to a point that I'm not making changes or it's tough to make a change, then I might write it down. You know what I mean... I might put it on my goal board. I need this change this month. It's not like that right now, the money's not bad... things are good, so changing is easy, but I guarantee you when things were tough, I'd put up a change on that goal board. If I had to pick ONE THING that has made me successful, it's that attitude of change. You know, you'd be surprised how many people don't have that attitude.

**C.I.** - Do you ever dream a dream and then let it get away?

**RL** - Well, I have this little board, and I started this when I was a kid. When I wanted to win Mr. America, I used to put pictures of Mr. America on my wall, and one day, I was going to be on that wall. I used to tell my friends that I was going to be on that wall... I weighed about 80 pounds, and I was 10 years old. I'm sure they all walked away laughing... but I never forgot that, and one day, my picture went up on that wall, you know. I'm sure my mother repainted the wall and the picture is down, but I won that contest. And, I do that with anything I want... if I want something real important and hard to get, I put a picture up on the wall. Last year, as this time, I decided by September 1st, I was going to *start* four more tennis courts, so I drew four tennis courts on a little piece of legal paper, put it up on the wall and said, 'we'll start four

tennis courts by September 1st.' The only problem... I didn't have any land to build them on. I went to talk to the lady next door, and she wouldn't sell. I had to romance her a bit, a lot of hello and goodbye, next thing you know, we were sitting down talking about it. Still wouldn't sell yet, but to make a long story short, on August 31st, I bought the land. On September 1st, I went out there with a shovel, and I dug a spade full of dirt.

**C.I.** - When you think back on your days of training for Mr. America, how much influence do you think winning that contest had on the rest of your life?

**RL** - Oh, everything. Not because I won the contest, but because I accomplished my goal. And, I think that was most important. I don't think the contest meant a thing. I really believe that I had the proper attitude... I realized the next morning that I was still a little red-headed fellow from Harvey, Louisiana that had another trophy... that it wasn't the end of my life... I didn't think that anybody owed me anything... I just won the contest. I went about my business... went back to school, worked in some health clubs, did some posing, trained, went to more school, and that was basically it, until I opened up my health club, which was a lifetime dream, also.

I'm not saying I didn't get sidetracked. You know, you get in school and you get in all this financial stuff... I was majoring in economics. And, I liked all that, but the thought of wearing a suit all the time and working in a bank or financial institution didn't excite me at all. But, as time rolled on, my little dream of opening up a health club became a reality.

I always worked in health clubs. I worked for **Alvin Rowan** one summer in Baton Rouge. He was one of the first guys to have a chain gym way, way back. He had one in New Orleans and one in Baton Rouge, and his sister had a few in Dallas. I learned a lot from Alvin. He was a

tough operator. He was a real pusher to get the bucks in. I got no salary; I had to sell memberships. I could do all that... but I don't know if I would want to do that again. But, Alvin taught me a lot. I spent the summer there. Alvin was invited to go to the world weightlifting championship as a coach. At that time, I was still in school, but I dropped out of school and stayed on with Alvin until December or January. Then, I found a little building in Lafayette and opened my health club shortly after.

**C.I.** - What made you come to Lafayette?

**RL** - To be honest with you, the way I ended up here was when I came home to compete in the Mr. America contest. I had gotten stationed in Hawaii in the Navy. There, I had won some local contests and the Navy eats that stuff up. When I won Mr. Hawaiian Islands, they had an 8 X 10 photo of me on the front page of the Hawaiian newspaper. Like I said, the Navy loved that, because the weekend before, a whole bunch of drunken sailors were arrested and put in jail. This was a real nice thing. So, I never had to go to sea again. All I had to do was eat, sleep and train for contests.

I was in pretty good shape, so in 1959, I decided I wanted to go for Mr. America. I took two months leave and went home to train. I competed in a contest in Baton Rouge, and at that time, I met a guy named **Mike Stansbury** who had a health club in Lafayette. I was then contacted by a guy named **Gordon Blake**, inviting me to a meeting in New Orleans. Blake introduced me as a Mr. America contestant. He said the next day he wanted to take me to Lafayette. He took me there, and I ended up working for *Mike's Gym*.

I won Mr. America, came back, went to school for three more years and then I opened my health club. Lafayette was growing... I was always doing well. But, when I say I was doing well, by some people's standards, maybe I wasn't, but I was doing what I wanted to do, which is what I consider being a success. Doing what you like to do and enjoying what you like to do. A lot of people go to work and make a tremendous amount of money and can't stand what they do. I'm not going to do that. Not that every moment is perfect... but I love what I do. I feel I have the best job in the whole world.

**C.I.** - You don't have an office, do you?

**RL** - No. I have no place to use a phone privately. I have to hide in the closest in the pro shop to use the phone privately. But, I like putting pressure on myself and not being able to hide too easily. I try not to do that. I try not to hide in my facility. I try to be wide open. If somebody has a compliment, I'm there to get slapped with it; if they have a complaint, I'm there to be kicked with it, too. Whatever. I like to operate that way. I like to operate under a little pressure all the time.



Red's Workout Row, One of Several

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- Mary Thomas | Owner and General Manager | Western Racquet & Fitness Club | Green Bay, WI

### ...Red Lerille

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**C.I.** - Have you ever had an office?

**RL** - No. Only the office we use to sell memberships here, and everybody uses that office.

**C.I.** - I know you are a member of *IRSA* (now the *Health & Fitness Association*). What about other associations?

**RL** - Basically, as far as the club, the only thing I'm a member of is the *Faust Roundtable #1 Group*. The original group. I feel the Faust Group and the IRSA Group are very beneficial. Not that you are going to learn a lot each time, but every time I go, I learn something. I always pick up something. I probably give less information than anybody. I probably don't give a lot of information, because I feel it is so simple to do this that I don't have a lot to give. **You just show up on time, ready to work.** And, there you are. I like to do that, I like to work. The IRSA situation is probably more beneficial to a new club, but I do feel every time I go, I get pumped up. The talks are excellent, some of the main speakers are sensational and I always come back with a good feeling, and I like that.

**C.I.** - When you hire an employee, what process do you go through? Have you ever

run an ad for employees?

**RL** - No. All my full-time people have been with me so long. I don't hire anybody. My managers do that. Most of the people come in and make applications. We don't test people. We went through that years ago, did testing, but we found our gut feeling was the best. It is not that we don't screw up, but by and large, we hire good kids and we try to hire U.S.L. students. That's worked fairly well for us. We have over 100 kids working here all the time, and during the summer, about 150.

**C.I.** - When a person is hired, what benefits do they get in the first six months?

**RL** - They get their pay, a membership and 35% pro shop and snack bar discount.

**C.I.** - With new employees, how do you break them in?

**RL** - We have a little two-month probationary period. I think the great benefit is working with the members who are so nice coming and going here all day. They meet more people with good attitudes than any other place in this town. That's pretty nice. There are over 2,000 people per day coming to this club, and there are 2,000 people per day coming with a good attitude. You don't find that at too many places. Working at *Burger King* or *McDonald's*, you don't get those good attitudes. We are dealing with

good, motivated people.

**C.I.** - You have a list of full-time employees that to characterize it as totally incredible for the health club industry might be an understatement. You have 13 people with nine or more years, including one person with 30 years and a couple of others with 25 or more years. What would you attribute this retention and loyalty to?

**RL** - Well, I can tell you one thing. I think I treat them like they are my family. Or, better than my family. I would do ANYTHING for those people. If they ever asked me for something or ask me to come somewhere, I would go. I wouldn't ask why; I would just do it. If they said I need \$10,000 or \$20,000, I wouldn't ask them what for. I would GET IT and give it to them... and I wouldn't even worry if they ever paid me back, and I think I would do that for ANY of those people. And, I feel they would the same thing for me. I might not do that for my kids. I might ask why they want it.

**C.I.** - You have developed both a profit-sharing plan and what amounts to an employee credit union. Could you share how that was done?

**RL** - The plan was probably started for a selfish reason. It was so I could put money away for myself, and it's an official plan... but it has worked out to be quite a thing.

Several of my workers have used it to buy boats, to buy cars, so in a roundabout way, we're running it like our own little bank... and all of the interest is shared by all of us. For some of my top people, this could be their retirement, and in my case, it could be my retirement, too, if I ever decided I wanted to retire. Hopefully, I can work until I'm 100, you know.

**C.I.** - That leads to the next question. This is your plan, is it not?

**RL** - I would like to never retire and never draw social security in my lifetime.

**C.I.** - 1993 was a good year for Red's wasn't it.

**RL** - It was our best year. It's the first year we got up to the numbers we were hitting before the big crash. We haven't had bad years. Things have been good for us. It is the most members we have ever had.

**C.I.** - There is one thing that I don't want to forget to ask you. What are the three things you can't buy in this world?

**RL** - Respect, reputation and experience. They can come and put a new competing club right next to you, but they can't take those away from you.

**C.I.** - Red, what would you say is the most  
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unique quality about your club?

**RL** - I really believe that if I had to pick one thing, and the comment I get from a lot of people who visit the club, is that this club has a "Feel" about it. You know you walk in and you kind of "Feel" something. The members all have that; I think they like coming here. We have our share of misbehavior, but I think by and large, people are excited about their club, they like coming here and they bring their friends here. During the Holidays, they all bring their friends here. They are excited and proud of it. I think it is because both the staff and the members here have GOOD ATTITUDES. I guarantee you one thing, you want to go through your life with a good attitude. I went to high school in New Orleans, which pushed RMA hard.

**C.I.** - What is RMA?

**RL** - *Right Mental Attitude*. They drummed it into me. If there is one thing I learned in high school, it was to have a proper mental attitude. Attitude is important.

**C.I.** - You had a real interesting experience with your work with **Dr. Michael Berard**. Could you share that with us?

**RL** - There was a time when we were growing like crazy. It was during the racquetball boom days. We were adding on. If I could borrow money, I'd borrow it. If somebody would lend me \$5 million, I'd take it. But, I had tremendous confidence that I could pay it back and I thought, like everybody else, that racquetball was a game to get into. And, it was at that time. I have no regrets... it made me grow, we were just adding on like crazy, adding not just racquetball but tennis and swimming and so on. We just kept adding more and more. It got to the point where I came to realize that I couldn't operate this facility; I was basically trying to do everything. I was even still writing out workout programs... I knew all of the members. I enjoyed that part... but I could not keep doing it all.

Dr. Michael Berard primarily helped us develop a management team... probably more in a selfish fashion to help me more than anybody else, so I could turn loose. I was willing to let these people take some control, and I think I definitely picked the right people. They are all still here, not that we've all worked perfectly together, not that they are perfect people; nor am I. But, I think we all did a good job, and I think that we all learned a lot from him. We worked with him almost on a weekly basis for two years, which was really tough for me because I can't stand to sit in a meeting. But, we'd sit in meetings sometimes for 3 or 4 hours. We'd laugh and cry and do everything. I think we got to know each other better... I'm not saying we like each other better. I love 'em all... but I don't like 'em all.

**C.I.** - After you got your team in place, do you feel able to let go like you had hoped?

**RL** - To some extent. You know that's hard for me. Anytime you are a 100% owner, I mean this is my thing, I still look at it as #1. It's my total ass if this thing goes out. In their case, it's their job. In my case, it's me, totally. So, I mean there's times when I put my foot down. In most cases, I do listen to what they say. Sometimes, they knock me down. Sometimes, they are basically right. I feel I've been right most of the times... I've screwed up. Contrary to what they might think, I might bring up something and we move fast, but that doesn't mean that I haven't thought about it for awhile... I analyze it in my own fashion and then we do it.

**C.I.** - What was the biggest mistake that you can remember ever making in the business?

**RL** - If I had to look at the biggest dinosaur I have, it would be indoor tennis, and if I had the guts, I probably wouldn't have them. I probably would have converted those courts into a gymnasium. But, it would have been difficult to take out. I don't care what it is, to take it away from the members is really difficult. But, that's probably the biggest single item. I can't call racquetball a mistake because it made us grow. I can tell you about mistakes I didn't make, though. I had a lot of opportunity to expand and build more clubs around the state when things were really rolling. I could have had four or five sites. But, do you know where Red would be right now? *Out of business*. Because when things got tough, they got tough in all of those cities at the same time. We concentrated here, and it saved our ass. I don't know if I could have done that in five places, you know? I'm just not the type of person to do that because I like the hands-on work. That was the biggest mistake I didn't make. I'm not saying it is a mistake for others, I just don't want to miss my workouts, my planes, etc. I'm not going

to miss my workouts to make money... if you had to describe myself with one word, that word would be BODYBUILDER. That's the best word I could use... no doubt in my mind. I'm not a businessman, I'm not an entrepreneur, I'm a bodybuilder... and bodybuilder by Arthur Jones' description is: *'A little boy in the body of a gorilla!'*

**C.I.** - Red, what do you think about the hospital competition you are seeing in Lafayette, New Orleans and other cities?

**RL** - I tell you what... I feel that hospitals are the #1 competitor for the health clubs for one big simple reason, they've got the thing that most of us don't have... money. I think that they are going to be the competition of the future. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure that out.

**C.I.** - I think I know the answer to this question. Is there anything else in the world that you would rather be doing with your life?

**RL** - I don't think so. I think I was actually put here to do this. I must say that, if luck has anything to do with my situation, I think the luck is that I've found something that I really like to do. By and large, I am extremely happy with what I do. I really like working here.

**C.I.** - How did you get started rising at 3:45AM?

**RL** - Well, actually, I've always been an early riser. In fact, when I talk to the girls in the pro shop, I tell them that girls used to like to go out with me because they could have two dates in one night! I bring them home so early that they could have a second date! I've always been like that, going to bed early and waking up early. I like the mornings... after you get a workout, you get this great feeling, so why get it at night or late in the afternoon? I enjoy it in the morning, where it can last all day! Then, I know when I'm going to work out, I don't have to worry about interruptions, because at 4:30AM, the only thing that will interrupt

your workout is sleep. So, to me, it is a great time to exercise, it makes me get up and it starts my day, and I just like it. I don't think it has any added benefits to training in the morning, it is just that I am a morning person. I'm gonna do it, so I want to get it done soon!

**C.I.** - We were having lunch and a man walked up to talk to you who was from Shreveport, Louisiana. He made some complimentary remarks to you and then he said: 'Red, you're a LEGEND, do you know that?' Red, what do you think about being a legend?

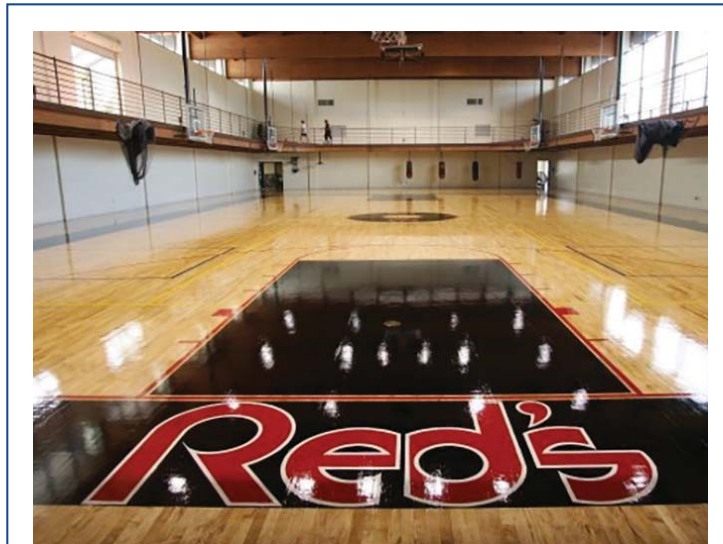
**RL** - I don't know if I'm a legend. I think the reason people are shocked at my success is because the town is so small. And, I guess because I have been here so long. 31 years is a long time in this business. This is normally a very short-lived business. I've been lucky enough to have people who have worked with me for a long time, and I think all of that adds up to the little thing of me being a legend. And, we have been successful financially, no question about it... we probably have one of the highest grossing clubs as almost anybody in the country. I'm sure there are a few with big restaurants and bars, where they can charge high, high fees, who top us. But, I think the average guy with a small club looks at us as maybe like him only doing better. They might not look at the *East Bank Club* in Chicago as something they can strive for, you know, where I might be something they can strive for. I might look like the average guy with the average club who has grown to become above average, whereas they might look at East Bank Club and say, 'I can't ever have that.'

Maybe, I feel that's where the word 'legend' might come in. I get that thrown at me quite a bit. But, I don't think that I've ever done anything super human... I just think I picked an excellent town, I hired excellent people and I think we really work well together... I think we have a 'knack' for running the business. I think we developed that of course; we like it, we like working here, and all of that has made us somewhat successful. But, I don't think it's any special thing, any reason to be a legend. Of course, we are still here... the length of time, I think that's a reason, too. But, you've got Foxy in Baton Rouge who has been in business almost 30 years, you know. For some reason, he never expanded a lot there. I don't know why, but he is an excellent operator.

**C.I.** - Over a year's time, how many club operating people come in to see your club?

**RL** - Maybe 20 per year. A lot of local people come by from around the state. You can't dream of this in some towns... this is not even practical for a town like Lafayette, Louisiana. It's only here because of the time period, you know. If you build this place today in Lafayette, you would bust your ass... no question about it. I mean, they bust their ass in California with the big clubs,

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where they have population. This couldn't not exist, this thing really should not exist, and it's only because of that one attitude of mine of doing something every month and that slow growth that has allowed this facility to exist... and the timing was right... right now, the timing is not right... someone would have to come in and build a facility to compete with this one, and it would be hard to make it. You'd have to have started with a lot of members the first day. If you had to build up like we did, it would be tough... I started when this was nothing. Physical fitness was nothing... just a bunch of kooks working out, and gradually, the fitness boom started. We grew with it, and racquetball played a big role there. We should all thank racquetball... most of us would not be here if it weren't for racquetball.

**C.I.** - Where do you see the future of the club business?

**RL** - No question about it, the weight training and cardiovascular areas will be it. I question some things, like personal training. I think the future is basically in the fitness component, the weights and cardio machines. And, that's always been the biggest thing for us... but the weights have always been our biggest

thing, and it's getting bigger. It's probably where we'll put our bucks. I'll continue to upgrade this place, and I want to keep this place impressive.

**C.I.** - You were kind enough to give us in the Faust Roundtable group the book, *Think and Grow Rich*, by **Napoleon Hill**. Have you used the principles in that book to reach your dream?

**RL** - I have used some of them, such as *persistence*; you never give up. I've used that principle in my goal setting. I first read the book when I was about 20 years old, and I've read it many times. To me, it's the greatest book because it made me think of success and not necessarily in a monetary way... if it was just money, I'd have more money, because I don't have a lot of money... I don't look at success as money. I feel I'm a very successful person, mainly because I do the things I want to do. I have a nice family, I have a great job... the best job in the whole world. I have a hobby that is a passion with my antique airplanes. And, my job is a passion for me. I think that I look at my life as successful because of all those things...

I think the book, *Think and Grow Rich*, helped me in those ways, but I actually do not practice all of those principles, like developing a mastermind group and things of that nature. You know a

mastermind group could be something like my managers. But, I do talk to people and try to get advice from them... And, I might pass something on and see how it strikes them... so, I guess I use a lot of principles in the book... the book is the first thing that ever put me on a successful path in some shape and form. I would recommend that book to everybody... I think it's a great book. It's not exciting; it's more like a textbook... the man did more research on that book than anybody... But, if I had to pick one thing out of that book, it would be persistence.

**Winston Churchill** gave a speech to his Junior High School class, and he said: NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP! And, that was it. That about says it, doesn't it? I think that is what those people all had in common... they never gave up. They kept trying over and over again... I think that's the most important thing. You will get shot down A LOT, most of us do, but get up and do it again... get back up on your horse until he throws you off again. That's about it.

. . .

**Publisher's Note:** It's 30+ years later, and so many of the things Red said then ring true today. And, he continued on practicing what he preached. Today, Red's Health and

Racquet Club is simply known as *Red's*, signifying the fact that his brand is so well known in Lafayette, no further description is needed in the name. And, for good reason... Red's is now 62 years old and spans 195,000 square feet on 20 acres. Dozens more expansions have occurred, and more are underway and on the horizon. Red and his facility are one-of-a-kind, simple as that. To close this *Cover Story Classic*, it is important for you to know that what was presented in this edition (10,000+ words) was less than half of what was published in this two-part case study cover story in 1994 (20,000+ words). Subsequently, in March 2005, we did a follow-up cover story on Red when he was presented with *Club Insider's Health Club Pioneer of the Year Award*. All of this can be found in the *Club Insider Archives* for **Paid Subscribers**. Simply, go to [www.clubinsideronline.com/archives](http://www.clubinsideronline.com/archives). Thank you for reading!

**Make  
 It Fun!**

# When Struggling Becomes Comfort:

## *Breaking Free from Familiar Chaos in the Gym Business*

By: **Jim Thomas**

For many independent gym owners, the struggle to keep their business afloat is a constant battle. They grapple with dwindling memberships, rising operational costs and an ever-evolving fitness industry. Yet, amidst this chaos, some gym owners unknowingly settle into a dangerous pattern: the struggle itself becomes their comfort zone. The resistance to change solidifies, and the familiar chaos of an underperforming business feels safer than the uncertainty of doing something different.

This article explores the phenomenon of struggle-induced comfort, the dangers it presents and actionable steps gym owners can take to escape this cycle and move toward sustainable success.

### The Allure of Familiar Chaos

The concept of "familiar chaos" refers to the strange comfort people find in situations they know are problematic but predictable. For gym owners, it might look like:

- **Accepting constant cash flow problems** because they've "always been there."
- **Avoiding marketing or sales changes** due to the fear of failure or added work.
- **Sticking with outdated pricing models** because "members won't pay more."
- **Keeping underperforming staff** because hiring and training new employees feels daunting.

While these choices may seem practical or logical in the moment, they are often symptoms of a deeper problem: resistance to change.

### Why Struggle Becomes Comfortable

**1. Fear of the Unknown** - The fear of stepping into uncharted territory often outweighs the discomfort of staying in a known but failing situation. For example, implementing a new marketing strategy might feel riskier than sticking with one that isn't delivering results, simply because the outcome is unpredictable.

**2. Emotional Investment** - Many gym owners pour their heart, soul and savings into their business. Admitting that their current methods aren't working can feel like a personal failure, leading them to double down on ineffective practices instead of exploring alternatives.

**3. Survival Mode Mindset** - When gym owners operate in survival mode for too long, it becomes their default state. Struggling feels normal, even inevitable, and efforts to break free from it are viewed as futile or excessively risky.

**4. Normalization of Chaos** - Chaos can become so ingrained in daily operations that it feels like a natural part of the business. Owners may even develop a sense of pride in their ability to "manage the chaos," mistaking it for resilience.

### The Danger of Staying in the Comfort Zone of Struggle

Remaining in this state has profound consequences:

- **Stagnation:** The gym stops evolving, losing relevance in a competitive market.
- **Burnout:** Constantly putting out fires without making progress leads to emotional and physical exhaustion.
- **Member Attrition:** Members sense when a gym is stagnant or chaotic, leading them to seek alternatives.
- **Financial Collapse:** Without proactive change, the financial health of the gym deteriorates further.

### Recognizing the Signs of Resistance to Change

To break free, gym owners must first recognize the signs that their struggle has become a twisted form of comfort:

- 1. Excuses Over Action:** Constantly rationalizing why changes can't be made (e.g., "I don't have time," "It's not the right market for that").
- 2. Repeated Cycles:** Facing the same problems repeatedly without implementing lasting solutions.
- 3. Inward Focus:** Blaming external factors (economy, competition, members) rather than examining internal operations and decisions.
- 4. Avoidance:** Avoiding uncomfortable but necessary actions, such as increasing prices, rebranding or investing in staff training.

### Breaking Free: The Path to Positive Change

**1. Admit the Problem** - The first step is

acknowledging that the current approach isn't working. This requires humility and a willingness to face uncomfortable truths about the business.

**2. Shift the Mindset** - Gym owners must reframe their thinking: the chaos they've grown comfortable with is the real risk, not the potential challenges of change:

- View change as an opportunity, not a threat.
- Replace the survival mode mindset with a growth-oriented one.

**3. Define a Clear Vision** - A struggling gym often lacks a clear direction. Gym owners should ask themselves:

- What do I want my gym to represent?
- How can I provide unparalleled value to my members?
- What would success look like six months or one year from now?

**4. Start Small but Start Now** - Avoid being overwhelmed by the scale of change. Instead, focus on small, actionable steps:

■ **Reassess Membership Packages:** Introduce a new tier or adjust pricing.

■ **Improve Member Engagement:** Start with a simple campaign to re-engage inactive members.

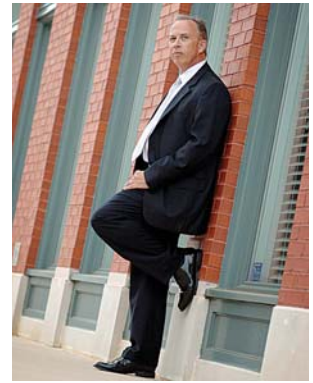
■ **Invest in Staff Training:** Even a single workshop can reignite enthusiasm among staff.

**5. Embrace Accountability** - Seek accountability partners, such as mentors, consultants or peer groups. These individuals can provide honest feedback, encouragement and a fresh perspective.

**6. Measure Progress** - Success is built on measurable results. Track Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as member retention, revenue growth and lead conversion rates to gauge the effectiveness of changes.

### Conclusion: Moving Beyond Comfort

Struggling gym owners must understand that the struggle itself is not a badge of honor or an inevitable part of business ownership. Comfort in chaos is a deceptive trap that holds businesses back from reaching their full potential. By recognizing resistance to change, embracing discomfort and taking deliberate



Jim Thomas

steps toward improvement, gym owners can break free from the cycle of familiar chaos and create thriving businesses.

The key is to act; not tomorrow, not next week, but today. The moment you stop normalizing struggle and start demanding more for yourself and your business, you begin the journey toward lasting success. Change may feel uncomfortable, but in the fitness industry, comfort never leads to growth and the same applies to your gym business.

*(An Outsourced CEO, Turnaround Expert and Author, Jim Thomas is the Founder and President of FMC USA Inc., a management consulting, turnaround, financing and brokerage firm specializing in the leisure services industry. With more than 25 years of experience owning, operating and managing facilities of all sizes, Thomas lectures and delivers seminars, webinars and workshops across the globe on the practical skills required to successfully overcome obscurity, improve gym sales, build teamwork and market fitness programs and products. Learn more at [www.fmconsulting.net](http://www.fmconsulting.net) or [www.youtube.com/gymconsultant](http://www.youtube.com/gymconsultant).)*

# Make It Fun!

# Use PIPs to Address Culture Fits Who are Falling Short

By: **Chris Stevenson**

A *Performance Improvement Plan*, widely known as a *PIP*, is a way to assist underperforming team members positively and strategically. While there are other methods of assessing team member performance, this method has a more specific purpose: to help a team member, considered a great asset by most, improve performance.

My team and I have effectively used performance improvement plans in our organizations for various reasons and roles in many departments. Taking a strategic approach is critical to getting great results. Here are five keys to getting the most out of PIPs:

**1. Decide if a PIP is warranted:** A performance improvement plan is precisely that. It is a plan to improve a team member's performance. It is not for a team member who isn't a strong culture fit.

Team members typically fall into four categories. The first category includes individuals who are great culture fits and are high performers. Keep praising these team members, as they are your rock stars. The opposite of that category is a team member who is a poor culture fit and a low performer. These people should be off the team ASAP because they add no value to the organization and can often bring others down.

A third category is a team member who is a high performer but a poor culture fit. This is the most challenging employee category and generally requires conversational exploration as to why there isn't a culture fit. If there is no way to improve buy-in to the organization's culture, then there is a strong chance that the employee will move into the category that includes low culture fits with low performers and must be let go.

The last category, and the one most ripe for a PIP, is a team member who is a great culture fit but could perform better. This type of team member believes in the organization's mission, vision and values, but for some reason, still falls short. We had a sales team member with a great attitude and work ethic, but he lacked phone skills and had a meager appointment booking percentage. In other words, a culture fit who wasn't performing to standards, a perfect example of where a PIP is warranted.

**2. Have an honest conversation:** A PIP should start with a transparent and clear two-way conversation between the manager and the team member. In this conversation, the manager can openly and honestly share specifics about expectations and where there are deficiencies. It is also an opportunity for the team members to share thoughts and insights on why they

might fall short.

Starting with a conversation before getting into the actual logistics helps to build trust and demonstrates that the PIP requires a team effort for improvement. It should be made clear that a PIP is not a punishment.

We had an instance in which one of our experienced personal trainers was having trouble converting trial sessions into clients. We uncovered that, in her former job, the sales team had been responsible for selling trials rather than the trainer. The trainer needed more training, coaching and practice.

We might have approached the PIP incorrectly if we had not uncovered this hurdle. An honest conversation leads to the next step.

**3. Create clear outcomes:** Once there is a clear mutual understanding of the situation, it is time to create a plan. An effective plan begins with a *SMART* Goal (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely). It is ineffective to require the team member to "perform better simply." That is too ambiguous and not at all helpful. Ambiguity leads to confusion and anxiety.

Setting goals or performance outcomes in areas such as sales is typically easy because goals in this department can often be tangible. Using hard numbers can help clarify goals, such as improving a closing percentage by 10% or upping introductory personal training bookings by 15%.

Other areas may require more creativity, especially in improving soft skills. Imagine a welcome desk attendant who needs to be more proactive and interactive with members. A goal in this area could be to have the attendant introduce himself to ten people per shift or memorize five names daily.

Clarity is essential for success. Once clear outcomes are created, the next step can take place.

**4. Determine necessary resources and action:** Resources must be provided to achieve the desired outcome, and action must be taken. This is the responsibility of both the manager and the team member. It's a collaborative effort.

Let's take, for example, a group exercise instructor whose class attendance is down. The desired outcome is to increase class attendance by 20% in 90 days. The manager commits to meeting weekly with the instructor to work on choreography, cueing and other aspects of teaching a good class. Those are the resources that will be provided to the team members. The team member will commit to attending those meetings. In addition, she will advertise her class by posting on social media three times per week, attending

another instructor's classes once a week, and personally inviting five people to attend her sessions.

The manager's resources and the instructor's willingness to perform these agreed-upon tasks create a formula for improved performance.

## 5. Assign a timeline with checkpoints:

A typical PIP is 90 days long. It often has 30- and 60-day formal check-ins. In addition, there should be frequent informal follow-ups throughout the process.

Checkpoints include incremental breakdowns of the goal and help to determine whether the team member is on track. This process not only helps to assess progress but also to reveal issues. Check-ins are necessary for the team members to feel safe and supported.

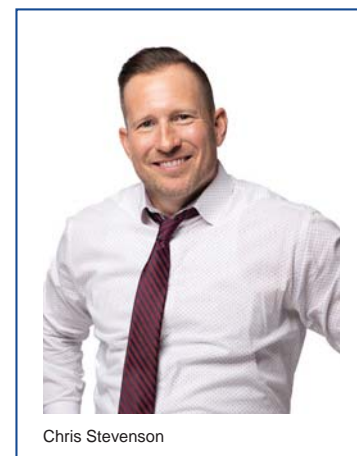
Imagine creating a PIP in any of the above examples and saying, "Good luck! Let's see how you do in 90 days!" That would be neither motivating nor supportive, and therefore, likely ineffective. In that scenario, it may cause the team member to regress, lose motivation and even quit.

When you check in frequently, one of two things happens. The first is a realization that progress is happening. This confirms things are on track for the manager and the team members. Celebrate these small victories! The second thing that can happen is discovering that the team member is behind schedule. If that's the case, the goal can be reassessed, allowing for adjustments in terms of resources and actions.

Given that the purpose of a PIP is to make sure a good team member perform better, either result is valuable and will enhance the success of the PIP.



Those are the critical steps for executing a successful performance



Chris Stevenson

improvement plan. To reiterate, PIPs are appropriate for team members who are great people but not performing to expectations. If a team member is not a great fit, PIPs are not the solution; termination often is.

PIPs are not a punishment or a tool to document bad behavior. They are designed as a team effort to help improve specific performance while improving morale, teamwork, the workplace environment and the overall success of your business.

*(Chris Stevenson, former Power Ranger stuntman, is the Founder of The Empower Group, a full-service consulting firm with services ranging from staff training, workshops, full facility management and more. Stevenson has over 20 years of experience in many aspects of the health and fitness industry. In addition, he is an international speaker who regularly presents at IHRSA, Athletic Business, Club Industry and many other fitness and business events. From health and wellness to business strategies. Chris can be reached by phone at 818-519-6038 or email at [chris@stevensonempowers.com](mailto:chris@stevensonempowers.com).)*

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# Beyond the Finish Line:

## The Evolution of Running from Niche Sport to Mainstream Movement

By: **Nancy Trent**

Running has transformed from a niche activity into a vibrant, mainstream movement. The recent *TCS New York City Marathon*, *Philadelphia Marathon* and *The Running Event* have all highlighted this cultural shift. These events spotlight not only the physical endurance required to conquer marathons but also the growing role of running in the broader lifestyle and fitness community. Today, running isn't just about competition, it's a means of personal expression, community connection and self-care.

What makes this shift so notable is how brands have responded to the evolving needs of today's runners. From performance gear and nutrition to recovery tools and stylish apparel, companies are redefining the runner's experience. No longer is it just about speed and endurance; runners today are seeking innovative products that enhance their overall lifestyle, blending form and function seamlessly. The result? A running culture that is more inclusive and dynamic, attracting a broader range of participants, from elite athletes to everyday enthusiasts.

### Fresh Faces in Fitness: Brands Redefining Health and Wellness

The rise of running has paved the way for new players in the fitness and wellness space, eager to innovate and meet the needs of modern athletes. One such brand is *Knockaround*, which has redefined the role of running sunglasses. Originally rooted in the surf culture, *Knockaround* has grown to become a go-to choice for runners who value durability, affordability and style. **Jeff Hennion**, CEO of *Knockaround*, explains, "What we've found, and this is true across the brand, but especially in running, is that people no longer have to choose between performance and price. What we offer is high quality, performance, UV protection, everything you expect, but at a price point where they don't have to worry about what happens to the sunglasses."

*Knockaround* has embraced running as a natural extension of their brand, expanding beyond surf culture to include events like the *Providence Hood to Coast Relay* and the *New York City Marathon*. These races allowed *Knockaround* to connect directly with the running community, building trust and credibility in person. "Runners are about being right there, being dedicated and in the space, and that's completely our focus right now," Hennion emphasizes. Today, *Knockaround* stands as a symbol of the growing desire for stylish, functional

gear that can withstand the demands of outdoor sports.

### Next-Level Recovery: The Role of Rest and Renewal

As running continues to gain mainstream appeal, the focus on recovery has become more prominent. Athletes are increasingly recognizing that performance doesn't stop at the finish line; recovery is just as crucial. Innovative recovery tools are now a key component of the modern runner's toolkit. *GoFit* has revolutionized post-workout recovery with their *Revolve Roller*, a massaging roller designed to provide deep tissue relief without the need for heavy equipment or electricity. With adaptive massage rings that target various muscle groups, runners can customize their recovery experience, promoting circulation and reducing tension.

Meanwhile, *SCS Make Life Easy* has introduced new cold plunge and hot tub systems, such as their *EzLife* line, designed to accelerate recovery. These products offer an effective and accessible way to manage muscle soreness and inflammation, reinforcing the importance of rest and renewal. The demand for such tools highlights how runners are increasingly prioritizing recovery as much as they do performance.

Prevention is the key to recovery, and every runner knows that *Body Glide* is the go-to solution for stopping chafing before it starts, eliminating the need to recover from blisters or raw skin caused by friction. But chafing, blisters and rubbing don't just happen during a run; they're common in everyday life, making *Body Glide* a versatile essential beyond the track. Unlike sticky, greasy or messy alternatives like petroleum jelly, which can clog pores, *Body Glide's* balms are breathable, allowing perspiration to escape while protecting the skin. These quick, easy-to-use balms create a reliable barrier against friction, preventing rashes, irritation, blisters and raw skin in sensitive areas. With a clean, allergen-free formula, *Body Glide* provides all-day protection that helps users move through their routines with confidence and comfort, free from worry or pain. Whether you're running a marathon or tackling your daily errands, *Body Glide* offers a seamless way to stay protected and at ease.

Foot health has also become a focus within the running community, given the importance of maintaining proper support and comfort. *OOFOS* has developed footwear that prioritizes active recovery, using *OOFoam™* technology to absorb impact and reduce strain on the feet. These shoes help alleviate fatigue and

improve mobility, offering runners a solution for reducing foot discomfort after long runs.

Similarly, *Kane Footwear* has emerged with shoes made from dual-density *RestoreFoam™*, reducing carbon emissions while providing ergonomic support. Dr. Daniel Geller, a foot and ankle surgeon, has integrated recovery-based orthopedic principles into Kane's designs, making them a popular choice for athletes seeking sustainable and effective footwear.

### Everyday Athletes

Running is often associated with specialized gear and routines, but the influence of running culture extends far beyond the sport itself, shaping everyday products and solutions for all kinds of active lifestyles. From bold fashion statements to fitness haircare and meaningful keepsakes, these innovations prove that running-inspired essentials are for everyone, not just runners.

For those who prefer to exercise with flair, brands like *Sprints* and *Rabbit* are redefining fitness apparel. *Sprints* caters to everyday athletes who don't fit the mold of a professional runner, offering fun and functional hats and fanny packs designed for "normal" people who want to express their unique personalities. Their fashion-forward designs blend performance fabrics with individuality, creating gear that stands out and fosters community. Similarly, *Rabbit* brings premium running apparel rooted in California culture and sustainability. Founded by two passionate runners, the brand champions inclusivity and gives back through community initiatives, while its sustainable practices, like using recyclable packaging and reducing carbon footprints, make it an all-around feel-good choice. Their women's tank tops and sports bras, complete with pockets for phones, are as practical as they are stylish.

Fitness isn't just about apparel; haircare for active lifestyles is another often-overlooked category. Sweat, frequent washing and environmental exposure can take a toll on hair, but brands like *SWAIR* have stepped in to fill the gap. Created by women training for the NYC Marathon, *SWAIR* offers multitasking haircare solutions that are safe, effective, vegan and dermatologist-tested. Their products not only withstand the rigors of intense workouts but also nourish and protect hair, making them a must-have for gym-goers, yogis and anyone breaking a sweat.

Even celebrating milestones has evolved thanks to the running world. *Erica Sara Designs* specializes in creating meaningful jewelry that captures the essence of personal achievements. Her



Nancy Trent

collections, like the *TCS New York City Marathon* line, offer runners and non-runners alike the chance to commemorate their journeys with personalized, chic and timeless pieces. With semi-precious gemstones, custom engravings, and luxurious craftsmanship, her designs transform memories into wearable art that inspires and connects.

These innovations, inspired by the running community, demonstrate how thoughtful, performance-driven products can transcend the sport, enhancing everyday life for anyone who values style, functionality and meaningful connections. Whether you're chasing miles or just going about your day, these products are proof that the spirit of running is everywhere.

### Fuel Your Strength: Beverages and Supplements

Nutrition plays a vital role in the evolving running culture. Brands like *PlantFusion*, one of the pioneers in the plant protein market, develops organic plant products with 18 grams of 100% USDA organic protein derived from a superfood blend of organic fermented fruits, vegetables and mushrooms. This powerful powder, ideal in smoothies, cereals, shakes, bites and baked goods, is available in creamy vanilla and rich chocolate flavors. The trailblazer continues to innovate with impactful products, from compostable packaging to an organic certified line of supplements and formulas to help balance women's hormones with their product *INSPIRE for Women*, packed with protein and phyto-nutrients. With all these exciting innovations, *PlantFusion* provides runners with nutritious, sustainable solutions to fuel their performance and support overall wellness.

Additionally, *Ketone-IQ* offers (See *Nancy Trent* Page 21)

# A Strength Training Resolution Revolution

By: **Terry Browning**

Fitness fads, the newest, hottest trends, the code-cracking, must-have workout... we've seen them all come and go - with an emphasis on go - as trends tend to do. This time of year, in particular, the chatter is all about what's trending in fitness to appeal to resolutioners starting or restarting healthy habits. But, for the first time in recent memory, the "in" thing feels like something smart, something strong, something sustainable, something we can believe in, invest in and get people... well, in.

Finally, people aren't just looking for some vague version of exercise ("I guess I'll join a gym") or looking to undo bad habits in general ("I guess I'll change my ways").

More than ever, people have specifically resolved to start *strength training*.

## Why Strength Training?

Maybe - like you and me - they know strength training comes with health benefits that stretch way beyond building muscle, things like cardio health, weight management and improved mental health. Or, maybe their doctor prescribed it. Or, maybe it's simply trending, having a moment, the "in" thing. Whatever the reason, when it comes to weightlifting, people want *in!* Fast forward, and they're *in* your facility.

Can you deliver a solution to the next prospect who walks in the door? No, not strength training machines, however "cutting edge" they may be. Those are available everywhere, most dangerously right down the road at the cheaper place.

You - and your prospects - need strength training plus the social and physical phenomenon of group fitness.

The community of fellow movers, and the power and connection that comes from moving together, to motivating music and toward a common goal. Because strength training is *work* - it's weightlifting! - and it's work members will only do long-term if they enjoy it, feel accountable and see results.

Do you offer strength training workouts that are worth the *work*? Current partners of MOSSA, you likely offer *Group Power*, but do you participate and promote it to... everyone? (You should, it's amazing.) Group Power is, as we like to say, the most fun you can have strength training. It's also a fits-all, full-body workout for everyone. And, if you don't currently offer Group Power, let's get you the sought-after strength training your group fitness program needs and your prospects deserve. Here's why.

## Strength in Numbers

The right strength training in the group fitness setting is, in a word, game-changing. But here are a few more: user-friendly, adjustable, action- and music-packed, led by great (we hope!) instructors, high quality, guesswork-free, efficient, appointment-driven and packed with workout buddies. It's welcoming regardless of age, gender or experience level, making it an ideal onboarding solution and a retention magnet.

Done right, strength training will pack your group fitness rooms like no other program and your members will be there 2-3 times per week, every week, for years and even decades. It will be the "trend" that finally doesn't come and go, but it inspires people to stay.

Do you have a strength training solution, one that's all of the above? And, equipment that's authentic and attractive to even long-time weight room loyalists? If not, let's talk. With an inclusive program like Group Power on your schedule and a talented, inspiring, diverse, well-trained instructor team, you'll stand out among heavy competition; make group fitness central to your sales, onboarding and retention strategies; and deliver strength training as a lifelong, healthy - and even enjoyable - habit.

You and I are the lucky ones this year - trendsetters, you might say - who've long counted strength training as a cornerstone of our business and a mainstay of our own personal fitness regimens. We can - and should - capitalize on strength training's current status as "new" and "hot," with a decidedly *not* new but very hot program like Group Power, which turns 20 years old this year. It's *the* place to send your strength training resolutioners so you can deliver the full body muscle and movement training people want, with the community and connection they need.



Terry Browning

Add *Group Power* to your schedule by the spring with MOSSA as your partner. Learn more about *Group Power*, our signature strength training workout, here: [mossa.net/workouts/group-power](http://mossa.net/workouts/group-power). You'll see why it's our most popular workout in health clubs worldwide and on MOSSA On Demand.

(As President and CEO of MOSSA, formerly known as *The STEP Company*, Terry Browning has been instrumental in guiding the company's directions after the introduction of *The STEP* to the fitness industry and retailers, has led the team that introduced *Branded Group Fitness* to health clubs in 1997 and now steers the company's growth in the consumer digital workout market. Terry has nearly 30+ years industry experience and holds a degree in Marketing and Business Administration from the University of Akron. Terry can be reached by email at [terry@mossa.net](mailto:terry@mossa.net) or phone at 800-729-7837, Ext. 242.)

# Make It Fun!

## ...Nancy Trent

continued from page 20

high-performance energy supplements that provide a boost in focus and endurance, while *CON-CRET* creates gummies aimed at muscle-building without the need for bulky supplements.

## Luxury Experience

The world of running is embracing the high-end treatment typically reserved for events like the *Super Bowl* and the *U.S. Open*. Now, marathon runners can enjoy a fully curated, first-class experience when they arrive in NYC for race weekend with companies like *On Location*, an event management company that has transformed how people experience

live events. With over two decades of expertise in luxury hospitality, *On Location* curates premium experiences, blending convenience, comfort and access for both personal and corporate clients. They've reimaged what it means to attend events like marathons, creating lasting memories and enhancing the overall experience for participants and spectators alike. From seamless travel arrangements and premium accommodations to exclusive dining and personalized race-day support, every detail is handled, ensuring runners feel like VIPs from start to finish.

The runner's journey from niche sport to mainstream cultural phenomenon is far from over. The brands

and innovations driving this transformation reflect the evolving needs and desires of modern runners, ones who seek not just performance but a holistic experience that includes recovery, style and sustainable solutions. These marathon events saw a surge of innovation and inclusivity, highlighting how running has firmly stepped into mainstream culture. These new advancements and game-changing trends embrace the evolving needs of modern runners. As the sport continues to attract diverse participants and lifestyles, it's clear that running is no longer just about competition; it's about community, wellness and self-expression, proving that this once niche activity is now a movement that's here to stay.

(Nancy Trent is a writer and speaker, a

lifelong wellness activist, a globe-trotting trend watcher and the Founder and President of *Trent & Company*, a leading wellness PR firm. *Trent & Company*, which launched many health and beauty brands, grew out of Nancy's personal and passionate commitment to helping people live longer and healthier lives. A former journalist for *New York Magazine*, Nancy has written seven books on healthy lifestyles, serves on the editorial boards of several magazines and travels around the world speaking at conferences and trade shows on trends in the marketplace. She is a recognized expert in PR with more than 30 years of experience creating and managing highly successful campaigns. Learn more at [www.trentandcompany.com](http://www.trentandcompany.com) or contact Nancy at [nancy@trentandcompany.com](mailto:nancy@trentandcompany.com).)

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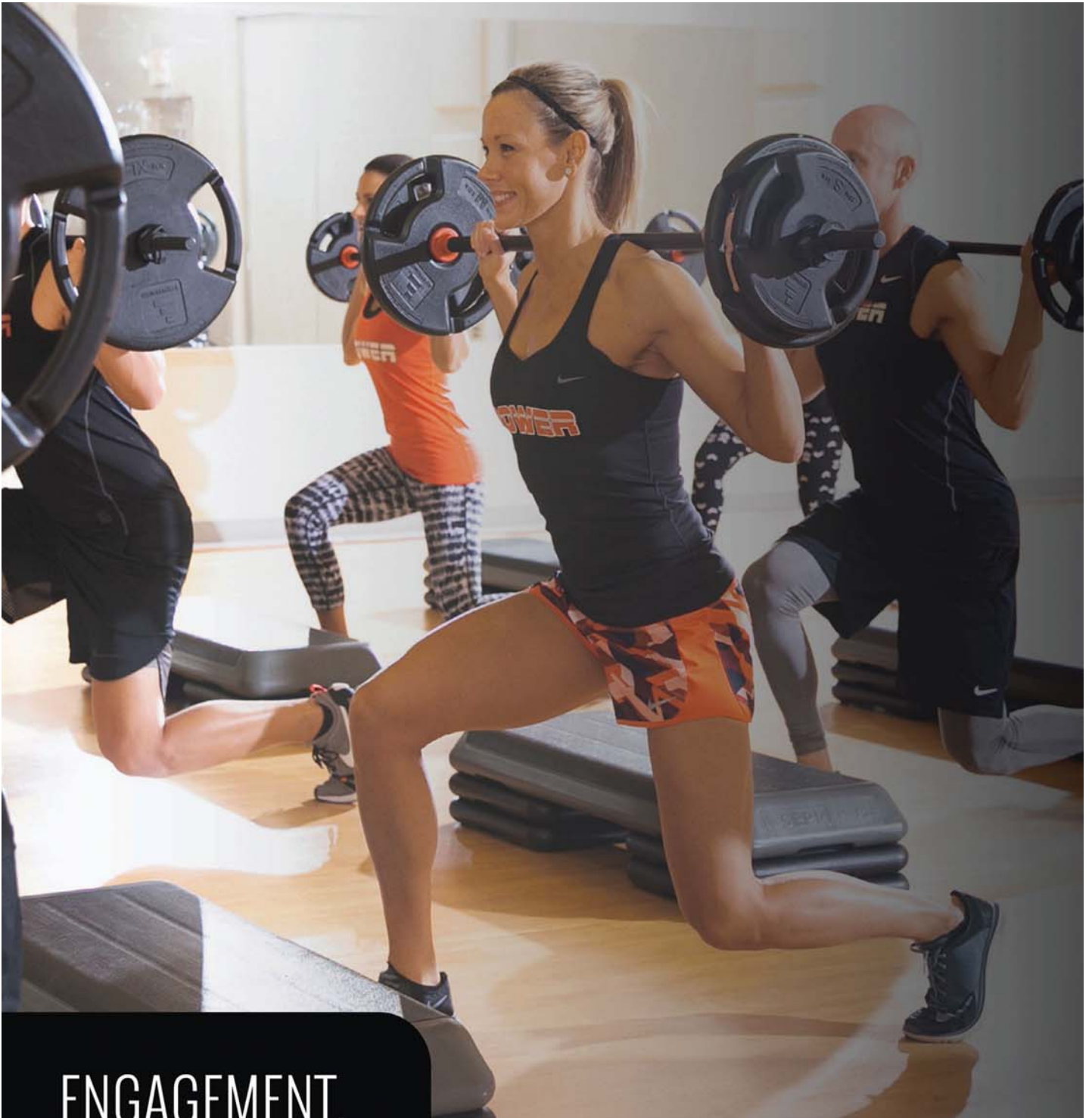


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