Norm Cates'
CLUB INSIDER
CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

The 2nd Annual HFA Show and Hall of Fame Class

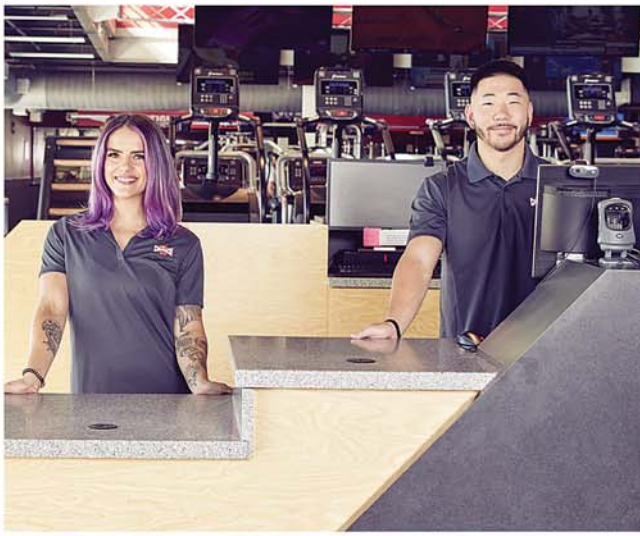
FEBRUARY 2026

Read This Month's Edition and Archive Editions Online at **www.clubinsideronline.com**

JOIN THE FASTEST-GROWING FULL-SIZE FITNESS FRANCHISE

Convert your gym to Crunch or sell to a Crunch Franchisee

- Most competitive and progressive model in the $32 billion fitness industry
- Rated best franchises to buy in 2023
- Highly recognizable fitness brand with a 30-year history
- Over 1,400 franchise rights sold
- One of the largest member bases in the worldwide fitness industry



Ready to talk about how to win in the high-value, low-price gym model? Contact us:

John Merrion
John.Merrion@crunch.com

Greg Mcdonough
Greg.Mcdonough@crunch.com

Entrepreneur FRANCHISE 500 FASTEST GROWING FRANCHISE 2022

Entrepreneur FRANCHISE 500 RANKED 2022

FranchiseTimes ZOR AWARDS BEST FRANCHISES TO BUY 2023

Entrepreneur FRANCHISE 500 TOP GLOBAL FRANCHISE 2022 VERIFIED

Entrepreneur FRANCHISE 500 2023 VERIFIED

Norm Cates'
CLUB INSIDER
CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

The 2nd Annual HFA Show and Hall of Fame Class

By: Justin Cates

The *2nd Annual HFA Show* and *Hall of Fame Class Induction Ceremony* is just around the corner, taking place **March 15 - 18** in beautiful San Diego! If you have not already registered to attend, it is not too late! Don't read any further, go to **healthandfitness.org/show** to register now (then come back here). And, of course, don't forget your hotel and airfare.

Okay, now that you are registered and back to reading this Cover Story, here's what is going to be happening! As always, there will be a conference schedule with over 150+ presenters. This is the *Who's Who* of our industry presenting topics that run the full gamut of issues related to the successful operation of health and fitness clubs.

Kicking off each day of conference content will be the *President's Address* (March 16), *Award Presentations* (March 17 - 18), *Association Business*, followed by the always thought-provoking *Keynote Presentations*. This year's lineup is as follows:

March 16: Erica Dhawan, *Best-Selling Author and Advisor*, presenting *Win Together - Building Resilient, High-Performing Teams in the Age of AI:* Join WSJ bestselling author and teamwork expert Erica Dhawan for a high-impact keynote on unlocking team potential in the AI era. Erica shares research-backed strategies to build trust, foster agility and elevate performance amidst rapid change. Learn how to turn digital challenges into opportunities, harness AI as a catalyst for smarter decisions, and create a culture where collaboration and innovation thrive. AI won't replace us, but those who master it will lead the future of work. *Sponsored by Zenoti*

March 17: Jesse Itzler, *Entrepreneur, Author, Speaker,* presenting *The Spiritual Billionaire:* Being an entrepreneur is a journey you walk, as you look to achieve big things. In this speech, Jesse shares stories from his own path. Brought to life with the help of DJ Dee Wiz, through humor, music, love, loss and knowledge, Jesse distills lessons he's learned. By breaking down the hours in a day, and knowing that sometimes a lot of soul, creating your own luck, and the power of the spoken word can allow your own journey to get you exactly what you want, without having to give up what you have. *Sponsored by Matrix*

*(See **HFA Show 2026** Page 10)*

The 29th Annual Financial Panel

By: Justin Cates

Following the passing of **Rick Caro**, *Moderator of the Annual Financial Panel for 28 years*, *Club Insider* is very happy to announce that **Luke Carlson**, *Board Chair of HFA*, will pick up the torch to moderate the *29th Annual Financial Panel*. This not-to-be-missed presentation will take place on **March 17, 11AM - 12:30PM**, in **Room 6D**. Luke was kind enough to spend a few minutes with us discussing the upcoming panel. Following that interview, we will also introduce you to this year's panelists.

An Interview With Luke Carlson, Board Chair of HFA

Club Insider (C.I.) - First of all, congratulations on continuing what has become a truly unique and important feature of and tradition at the *IHRSA*, and now *HFA*, Conferences. How did you stepping into the late Rick Caro's shoes come about? Will you be the annual host/moderator now, or will this change year by year?

Luke Carlson (LC) - Rick was an icon in our industry, and the annual financial panel is an important part of his profound legacy. I don't think anyone can truly fill his shoes, nor should they try. We made the decision to have the *current Chairman of the HFA Board* serve as the Moderator of this panel each year. And thus, I'll moderate this year's panel.

C.I. - For those who have never been to a financial panel, why should they attend?

LC - The panel provides an update on the financial health of our industry. We'll provide a snapshot of where the industry is and where the industry is going, and most importantly, we'll understand how leaders in the equity markets view our industry.

C.I. - For those who have been to one financial panel or many, why should they attend?

LC - Our industry is evolving fast, and significant PE deals have been completed in recent years. We'll recap those, share learnings and talk about how to prepare for an equity event. Most importantly, I'm convinced attendees will appreciate the unique perspectives of our diverse panel.

*(See **HFA Financial Panel** Page 6)*

Luke Carlson

Inside the Insider: Edition #386

- It's Not All About the Experience - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- Member Retention is Not a Program - **By:** Herb Lipsman
- Shortening the Learning Curve: A Guide for New Gym Owners - **By:** Jim Thomas
- From Hype to Helpful: The Fitness and Wellness Trends Defining 2026 - **By:** Nancy Trent
- 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 **386th monthly edition of this 30+ 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!!!**

■If you have not already done so, be sure to sign up and make your plans for **The HFA Show 2026**, to be held in beautiful San Diego, **March 16 - 18**. Go to: **healthandfitness.org/show**. Check out **Cover Story** on **Page #3**, as well as the **HFA Ad** on **Page #13.** And, of course, please stop by our **Booth #513!**

■This very *Special Note* is from **DR. PAUL BEDFORD** in England. Dr. Paul is a researcher, international speaker and fitness industry expert on retention, attrition and customer experience and he shares these insights from a recent article:

And, that's a WRAP. The *Central London YMCA* has closed for the last time. Most members do not leave because they suddenly lose motivation. More often, they begin to withdraw when something in the environment makes them question whether they fit. That shift rarely announces itself. It appears first in behavior. Slightly longer gaps between visits. Less predictable timing. A weakening of rhythm rather than a complete stop.

In this article, I explore how belonging influences exercise identity, how early attendance patterns reflect perceived fit and why subtle environmental signals often shape long-term adherence more than programming or intensity. The message a member receives is not always explicit, but it is interpreted.

For many members, the decision to leave does not begin with a cancellation form. It begins earlier, often with a quiet internal conclusion that this place may not be for them. Operators often focus on motivation, programming or pricing when attendance begins to shift. In reality, adherence is shaped less by intensity and more by belonging. When members feel uncertain about their place in the environment, behavior becomes fragile. This is not simply a confidence issue. It is a behavior response to perceived signals.

The Early Experience Shapes Identity: Exercise adherence is not built on willpower. It is built on identity. In the early weeks of membership, individuals are not just forming routines, they are assessing whether the environment feels compatible with who they are. Subtle cues such as staff interaction, crowding, equipment layout and ease of navigation all contribute to an internal decision. Am I someone who belongs here? Or, am I someone trying to keep up? When uncertainty outweighs clarity, visit patterns become inconsistent. The member may still attend, but the rhythm weakens. Each session requires renewed effort rather than feeling like part of life. Belonging reduces cognitive strain. When someone feels they fit, attendance becomes easier to sustain.

Norm Cates

Behavior Signals Risk Before Cancellation: It is important to note now that attendance rarely collapses without warning. It shifts gradually:

■Members who feel unsure of their place often display subtle patterns. Longer gaps between visits. Irregular weekly timing.

*(See **Norm's Notes** Page 7)*

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

Club Insider, established in 1993, is a product of Cates Media, LLC. Those wishing to reproduce any portion of this publication may do so, provided it is not for resale.

PUBLISHER
Justin Cates
(e): Justin@clubinsideronline.com

FOUNDER & TRIBAL LEADER SINCE 1993
Norm Cates, Jr.
(p): (770) 635 - 7578
(e): Norm@clubinsideronline.com

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS - Bruce Carter, Cathy Spencer Browning, Chris Stevenson, Frank Guengerich, Herb Lipsman, Jeffrey Pinkerton, Jim Thomas, Nancy Trent, Paul Bosley, Sara Kooperman, JD, Steve Vucovich, Terry Browning and Thomas Plummer

DISTRIBUTION - Club Insider Online (**www.clubinsideronline.com**)

Proudly Published in The United States of America

www.clubinsideronline.com

Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider,* we are excited to be in our **33rd 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 the **late 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, the **late 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 over the 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.

LA | FITNESS®

perfo

Join Our Team!

NOW HIRING GROUP FITNESS INSTRUCTORS

We're looking for fun, high energy, motivating, and dynamic instructors!
If you're interested and have experience teaching group fitness, apply now!

Also Hiring Sales Counselors, Management, and Personal Trainers!*

- Competitive pay
- Fast track to management opportunities
- Benefits package (for qualified positions)
- Complimentary LA Fitness gym membership with employment

*Trainers must be nationally certified.

Apply online at www.lafitness.com/careers

Photos depict a typical LA Fitness facility; clubs and amenities may vary. ©2024 Fitness International, LLC. All rights reserved.

...HFA Financial Panel

continued from page 3

C.I. - What advice can you give to potential attendees on what to listen for, pay attention to, etc.
LC - I think it's important to listen to the panelists to gather the perspective of what they value from a business or an operator in our industry. As business leaders, we are interested in value creation and value capture, but many times, our perspectives become myopically focused on either an operator's lens or the customer lens (and this IS a healthy lens). Hearing the way the financial community views the growth and opportunity of our industry is important. Finally, and maybe most importantly, we should listen to the changes on the horizon, but we should really zero in on what won't change because the things that don't change are the things we can build our businesses around.

C.I. - Luke, you have a HUGE job stepping into Uncle Rick's shoes. How does that feel? What is your gameplan to make it your own?
LC - That's an understatement. I want to honor Rick and what he's built while not trying to emulate him, because I really can't. Attendees will notice slight changes from previous years, but I have no ego attached to making it mine. I'm going to try to honor Rick and let our panelists truly be the star of the show. Most importantly, I want our attendees to talk away with learnings that they can discuss with their teams and apply to their businesses.

This year's panelists are...

Tracy Chadwell,
Managing Founder, 1843 Capital

Named to *Forbes' inaugural 50 Over 50* list and *Entrepreneur Magazine's 100 Powerful Women*, Tracy Chadwell is the *Founder of 1843 Capital*, a venture firm investing in early-stage technology and longevity companies. Her portfolio includes early investments in *Beautycounter* (Exited: $1B valuation) and *Tempo Automation (Nasdaq: TMPO)*. A recognized leader in venture capital, she has testified before the U.S. Senate and spoken at events including the *Nantucket Project, MIT* and *TEDx NYIT*. Previously, Tracy was a *Partner at Baker Capital* and *VP at Robertson Stephens*, following earlier work in Tokyo with *Nagashima & Ohno* and *SCM International*. She serves on the Boards of *Recuro Health* and *Early Stage Montana* and is an active member of the *AARP Age Collective*. Tracy holds a B.A. from *Trinity College* and a J.D. from *Loyola University Chicago*.

Adam Hemmer,
Managing Director, TSG Consumer

Adam Hemmer is a *Managing Director at TSG Consumer Partners*, where he is responsible for sourcing, structuring and conducting due diligence on new investment opportunities. Before joining TSG, he worked as a consultant at *Kurt Salmon*, advising private equity clients in the consumer products and retail sectors. A graduate of *Stanford University* with a degree in economics, Adam has played a key role in investments across leading brands such as *BrewDog, nuun, Sunshine Fitness, Raybern Foods* and *PAIGE*. Most recently, he was instrumental in TSG's acquisition of *EoS Fitness*, reflecting his deep expertise in fitness industry investment and growth strategy.

Jeremy Hirsch,
Managing Director, Houlihan Lokey

Jeremy Hirsch is a *Director in Houlihan Lokey's Consumer Group*. He has nearly two decades of investment banking and private equity experience and has successfully managed and executed multiple M&A transactions across a variety of industries, with a particular focus on companies in the franchise, health and fitness, and multi-unit services sectors. He is based in the firm's New York office. Before joining Houlihan Lokey, Jeremy was the *CFO/COO of The Studio (MDR)*, a multi-unit boutique Pilates chain based in Los Angeles, where he is a Partner. Previously, he was an *Associate at KarpReilly*, a consumer growth equity firm focused on investments in the restaurant and retail space, and he was an investment banking analyst in the *Consumer Retail M&A Group at Rothschild* in New York. Jeremy has worked with numerous companies, including *The Studio (MDR), Good Feet Stores, Brooklyn Boulders, Bluestar Alliance, Café Rio, Café Zupas, Comark, Cedar Fair Entertainment, CSM* and *Schiff Nutrition*. He holds a B.A. in psychology from *Tufts University* and a MBA from *New York University*.

Jack Nagle,
Principal, Princeton Equity Group

Jack Nagle joined *Princeton* in 2021 and focuses on sourcing and executing transactions. He also provides operating support to our portfolio companies. Prior to Princeton, Jack was at *Kayne Anderson Capital Advisors* working on special situations transactions. Before Kayne Anderson Capital Advisors, Jack was at *J.F. Lehman & Company* executing investments in the aerospace and defense and industrial services sectors. Jack began his career as an Analyst at *Morgan Stanley* in the Financial Sponsors and Western Region Coverage groups. Jack's current investments include *Barry's, The International Franchise Professionals Group (IFPG), Stretch Zone* and *D1 Training*.

Vasu Pinnamaneni,
Managing Director, Evercore

Vasu Pinnamaneni is a Managing Director in the firm's strategic advisory practice, with a focus on the beauty, health, wellness and sustainability sectors. She has advised on numerous notable strategic M&A transactions for public and private clients, including *Waddington, Caraustar Industries, Jenny Craig, Smartypants Vitamins, Outcome Health, Buckeye Technologies, ProMach* and *KapStone Paper and Packaging*. She has also advised select financial sponsors, such as *AEA Investors, Arbor Investments, Carlyle, H.I.G. Capital, Jordan Company, North Castle Partners, Olympus* and *Onex*. Prior to joining *Evercore*, Vasu was at *Barclays* and *Rothschild*, and earlier held a consulting role within *Deloitte*. She earned a B.S.B.A. magna cum laude with concentrations in finance and international business from *Georgetown University*. She earned an MBA with concentrations in finance, accounting and economics from the *University of Chicago Graduate School of Business*.

■ ■ ■

Thank you to Luke Carlson for his time interviewing for this story, as well the preparation needed to moderate the 29th Annual Financial Panel. Thank you also to all panelists for their time and expertise. Folks, this is one conference event you DO NOT want to miss. Get there early, as it is always standing room only by presentation time! **March 17, 11AM - 12:30PM**, in **Room 6D**.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 40+ years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 15+ years. Justin became Publisher of Club Insider in April of 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin at **Justin@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*

Vasu Pinnamaneni

Tracy Chadwell

Adam Hemmer

Jeremy Hirsch

Jack Nagle

This isn't just about recruiting.
IT'S LEADERSHIP ARCHITECTURE.

Built for organizations that refuse average leadership.

Your customized leadership search—designed around your facility, your market, and your growth goals.

jlr associates

Executive Search for the Fitness & Wellness Industry

JLR Associates

609-430-8455

jlrassoc.com

...Norm's Notes

continued from page 4

Avoidance of previously attended sessions. These are not signs of laziness or lack of motivation. They are signs of friction.

■Clubs sometimes respond by increasing encouragement or pushing performance. Evidence consistently shows that predictability and perceived safety matter more than intensity.

■Cancellations are outcomes. Behavior patterns are the early indicators.

■When operators monitor rhythm rather than emotion, intervention becomes calmer and more effective.

The Environment Communicates Constantly: Every club environment sends messages. Front desk greetings, staff visibility, equipment layout, signage clarity and peer behavior shape how psychologically safe a member feels. A crowded space with little acknowledgement can amplify doubt. A structured and welcoming environment reinforces belonging. This is where member experience and behavior change intersect. Experience is not decoration. It is behavioral architecture. If someone feels evaluated rather than supported, they withdraw. If they feel acknowledged and guided, they return. Retention is not simply about activity levels. It is about belonging.

What Changes When Belonging is Designed Intentionally? The highest retention environments are rarely the loudest. They are the clearest. They remove uncertainty early. They normalize beginner experiences. They reinforce small, consistent behaviors. They create visible systems that signal competence and care. Staff understand their role is not to motivate constantly but to reduce friction and ambiguity. Members know what is expected and what success looks like in the first weeks. When belonging is designed intentionally, adherence strengthens quietly. Visit frequency stabilizes. Confidence compounds. Identity shifts from trying to do this to this is something I do.

Final Thoughts: "You don't belong here" is rarely spoken aloud. It is inferred through small signals, inconsistent guidance or environmental overload. When clubs design for clarity, predictability and psychological safety, that message changes. Members do not need constant inspiration. They need structure, reassurance and evidence that their presence is welcome. Belonging precedes adherence. Adherence precedes retention.

Folks, it's that time of year where the Resolution folks are not coming as often if at all. Why? Is it you, or is it them? Thank you to Dr. Paul for these insights. For additional insights on this topic, please see **Herb Lipsman's Article** on **Page #14**.

■Here are some of the *Club Insider Weekly* items you may have missed:

■Workout Anytime Names Tim Hicks as Vice President of Franchise Development

ATLANTA, GA - While Americans are projected to spend an estimated $60 billion on fitness in 2026, *Workout Anytime*, a premium 24/7 fitness franchise, has named **Tim Hicks** as *Vice President of Franchise Development* to spearhead the brand's next stage of disciplined franchise growth. In this role, Hicks will lead Workout Anytime's franchise development strategy, focusing on identifying the right franchise partners, strengthening real estate selection and building systems designed to support scalable growth across new and existing markets.

Check out the **Workout Anytime Ad** on **Page #11**.

■LA Fitness and Shoot 360 Announce Pilot Program to Transform Basketball Gyms into Gamified, Data-Driven Training and Competition Experiences

VANCOUVER, WA - *Shoot 360*, one of the world's largest and most advanced technology-driven basketball training, competition and entertainment platforms, is piloting a program with *LA Fitness* that will convert select locations of the chain's basketball facilities into immersive, gamified experiences powered by cutting-edge technology. Test markets will launch in Northern California, Oregon and Washington State.

Check out the **LA Fitness Ad** on **Page #5**.

■World Gym International Announces the Upcoming Opening of its Newest Facility in Pine Brook, New Jersey

PINE BROOK, N.J. - *World Gym International* announces the upcoming opening of its newest location in Pine Brook, New Jersey. Industry veteran, Erik Santiago, is excited to bring a new state of the art 50,000 square-foot family facility to the NJ/NY Metropolitan Area that will cater to World Gym Athletes of all kinds.

Check out the **World Gym Ad** on **Page #18**.

*(See **Norm's Notes** Page 8)*

It's Not All About the Experience

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

I love the barber I found last year. Henry is personable and talented. His cuts involve clippers, multiple scissors, a straight razor and hot towels. He remembers my name and my haircut, but we don't chit-chat. I sit down, and he gets to work. The shop is nothing fancy, but it's nice – a couple of TVs, music and comfortable chairs. Unlike the last place I frequented, there's no cool artwork, no fancy light fixtures, no shiplap on the walls and no complimentary coffee. So, why did I choose a place that is "less" about the experience? Well, it turns out, the "experience" is more than the environment; it's the environment *plus* the expertise, the expenditure and the end result.

Like Henry, we are all in the service business, and the way members interact with and engage our services will make the difference between a long-time loyal member and a quick cancellation. So, let's stop short-cutting to "experience" and take a look at the three things that *really* shape people's time in your facility, and importantly, in group fitness.

Is Your Group Fitness Room Due for an Upgrade?

Old equipment, muffled microphones, sketchy speakers – they all send a message to your members and your team. You don't need to take on an expensive remodel (although that is great). Small changes and improvements prove to people that their group fitness experience is important. And, as the biggest driver of member loyalty and retention, we recommend group fitness be at the top of your priority list.

If you are looking for where to start, download our white paper (**mossa.net/clubs-facilities/white-papers**) on group fitness room design and commit to making two or three upgrades or improvements this year (we offer a list of 10 items to review). Maybe this is the year you tear down the aerobics-inspired mirrors in the front, build a small stage for better visibility and coaching, or add some dramatic lighting to elevate the experience.

Are Your Instructors Experts?

Too many people mistake time for training. We make the assumption that, because someone has been teaching group fitness for a long time, they must be an expert. I've played golf for 20-something years. I am a competent golfer, but I am by no means an expert. In two decades, I have had a total of three lessons. What I'm saying is, my time playing the game is not a direct indicator of my skill or ability.

Unfortunately, when it comes to group fitness, the range of expertise, quality control, screening, auditing, mentoring and professional training is hugely varied. Some clubs have great screening, tryout and interview processes. And some just want to see a cert and know... when can you start? But every instructor, no matter how seasoned or new, can benefit from additional training, annual video reviews and live-training refreshers. Don't let instructors' years (whatever the total) imply that they're beyond improvement; build a system and a culture that includes candid feedback, regular upskilling and live training, and an always-improving, life-long learner mentality.

Does the Expenditure Match the Experience?

I assume that most people do money-math the way I do it. I take the total cost and divide it by the number of uses to come up with a per-use dollar amount. If I am going to join a health club for $60 per month, and I use the club three times a week, that's 12 times per month or $5 per visit. Now, of course, the range of what people are willing to spend on a good-great-amazing group fitness workout varies greatly based on your local market and competitive pressures of other group fitness providers and boutique studios. For the sake of argument, even at $100 per month, 12 visits per month would break down to $8 per visit, which is (good news, bad news) less than many coffees these days.

Are Your Members Getting Results?

This is really the crux of the entire discussion: *What is the end result of their belonging to your facility?* Are your members moving better, feeling better, getting stronger, seeing progress, building a habit, building confidence, finding a fun social space, making friends and reaching their goals? Is your facility and staff the best for them to continue that trajectory?

And, ultimately, will they come back?! Yes, because like a quality haircut, an amazing workout makes every one of us feel better, stand a little taller, look our best and look forward to the next visit.

Jeffrey Pinkerton

■ ■ ■

Years ago, a friend of mine moved to our Atlanta suburb and asked, "Do you know where I can get a good $10 haircut?" My reply: "I didn't know there was such a thing as a good $10 haircut." Like many of my favorite jokes, I laughed, and he did not.

That said, I'm ready with a recommendation on how you can offer high-quality group fitness and trim the stuff that just isn't working anymore. Let's talk about simple ways to improve your environment, boost the expertise of your team, and make sure members are getting results, physically and socially.

(Jeffrey Pinkerton is the Business Development Manager for MOSSA. Jeffrey can be reached by phone at **770-989-4737** *or email at* **jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net**.*)*

...Norm Cates

continued from page 7

■VASA Fitness Appoints Michael Schwindle as Chief Financial Officer; Chris Tarrant as Chief Growth Officer

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, CO - VASA Fitness, one of the nation's leading high-value, low-price fitness operators, announces the appointment of **Michael Schwindle** as *Chief Financial Officer*. Michael brings more than 30 years of financial and operational leadership experience across global retail, e-commerce and consumer brands. His appointment will help VASA continue to scale its national footprint. VASA also announces the appointment of **Chris Tarrant** as *Chief Growth Officer*. A longtime *VASA Board Member*, Tarrant brings more than 30 years of experience leading market planning, real estate, design, construction and development initiatives for some of the world's most respected consumer brands. His appointment marks an important step in strengthening VASA's leadership as the company continues to grow and expand nationally.

■Active Wellness Names Angie Dobrowski Director of Active Aging and Medical Fitness to Spearhead 2026 Longevity Initiative

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - *Active Wellness*, a leading fitness design, management and consulting company, announces the appointment of **Angie Dobrowski** as *Director of Active Aging and Medical Fitness*. This strategic move reinforces Active's 2026 commitment to advancing longevity and healthspan, ensuring that individuals can lead inspired, healthy and active lives at every age.

Folks, be sure to check your email every **Wednesday morning** at **9AM EST** for *Club Insider Weekly*!

■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!

Angie Dobrowski

■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, celebrating 30+ years of trust in publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President and a Co-Founder of the Association with the late Rick Caro and five others. You can reach Norm by phone at **770-635-7578** *or email at* **Norm@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*

ENGAGEMENT.
CONNECTION.
RETENTION.

Unlock the full power and potential of group fitness at your facility through MOSSA's innovative programming, custom engineered music, inspiring marketing, and thoughtful strategy.

MOSSA
LET'S MOVE!

Learn more at www.mossa.net

...HFA Show 2026

continued from page 3

March 18: Apolo Ohno, *Olympian, Author, Speaker,* presenting *From Podium to Pivot: How Champions Upgrade, Adapt, and Win Again:* Reinvention is about winning with new tools in an unpredictable world. You'll learn how to adapt faster, lead with clarity and maximize output, even when the game keeps changing. In 2026, reinvention doesn't mean starting over, it means upgrading in motion. *Sponsored by ROR*

The 29th Annual Financial Panel

Following the passing of **Rick Caro**, *Moderator of the Annual Financial Panel for 28 years*, *Club Insider* is very happy to announce that **Luke Carlson**, *Board Chair of HFA*, will pick up the torch to moderate the *29th Annual Financial Panel*. This not-to-be-missed presentation will take place on **March 17, 11AM - 12:30PM**, in **Room 6D.**

After you finish reading this Cover Story, please read all about it on **Page #3**, as Luke was kind enough to spend a few minutes with us discussing the upcoming panel. Following that interview, we will also introduce you to the panelists.

The 2nd Annual HFA Hall of Fame Class

Taking place on the evening of **March 15**, this year's HFA Show will also feature the induction of *HFA's Second Hall of Fame Class*. In order of their announcements, the inductees are:

Phillip Mills,
Founder of Les Mills International

"Phillip Mills exemplifies the kind of visionary leadership the HFA Hall of Fame was created to honor," said **Liz Clark**, *HFA President and CEO*. "His pioneering work in group fitness has not only transformed how millions of people move but also how they connect with each other and with their own wellbeing. Phillip's global impact through Les Mills International continues to elevate our industry and inspire the next generation of fitness leaders."

Mills launched his fitness career in the 1980s, introducing exercise to music programs to gyms. He transformed a small gym in Auckland, New Zealand to a leading fitness chain. In 1990, he revolutionized the industry with the creation of *Bodypump*, a barbell-based group workout that became a global phenomenon. Today, *Les Mills International* operates the world's largest group fitness program with classes offered in 22,000 gyms across 120 countries.

Over the years, Mills has earned numerous accolades, including induction into the *New Zealand Business Hall of Fame* in 2022 and *Ernst & Young's NZ Entrepreneur of the Year*.

"It's an incredible honor to be inducted into the HFA Hall of Fame alongside so many pioneers who've shaped our industry," said Mills. "From the early days in Auckland to building a global movement through Les Mills, I've always believed in the power of group fitness to transform lives. This recognition is a tribute to everyone who's joined me on that journey."

Erica Dhawan

Jesse Itzler

Apolo Ohno

Jack and Elaine LaLanne,
Fitness Pioneers and Legends

"Jack and Elaine LaLanne are legends, not just in fitness but also in the way they inspired generations to live with energy, purpose and joy," said Clark. "We're thrilled to welcome them into the HFA Hall of Fame. Their impact on our industry is immeasurable, and this honor is a tribute to the movement they started and the lives they've transformed."

Jack's devotion to fitness began at age 15 when he heard a lecture by nutritionist **Paul Bragg**, after which he cut out sugar, stopped eating meat and began eating raw vegetables, whole grains, nuts and fruits.

He preached the benefits of combining exercise and nutrition. In 1936, at the age of 21, Jack started what many consider to be the *first* health club, *Jack LaLanne's Physical Culture Studio*. He also developed several types of fitness equipment, including the leg extension machine, the weight selector machine and machines with cables and pulleys.

Elaine met Jack in 1951 while producing and co-hosting the, *"Les Malloy Show,"* where she booked Jack to perform push-ups for the entire 90-minute broadcast. The TV show appearance led to an exercise show of his own, *"The Jack LaLanne Show,"* which aired for the first time in 1951 in San Francisco and then went national in 1958.

The appearance also led to Jack convincing Elaine to give up smoking and her daily donut and to take up exercising. He also convinced her to date him. The two married in 1959.

Elaine became a driving force behind Jack's business, co-hosted his shows and infomercials, and authored books including *"Fitness After 50"* and *"Pride & Discipline: The Legacy of Jack LaLanne."* She has shared the message of exercise and nutrition on many TV shows, including *The Today Show, The Early Show*, and *Fox and Friends*. Today, she co-hosts the *LaLanne Pass It On Podcast*.

Jack passed away at age 96 in January 2011. Elaine will turn 100 years old just four days after the induction ceremony.

Elaine commented: "I am extremely honored and humbled to be inducted alongside my husband, Jack LaLanne, into the HFA Hall of Fame. His TV show helped inspire people to get off their seat and onto their feet, work out and get into a gym. We spent our lives helping people to help themselves. What he proclaimed in the late 1930s, 1940s and 1950s is standard today. It is wonderful to see that legacy passed on and continue to inspire others. To be honored alongside Jack is deeply meaningful."

Following the induction ceremony, HFA has announced a special birthday celebration for Elaine, as she celebrates 100 years of grace. **Happy 100th Birthday Elaine LaLanne!!!**

Gale Landers,
Founder and CEO of Fitness Formula Clubs

"Gale Landers has been a driving force behind some of the most impactful advocacy efforts in our industry," said Clark. "From leading the HFA board to chairing the *National Health & Fitness Alliance (NHFA)*, Gale has consistently stepped up to serve, guide and elevate the fitness industry. His tireless work, from shaping national policy to mentoring state coalitions, has left an indelible mark. We're proud to induct him into the HFA Hall of Fame in recognition of his extraordinary leadership, vision and unwavering commitment to our mission."

Landers has served on the HFA Board twice, including a term as *Board President* in 2000. He helped steer the Association toward a stronger advocacy focus and guided Clark during her early tenure.

*(See **HFA Show 2026** Page 12)*

Phillip Mills

Jack and Elaine LaLanne

Gale Landers

JOIN A THRIVING FRANCHISE

THAT IS PROVEN TO BE RECESSION PROOF

YOU COULD BE NEXT

TINA & MATT CUNEIO
OWNERS OF WORKOUT ANYTIME CANTON

THE WORKOUT ANYTIME ADVANTAGE:

RECURRING REVENUE:
Ongoing revenue from monthly dues, plus add-on fees from personal training, reACT Training, hydromassage, and tanning.

NO GYM EXPERIENCE NEEDED:
We offer complete franchise gym training.

LOW STAFF REQUIREMENTS:
Run your club with 3-5 employees.

TURNKEY MARKETING:
Leverage our sophisticated Web platform, videos, and marketing collateral.

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT:
Our support team brings decades of fitness industry experience to help you open your business

FLEXIBLE BUSINESS MODEL:
Fits into a storefront, freestanding retail, and non-traditional spaces.

EXPERT REAL ESTATE ASSISTANCE:
Our executive team includes a professional commercial real estate consultant/broker.

THIRD-PARTY FINANCING AVAILABLE:
Our solid relationships with preferred lenders can jumpstart your financing process.

TERRITORIES AVAILABLE:
We are actively pursuing new locations across the country and throughout the world.

WANT TO JOIN OUR BRAND THAT'S HERE FOR YOU 24/7?

CONTACT TERRI HAROF TO LEARN MORE

TERRI HAROF
DIRECTOR OF FRANCHISE DEVELOPMENT

terri.harof@workoutanytime.com
workoutanytime.com **770-809-1425**

...HFA Show 2026

continued from page 10

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he co-founded the *Illinois Fitness Alliance* to support local club operators and shared the group's strategic playbook with leaders of other state alliances. He worked closely with **U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL)** and **U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)** to introduce the *GYMS Act*, aimed at supporting fitness businesses in the wake of pandemic-related closures.

Landers remains a regular participant in *HFA's Annual Fly-In and Advocacy Summit* in Washington, DC, where industry leaders gather to meet with federal legislators to advocate for legislation friendly to the industry, such as the *PHIT Act*. In 2023, Landers was named *HFA Advocate of the Year*.

Reflecting on the honor, Landers said, "From the beginning, my vision for *Fitness Formula Clubs* was to inspire people to live stronger, healthier and more connected lives. This recognition reflects the incredible commitment of the FFC team and the communities we've built together. I'm humbled, inspired and optimistic about the bright future of our industry."

Landers' impact extends beyond HFA. He is a Board Member of the *11-1-02 Foundation* and a past Board Member of the *Chicago Sports Commission*, and he has been inducted into the *Chicago Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame*. He is a member of the 1974 Hall of Fame baseball team at *Western Illinois University*. Landers was also part of the undefeated 1970 football team at *Ottawa High School (IL)*, which was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame a few years ago. In 2024 he founded the *FFC Cares Foundation*.

At FFC, Landers pioneered a "hub and spoke" strategy beginning in 1994, launching the first location in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood. From there, he expanded into the downtown 'Loop' and built a network of clubs that follows the transit lines around the business district and extends into the suburbs.

Joe Cirulli,
Founder and Owner of
Gainesville Health and Fitness

"Joe Cirulli's journey is the embodiment of grit, vision and heart. From leading workouts in his basement as a child to transforming Gainesville into one of the healthiest communities in America, Joe has shown what's possible when passion meets perseverance. We're proud to induct him into the HFA Hall of Fame, not just for the business he built, but for the lives he's uplifted along the way," said Clark.

Joe Cirulli's lifelong commitment to wellness began at age seven when his mother, who was a nurse, told him, "As long as you have your health, you have everything." It is fitting that one of his fellow inductees will be Jack LaLanne, because he began working out in his basement to the "Jack LaLanne Show" on TV and soon began leading neighborhood children in exercise.

Today, Cirulli owns a portfolio of fitness businesses including three *Gainesville Health & Fitness Center* clubs, two boutique *Xforce Body* studios in Tampa and Palm Harbor, and two *ReQuest Physical Therapy* locations.

In 2003, Cirulli spearheaded a citywide wellness initiative that earned Gainesville the nation's only *Gold Well City Award* from the *Wellness Councils of America*. The designation required that at least 50% of the city's workforce be employed at companies offering wellness programs, an achievement that reflected Cirulli's belief that a business's success is measured by the health of its community.

The *Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce* named his company *Large Business of the Year* in 2021 and 2016, *Employer of the Year* in 2019 and *Business of the Year* in 2004 and 2005. The company also received the *Community Service Award* in 2015 from the *Gainesville Police Department*.

His leadership and entrepreneurship have earned him several individual awards, too, including the *Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the University of Florida*, *Center for Entrepreneurship* in 2004; the *Club Industry Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2012; and the *Arthur Jones Lifetime Achievement Award* at the Resistance Exercise Conference in 2021.

He was also the first recipient of the *Clark Butler Entrepreneur of the Year Award*, which was perhaps the most personally meaningful to him because of Butler's respected leadership in the Gainesville community and Cirulli's admiration for Butler, he says.

Cirulli's business leadership and entrepreneurial skills have been recognized nationally, reflecting positively on the fitness industry. Gainesville Health & Fitness and Cirulli were the cover story of *Inc. Magazine* in August 2008. In 2016, *Forbes* named the company one of *America's 25 Best Small Companies*.

Cirulli also served on the HFA Board and as Board President from 2000 to 2001. He currently serves on the *Board of the HFA Foundation*, a nonprofit charity founded by the HFA.

"Being inducted into the HFA Hall of Fame is a true honor, and a moment of reflection for me and my team," Cirulli says. "Our company was built on a simple but powerful quote I once read: 'If you help enough people get what they want out of life, you will get what you want out of life.' That belief has guided everything we do, from the way we serve our members inside the club to the way we show up for our community through charitable work. It's not just a business philosophy, it's our culture."

Annbeth Eschbach,
Co-Founder and CEO of ResetOne

"During much of the last 40 years, Annbeth has transformed our industry through visionary leadership, pioneering marketing and business models, and by building brands that bridged fitness, spa, hospitality and now longevity," said Clark. "During her career, she has demonstrated remarkable dedication, creativity and a willingness to redefine what wellness can be. Her election as the first female President of the HFA Board and her steady, influential leadership make her not just deserving of this honor but a model for the next generation of fitness and wellness leaders."

From 1990 - 2002, Eschbach worked at *Wellbridge*, which at that time was the third largest national spa and club operator. While there, she served as *Senior Vice President of Marketing and Spa Development* where she oversaw the launch of multiple spas for the brand. She was then promoted to *President of the company's Cardio Fitness Centers*, a chain of executive fitness centers and on-site corporate fitness centers in New York and Chicago. Serving in that role from 1998 - 2002, she marketed the economic case for business owners to subsidize employees' health club memberships before this marketing tactic was common.

Eschbach served on the Board of HFA from 1998 - 2002, and during that time, her business acumen and leadership skills led to her election as its first female President.

In 2003, Eschbach founded *Exhale*, a national wellbeing brand that revolutionized the spa and fitness industry. As CEO, she built the business to 30 locations, a dozen proprietary boutique fitness classes, spa and wellbeing programs and 1,500 associates aligned around the company's mission. In 2017, Eschbach sold the business to *Hyatt Hotels* and continued to lead the organization under new ownership until 2019, when she was recruited to build a new startup in the healthcare space, *Kindbody*, a leading national fertility clinic network and benefits provider for employers.

A champion of people, culture, brand and experience, she helped bring the vision and mission of Kindbody to life as President and then CEO. From a single pop-up fertility testing truck in 2019, she helped scale the brand and business to 37 owned and operated clinics, and 121 employers under Kindbody's benefit management.

Today, Eschbach serves as *Co-Founder and CEO of ResetOne*, a longevity company that integrates longevity medicine with personalized nutrition, targeted fitness and optimized sleep strategies. Its mission is to make longevity accessible, actionable and rooted in real science to help people live better and longer.

"Being inducted into the HFA Hall of Fame is a profound honor," Eschbach said. "It is due to the transformative work of so many people I've been blessed to work with, and it makes me reflect on the lives changed, the barriers broken and the future we continue to build in this industry. I'm proud to be recognized alongside so many pioneers and grateful for the opportunity to keep inspiring healthier, stronger humans."

Chuck Runyon and Dave Mortensen,
Co-Founders of Purpose Brands

"Chuck Runyon and Dave Mortensen didn't just build a brand; they reshaped the fitness landscape," said Clark. "Their vision for Anytime Fitness sparked a global movement

*(See **HFA Show 2026** Page 17)*

Joe Cirulli

Annbeth Eschbach

Chuck Runyon and Dave Mortensen

STRONGER TOGETHER

Uniting the Industry to Advance Global Health

THE 2026 HFA SHOW

March 16–18
San Diego, CA

HEALTH & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

Join the leaders in the health and fitness industry for networking, education, and product innovations!

10,000+ Attendees **150+ Speakers** **400+ Exhibitors**

Arrive on March 15 to attend the Health & Fitness Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony!

Register Today!
healthandfitness.org/show

Member Retention is Not a Program

By: Herb Lipsman

For as long as I can remember, club owners and industry leaders have talked endlessly about the importance of member retention, yet very few ever take the time to truly understand why members leave. Instead, they roll out one "creative" retention program after another, hoping something will stick.

It rarely does.

How often have we seen this cycle play out? An Owner, CEO or Marketing Leader declares, "We must focus on retention." A new initiative follows, complete with scripts for frontline staff, incentives for members and detailed execution plans, only to be quietly abandoned months later when no measurable improvement appears.

So, what gives? The uncomfortable truth is this: *The retention problem cannot be solved with another program.*

Decades ago, I spoke at the *Club Industry Convention* in Chicago on a topic titled *"Member Retention Starts the Moment the Prospect Walks Through the Door."* My belief then and now is simple: Every member joins with a unique set of needs, motivations and expectations. One size has never fit all.

Yet, as an industry, we have continued to obsess over attrition reports and exit surveys, hoping departing members will tell us exactly why they are leaving. Human nature tells us otherwise. When people quit a club, or stop going to a restaurant, change hotels, or leave a professional service provider, they often give a polite, canned answer just to move on without further discussion.

We all do it.

Each member is different. Each member joins for their own reasons, and each member leaves for reasons that are just as personal. The only way to understand those motivations is to do the hard work of seeing the member and really knowing them, engaging them and listening along the way.

Yes, it's hard. Yes, it's labor-intensive. And, yes, it requires people who are willing and empowered to have real conversations.

But, that is the work. It's the "blocking and tackling" in the club and hospitality business.

Member retention, at its core, is a cultural commitment, not a program or a process. Only when leaders genuinely embrace this mindset can an organization create meaningful, sustainable approaches to reducing attrition. Offering a free month or two to "win someone back" is often seen by members for what it is: a late and inadequate attempt to compensate for neglect.

Herb Lipsman

Here is an exercise for your management team to try: Invite individual members into your staff meetings to share their impressions of the club... the good, the bad and the ugly. Select various types of members relative to retention, including those who have been with you for years and who appear to love the club, those who have been with you for several months but seem to come and go without much staff interaction, and those who have recently dropped their membership. Prompt them to share how connected they were with staff or other members. Try getting them to share their true feelings and perceptions of the club and its culture. Be sure to emphasize it is safe to tell it like it is and not to worry about offending anyone. You really want to know. I promise you and your team will learn more in these sessions than all of the exit surveys combined.

At *SOZO Clubs*, we are engineering from the very beginning around a different belief, that member retention begins the moment the prospect walks through the door and continues through every stage of the member journey. That belief will shape everything we do. I would love to hear your views on this subject. Send your comments to **herb.lipsman@sozoclubs.com**.

(Herb Lipsman is the Co-Founder and CEO of SOZO Clubs and can be reached at **herb. lipsman@sozoclubs.com**. *Learn more about SOZO Clubs by going to* **sozoclubs.com**.*)*

CURE ALS

AUGIE'S QUEST

INCURABLE

IS

UNACCEPTABLE

Donate via Credit Card

venmo

Shortening the Learning Curve:
A Guide for New Gym Owners

By: Jim Thomas

For new gym owners, entering the fitness industry is both exciting and daunting. You're full of enthusiasm, passion and big ideas, but the reality of day-to-day business can quickly humble even the most driven entrepreneur. Many first-time owners rely on *trial and error* to learn what works, but in the gym business, that approach can be costly. Time, money and reputation are the three things you can't afford to lose early on.

The key to long-term success lies in *shortening the learning curve*. By learning from proven strategies, expert guidance and sound business systems, you can bypass the mistakes that cause so many gyms to fail and accelerate your path to profitability.

1. Invest in Industry-Specific Education Early On

Success in the gym business doesn't just come from knowing fitness; it comes from understanding the *business of fitness*. Personal training certifications and fitness expertise are valuable, but they don't teach you how to manage a P&L, retain members or build a winning team.

Practical Steps:

- **Attend Fitness Business Conferences**: Gain exposure to industry trends, best practices and operational systems that top gyms are using right now. (**Publisher's Note:** Don't miss this month's *Cover Story on The 2026 HFA Show*. This is THE must-attend event every year. If you have never been, start this year, next month, March 15 - 18.)
- **Take Courses on Gym Management**: Learn about sales processes, marketing funnels, staffing systems and financial models designed specifically for fitness businesses.
- **Find a Mentor**: Work with an experienced gym business consultant or coach who has built or turned around gyms before. This mentorship can save you years of costly trial and error.

2. Create a Solid Business Plan

Your business plan is your GPS; it provides direction, identifies potential roadblocks and ensures you stay on track. Too many gym owners rush into opening without clearly defining their goals or understanding their numbers.

Key Areas to Address:

- **Target Market**: Identify exactly who you want to serve: general fitness clients, athletes, women, youth or older adults.
- **Competitive Analysis**: Study both local gyms and indirect competitors (like online programs or home fitness options).
- **Financial Plan**: Build realistic revenue and expense projections. Include fixed and variable costs, cash reserves and break-even points.
- **Marketing Strategy**: Define what makes you unique. Are you the community-driven gym, the transformation center or the performance facility? Your plan should align your brand and your goals.

3. Learn the Fundamentals of Sales and Marketing

Sales and marketing are the lifeblood of your gym. You can have the best facility in town, but if people don't know about it, or if your team can't close sales, your gym won't survive.

Marketing Must-Dos:

- **Build a Professional Eebsite** with SEO and local search optimization.
- **Leverage Social Media** with consistent posting and engagement.
- **Run Paid Digital Ads** (Google, Facebook, Instagram) to drive traffic.
- **Launch Referral Programs**, rewarding members who bring in friends.

Sales Essentials:

- **Develop a Clear Sales Process** from lead to close, including scripts, follow-ups and trial offers.
- **Train Your Team** on value-based selling: focus on *results*, not price.
- **Use Software and CRMs** to track leads and automate communication.

4. Hire and Develop the Right Team

Your staff represents your brand. Hiring the wrong people or failing to train them properly can undo all your hard work. New owners often rush the process or hire based only on availability rather than fit.

Hiring Tips:

- **Define Every Role** before you hire.
- **Hire for Attitude, Train for Skill.** Passion for fitness and people matters more than experience.
- **Onboard Properly.** Set expectations early about service standards, sales processes and teamwork.
- **Commit to Continuous Training.** Sales and service training should be as routine as member workouts.

5. Focus on Member Retention, Not Just Acquisition

Most new gyms focus on getting new members through the door, but keeping them is where profit is built. It's cheaper to retain a current member than to replace them.

Retention Strategies:

- **Personalize Communication.** Know your members by name and recognize milestones.
- **Create a Sense of Community.** Offer group events, challenges and social experiences.
- **Reward Loyalty.** Use loyalty points, member anniversaries or exclusive perks to show appreciation.
- **Gather Feedback.** Regularly ask members what you can improve and act on it.

6. Implement Strong Financial Controls

Cash flow is the silent killer of gym businesses. Even profitable gyms can go under if cash isn't managed properly. Avoid overspending in the early stages and plan for variability in revenue.

Financial Best Practices:

- **Use Accounting Software** to track income and expenses daily.
- **Budget Conservatively**, expecting delays and slower months.
- **Build an Emergency Reserve** to cover 3 - 6 months of expenses.
- **Review Financial Reports Monthly** and adjust as needed.

7. Avoid the "Do-It-All-Yourself" Trap

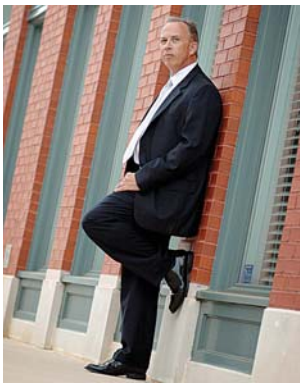
New owners often wear every hat --sales, marketing, accounting, cleaning-- but this leads to burnout and missed opportunities. Delegation and automation are your best allies.

Smart Systems:

- **Hire Professionals** for specialized roles like digital marketing, bookkeeping and legal compliance.
- **Use Gym Management Software** for scheduling, billing and member communication.
- **Automate Marketing Tasks** like follow-up emails and lead nurturing.

8. Track and Measure Everything

To improve, you must measure. Data tells the truth about your business... what's working and what isn't.



Jim Thomas

Key Metrics to Track:

- **Cost Per Lead**: How much are you paying to generate new prospects?
- **Conversion Rate**: What percentage of leads become members?
- **Retention Rate**: How long do members stay with you?
- **Revenue Per Member**: Are you maximizing upsells and personal training?
- **Profit Margin**: Are you operating efficiently?

When you track these metrics consistently, you'll make smarter decisions and identify problems before they become crises.

Conclusion

The path to becoming a successful gym owner doesn't have to be paved with mistakes. By proactively investing in your education, creating a solid business plan, mastering sales and marketing, hiring the right team, focusing on retention, implementing financial discipline, delegating tasks and tracking your numbers, you can dramatically shorten your learning curve. In a competitive industry where margins are tight and expectations are high, *the faster you learn, the faster you earn*. Don't just work hard; work smart and build a gym business that thrives from day one.

Need help building systems, improving your facility, or turning around your gym business? Contact Jim.

(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. Learn more at **www.fmconsulting.net** *or* **www.youtube.com/gymconsultant**.*)*

...HFA Show 2026

continued from page 12

rooted in accessibility, authenticity and community. More than two decades later, that same vision powers Purpose Brands. Their franchising model has empowered thousands of entrepreneurs to achieve their dreams of business ownership."

The duo launched Anytime Fitness in 2002 with a mission to make fitness more accessible. Over the next two decades, they expanded their reach globally, culminating in the 2024 merger of their parent company, *Self Esteem Brands*, with *Orangetheory Fitness*. The newly formed entity, *Purpose Brands*, now includes a portfolio of wellness-focused franchises such as *The Bar Method, Basecamp Fitness* and *Waxing the City*.

Today, Purpose Brands serves more than six million members across over 7,000 locations in more than 40 countries and all seven continents, including Antarctica.

Beyond growing their business, Runyon and Mortensen have championed initiatives that reflect their values. They created a franchise program designed for military veterans, helping them transition into business ownership by leveraging their leadership skills and discipline. The program has earned top rankings from media brands such as *Vetrepreneur* and *Entrepreneur Magazine*.

They've also been outspoken advocates for the fitness industry, lobbying at both state and federal levels to promote policies that support physical and mental wellbeing.

Under their leadership, Purpose Brands and its affiliated companies have earned numerous accolades, including *Best Franchises in America* by *Forbes, No. 1 Top Global Franchise* by *Entrepreneur Magazine, Fastest-Growing Fitness Club in the World* by *Entrepreneur Magazine*, and *Best Company to Work* for in Minnesota by *Minnesota Business Magazine*. In 2009, HFA (then known as IHRSA) honored Anytime Fitness with the *John McCarthy Industry Visionary Award*.

"We're honored, humbled and thrilled to be selected for the HFA Hall of Fame," said Runyon and Mortensen in a joint statement. "We love this people- and purpose-driven industry as much as we ever have, and we'll continue dedicating resources to protect, promote and grow it worldwide. There's never been a better time to be in the wellness sector, and the best days are ahead. A heartfelt thank you to our employees, franchisees and suppliers across the Purpose Brands global network."

Club Insider congratulates all of this year's Half of Fame Inductees!!!

The Trade Show

Last but not least, the *Annual HFA Trade Show* takes place **March 17 - 18**. This year could be a record year, as 400+ companies are already confirmed! So, make sure you do not sit at the conference all day. Get **MOVING** and have some **FUN** out on the Trade Show floor! Spend some money, and bring new innovations to your facilities. You will be happy you did. And, of course, say hello to *HFA Co-Founder and first President*, as well as *Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993*, **Norm Cates,** at **Booth #513**!

Credit to HFA for Press Releases used in portions of this Cover Story.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 40+ years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 15+ years. Justin became Publisher of Club Insider in April of 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin at **Justin@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*

Make It Fun!

From Hype to Helpful:
The Fitness and Wellness Trends Defining 2026

By: Nancy Trent

The year kicked off with two powerhouse industry events, *CES in Las Vegas* and *FIT Expo in Los Angeles*, and together they made one thing clear: fitness innovation has grown up.

After walking both show floors and tracking emerging launches, a defining shift is underway. The era of flashy gimmicks and incremental upgrades is fading. In its place? Purposeful, intelligent solutions designed to integrate seamlessly into everyday life.

At FIT Expo, brands leaned heavily into clinically-supported performance products, smarter formulations and recovery-driven solutions that prioritize long-term results over quick fixes. Community-building activations and experiential education were just as important as product launches signaling that engagement and trust now matter as much as efficacy.

Meanwhile, CES amplified this movement on a global stage. AI was no longer presented as a futuristic concept but as a foundational tool. Connected home fitness systems, adaptive training platforms and wearable wellness devices demonstrated how embedded intelligence can personalize performance in real time. Robotics, too, shifted from spectacle to practicality, focused on real-world applications that enhance mobility, optimize recovery and streamline routines.

Across both events, three themes emerged: hyper-personalization through data, recovery as a primary pillar and technology that anticipates needs rather than reacts to them. The takeaway is clear: fitness and wellness technology in 2026 is no longer speculative. It is tangible, actionable and ready for widespread adoption. Innovation is about meaningful impact today, not promises for tomorrow.

From Walk Desks to Wearable Robotics: The Smart Home Wellness Revolution

The smart home has evolved into more than convenience, it's a fully integrated wellness ecosystem. Connected technology is blending movement, recovery and biometric intelligence into daily life, turning living spaces into personalized performance hubs.

Lifesmart's SCS - Make Life Easy illustrates this shift with the *LifeTrend AT3 Walk and Work Treadmill* with *PowerTouch Technology*. The AT3 pairs productivity with performance, featuring a device holder and full-length mirror for guided workouts through the *Jillian Michaels Fitness App* or other platforms. Beyond movement, recovery is baked in: a near-zero EMF sauna, a dual-core premium massage chair and a multifunction cold plunge and hot soak tub optimize restoration and relaxation.

Speediance is building a similar home-gym ecosystem with AI-driven strength training. Its connected equipment and interactive bikes deliver guided workouts, personalized coaching and real-time analytics, continuously adapting to user output and recovery.

Dephy redefines mobility with its lightweight, powered ankle exoskeleton, the *Dephy Sidekick*. By enhancing walking efficiency and preserving natural gait, it brings wearable robotics out of the lab and into everyday life, from city streets to outdoor trails.

Nancy Trent

*(See **Nancy Trent** Page 19)*

...Nancy Trent

continued from page 18

Rounding out the ecosystem is *Dr. AI*, whose smart ring converts continuous biometric tracking into actionable health guidance. Equipped with advanced sensors and an AI-powered agent, the ring monitors heart rate, sleep and stress, delivering real-time, voice-enabled insights through its companion app.

Together, these innovations show that wellness technology is no longer a collection of standalone devices, it's an intelligent system designed to anticipate needs, enhance recovery and seamlessly support healthier living.

Protein, Upgraded:
Smart Fuel for Every Hour

Today's consumers aren't chasing bulk; they're chasing balance: steady energy, lasting fullness and nutrition that fits into real life. Welcome to protein maxxing 2.0 functional fuel for brains, bodies and busy schedules alike.

Shaklee Sparkling Protein flips expectations with a crisp lemon-lime drink delivering 40 grams of grass-fed whey protein, boosted leucine and a superior amino acid profile, all in 160 calories and zero sugar. Clinically tested for satiety, it's designed for life beyond the gym.

Linear Bar proves indulgence and intention can coexist. Its 100% organic ingredients layered in caramel, nougat and chocolate "upgrade your crave" while cutting out seed oils, processed sugar and unnecessary additives. Nutrition meets pleasure, no compromises.

Plant-powered *Huel* blends protein with balanced macronutrients, vitamins and minerals in convenient, ready-to-go formats. Designed for sustained energy and total wellness, it supports high-performance lifestyles where efficiency and nutrition go hand in hand.

Protein isn't about more; it's about smarter fuel that keeps you performing at your best every hour of the day.

Everyday Performance:
Activewear That Works as Hard as You Do

The activewear landscape is shifting. Consumers want functional, stylish pieces that move with them through workouts, recovery and daily life. Comfort, versatility and real-world wearability are the new benchmarks.

Ava Active embodies this evolution, offering apparel that flatters diverse body types while delivering performance-ready features. The brand's focus on fit, comfort and everyday functionality reflects a broader move toward inclusive, accessible activewear that doesn't compromise on style.

Chamelo takes performance to eyewear, combining instant color-changing and adjustable tint technology with fashion-forward design. Lightning-fast lens adjustments and interactive color control deliver personalization, performance and self-expression, proof that wearable innovation can be both practical and stylish.

■ ■ ■

These brands show a simple truth: modern fitness and wellness isn't about extremes; it's about accessibility, intelligence and everyday performance that fits real lives.

(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. Nancy can be reached at **nancy@trentandcompany.com**. *Learn more at:* **www.trentandcompany.com**.*)*

Make It Fun!

clubinsideronline.com