

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF TRUST

Jeff Quinn and Echelon Health & Fitness

Crafting and Cultivating the Member Experience



The Echelon Health & Fitness Team (L to R): Wyan Bollozos, Spreading Awesomeness Coordinator; Brandon Steward, Thrive Manager; Jeff Mood, Thrive Manager; Trey Servers, Thrive Director; Jeff Quinn, Managing Partner; David Chung, Co-Founder and Partner; Shannon Hannah, Awesomeness Coordinator; Bridget Stibbard, Thrive Coach; and Alyssa Marrero, Thrive Coach.

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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF TRUST

Jeff Quinn and Echelon Health & Fitness

Crafting and Cultivating the Member Experience

By: Justin Cates

Each morning, while getting ready for the day, I look in the mirror. Not to check my devilish good looks (just kidding), but to look myself in the eye to know I am ready to do what I need to do once again. In doing so, I think about a few things. First, I think about how fortunate I am: I live where I want. I work how I want. I have created the life I want. Second, I think about how that occurred... Each week and month, I get to publish *Club Insider*, which has the sole Mission, "To help the owners and operators of health and fitness clubs professionalize their clubs and gain the trust and business of their community." Every action we take reinforces that statement. Within your business, my hope is your Mission or

Values includes something such as: *To help our members live a healthier and better life.* Does each action you take reinforce a statement like that?

Delving into that statement, there is actually a lot to discuss. First and foremost is creating **TRUST**. Members must *Trust* that you can make their lives healthier and better. Second, working out is tough; eating healthy is even more difficult. Making it **FUN** can make it doable over the long-term. Finally, every moment a member is in your facility, *your business is on stage*. In aggregate across an entire membership base, every single thing imaginable is noticed at some point. The question then becomes: Does what is being noticed make their membership better or worse? If better, they will keep coming back. If worse,

eventually, there will be a breaking point where you could lose them forever.

These three items, and many more not discussed, comprise the *Member Experience*, and that will be the overarching topic of this cover story, which features **Jeff Quinn, Managing Partner of Echelon Health & Fitness, Co-Founder/CEO of FitPerx**. Over the course of 30+ years in the industry, everything Jeff will discuss comes back to the Member Experience. I invite you to read on.

An Interview With Jeff Quinn, Managing Partner of Echelon Health & Fitness, Co-Founder/CEO of FitPerx

Club Insider (C.I.) - Where were you born, (See **Jeff Quinn** Page 12)



Jeff Quinn

Crunch Fitness Recognized for Outstanding Franchising Achievements

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Crunch Fitness, a leading high-value, low-priced gym, has been recognized for ongoing success with a prestigious award and acknowledgment, including *The Zor Awards*, an exclusive program by *Franchise Times* designed to answer the question, "What is the best franchise to buy?" and *Entrepreneur's Franchise 500 10+ Club*, honoring an elite group of franchises that have earned a spot on the Franchise 500 list for ten or more consecutive years.

Crunch is the fastest-growing, full-sized fitness franchise with a solid track record of club openings, including more than 425 gyms currently, and commitments

to open an additional 1,000+ franchise locations. Offering the best value in the low-priced gym segment, Crunch provides its more than two million members spacious, modern clubs; leading proprietary group fitness programming; the HIITZone, a unique high-intensity interval group training program; top-notch personal trainers and essential Relax and Recover areas all centered on Crunch's "No Judgments" environment that originated in the '90s.

"We learned of these two outstanding recognitions in the same week, and it really reinforces for us the successful model and opportunity we are offering in the fitness franchising industry," said **Ben**

Midgley, CEO of Crunch Franchising. "We're honored to receive an exclusive Zor Award from *Franchise Times* and to have made it into *Entrepreneur's Franchise 500 10+ Club* for ten years of excellence, both prestigious recognitions that provide the prospective franchisee with insights into making the most educated and rewarding choice. These awards have been given to Crunch thanks to our amazing team and our dedicated members."

The Zor Awards by *Franchise Times* aids individuals that are actively exploring franchising by showing them how to make a selection using an astute business mindset. Crunch Franchise was



named in the "Sweat It Out" category for a gym franchise reflecting industry (See **Crunch Fitness** Page 7)

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- Getting Results: A Strategic Management Approach - **By:** Frank Guengerich
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- Fitness as Wellness - **By:** Sara Kooperman, JD
- Group Fitness Should Run Like a Restaurant - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- And, of Course, **Norm's Notes**

Norm's Notes

■Hello Everybody! This is your Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 checking in and welcoming y'all to our 352nd monthly edition! Since my last Norm's Notes, JUSTIN CATES and I have had the pleasure of going to beautiful San Diego where we experienced an amazing 2023 IHRSA Convention and Trade Show experience. I'll share some of our experiences there with you herein, as we've included a significant amount of coverage of the always special San Diego IHRSA Convention and Trade Show.

■Is America a GREAT COUNTRY, or what?! Hmm... hmm... hmm!!! WOW! This is our 352nd monthly edition of Club Insider! If that's not CLEAR PROOF there IS A GOD, I don't know what is! GOD BLESS YOU ALL! GOD BLESS AMERICA! And, GOD BLESS CLUB INSIDER!

■CONGRATULATIONS, THANKS and APPRECIATION to IHRSA Board Chair, CHRIS CRAYTOR and the IHRSA Board of Directors for the great job they've done this past year. And, best wishes as they move ahead. The 2023 IHRSA Convention and Trade Show in San Diego, March 19 - 22, was in my opinion A ROARING WELL DONE!

SUCCESS with over 8,000 health and fitness professionals from around the globe attending!

I say that from two perspectives: #1 being my own personal perspective as an attendee and trade show exhibitor, and #2 from the perspective of the lovely and talented LIZ CLARK, IHRSA's President and CEO, who along with her Team, deserve HUGE KUDOS and LOADS of THANKS and APPRECIATION for the absolutely TERRIFIC JOB they did with the 2023 IHRSA Convention and Trade Show. Since way back in 1980, when we started IRS/IHRSA, and I was the Association's Co-Founder and first President, I've attended every IHRSA Convention and Trade Show except for one, making that over 40 across the decades! And, I would rate this one as ONE OF THE BEST EVER!

So, CONGRATULATIONS, THANKS and APPRECIATION, to LIZ and her entire IHRSA Team on a job extremely WELL DONE!

Perspective #1: Those in attendance at the Keynote Session on the morning of Monday, March 20, experienced one of the very best keynote speeches in the 40+ history of IRS/IHRSA. And, it

set the tone for the entire show and the months and years to come! This amazing keynote speaker, ROBERT J. O'NEILL, a former Navy Seal, is one of the most highly decorated combat veterans of our time. Robert served on SEAL Team Two, SEAL Team Four and eight years on the legendary SEAL Team Six. O'Neill truly mesmerized a huge auditorium full of IHRSA convention attendees with his presentation entitled: The Way Forward: Master Life's Toughest Battles and Create Your Lasting Legacy. Having been decorated 53 times, his awards include two Silver Stars for gallantry in action against the enemy, four Bronze Stars with Valor to denote heroism against the enemy, a Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor, a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Valor, three Presidential Unit Commendations and three Combat Action ribbons, to name a few. Let me add that Rob is also the author of the New York Times and London Times Best Selling Memoir: THE OPERATOR: Firing the Shots that Killed Osama bin Laden and My Years as a SEAL Team Warrior. Rob's been interviewed on Fox News, CNN, CBS, Newsmax and others. Thank you, Robert! You've done a great



Norm Cates

job serving America, ROB!

Perspective #2: For a second perspective, I'm now turning to LIZ CLARK, IHRSA's terrific CEO and Executive Director, who on Monday, March 27th wrote in an eblast, CEO Corner: Tackling Redemption Together: "I recently researched the origin of the word 'gymnasium.' The word's Latin origins define gyms as, 'a place to come

(See Norm's Notes Page 7)

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PUBLISHER

Justin Cates

(p): (863) 999 - 2677

(e): Justin@clubinsideronline.com

FOUNDER & TRIBAL

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Norm Cates, Jr.

(p): (770) 635 - 7578

(e): Norm@clubinsideronline.com

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS - Bonnie Patrick Mattalian, Bruce Carter, Casey Conrad, Cathy Spencer Browning, Chris Stevenson, Daron Allen, Derek Barton, Frank Guengerich, Gary Polic, Herb Lipsman, Jeffrey Pinkerton, Jim Thomas, John McCarthy, Karen Woodard-Chavez, Mark Williamson, Mike Alpert, Paul R. Bedard Esquire, Paul Bosley, Rick Caro, Sara Kooperman, JD, and Thomas Plummer

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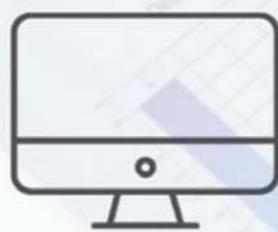
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The Best Way to Predict the Future of Fitness is to Understand the Future of Medicine

By: Eric Durak, MSc

The forecasters in the fitness profession like to look into their crystal ball and detail what will be happening in the industry in the coming years. They point to technological advancements and growth in specific sectors of clubs to state where trends may be headed. They look to specific programs for seniors and new developments in strength equipment, aerobic programs and mind-body classes. All of these are integral parts of the growth and maturation of the industry.

However, in order to get a sense of what the HEALTH elements of fitness may be, I want to take you where medicine is looking regarding its profession and how it will impact many industries (for good or bad), including fitness.

The March, 2023 Special Issue of TIME Magazine headlines, "The Future of Medicine," and goes into a number of areas of breakthroughs and efforts that will impact society in the coming years. This article will take a deep dive into some of these medical treatments, make some comparisons as to the use of health and fitness and if there is synergy or if one may work better.

What Just Happened to Medicine

In the past three years, the efforts to diagnose and treat COVID-19 were an unmitigated disaster. From using a PCR test that was not made to diagnose disease to turning away treatments of natural medicine and Ivermectin for an un-tested and essentially useless mRNA shot, the profession has a long way to go to gain trust back with a nation that was "scared" into taking something that had no real science behind it. So, where does medicine go from there?

In section one of the TIME issue, the first admit is that life expectancy in the U.S. is dropping. A 2013 study in middle-aged white males stated that over-medication, depression and an increase in suicides were at high correlation. But, let's look at the basics. More and more people are obese, eat poorly, drink too much alcohol, and more than 18% of Americans still smoke cigarettes. From a public health standpoint, that is a failing grade. For more than 40 years, doctors and public health officials have ignored pollution, fast food trends, illicit drug use and psychological issues that now have reached a peak, causing issues in education, medicine, aging and increases in violence, relationships and even international events. Medicine also has no answers for many diseases, from chronic conditions such as

diabetes and cancer to acute conditions such as long COVID. Medicine is trying to "redefine health" through changing health policy guidelines; however, the new "health" should be a simple equation:

Exercise Regularly + Get Better Sleep + Learn to Meditate + Increase Social Interaction + Improve Nutrition – Pollution = Better Health and Reduced Healthcare

Malaria kills many people in poor nations each year. One of the long sought after breakthroughs in health is a vaccine for malaria. Years ago, my studies in public health led me to extensive vaccine research, and after 30 years, I remain convinced that the premise of vaccinating against a disease, in most cases, is not in the best interest of the person. Malaria is a perfect example. The disease is a byproduct of polluted water supplies in standing water, the breeding grounds for first mosquito larvae production. Transmission can be reduced by clean water, having diverse species use the water, netting and herbs. These have been shown as effective preventives and treatments for years. Developing a vaccine will help in some cases, but it completely takes the responsibility of safe and clean water systems out of the equation. Vaccines are treating the symptoms of the disease but not the root causes.

The next example is the use of Semaglutide, which was used in a 4.5-year trial and results published in *NEJM*. After this time, the experimental group had a 15% reduction in body weight (or 3.3% per year) vs. the control group. This result may be considered important (but a 3% reduction in weight per year for a 300-pound person is nine pounds per year or .75 pounds per month). Any Exercise Physiologist with a basic knowledge of metabolic weight loss knows that, with a properly prescribed exercise program, patients can safely lose more than two pounds per week or up to ten pounds per month.

By the way, the side effects listed for the drug Semaglutide include the following: anxiety, blurred vision, depression, rapid heart rate, headaches, seizures, trouble breathing, vomiting, and the big ones...thyroid cell tumors, medullary thyroid carcinoma and multiple endocrine neoplasia. Call me crazy, but why would anyone take a drug that may only account for less than a pound of weight loss per month and may increase their risks for multiple cancers, as well as other serious side effects.

This is where exercise weight loss programs can prove to be much more effective than any prescription from doctors.

The next section of TIME is on artificial intelligence. They pronounce that AI will increase accuracy, decrease diagnosis times, and maybe, improve the doctor-patient relationship. According to the report by Wang this year, AI can do many computations, but it doesn't understand humanity. The authors contend (and I agree) that AI will be used by nefarious people for really bad things (I'm sure it already is being used by some). The Pentagon and CIA have been using AI for many years, and many believe they are behind some of the largest social media manipulations in the past few years. The believers state that many areas of medicine will improve drug development (like we need more of those), analyzing health plans, digital consulting and robotic surgeries. However, the flip side of this debate is in the hands of author **M. Scott Peck**, who years ago stated that, as the world becomes more high-tech, the high-touch methods become more important. I'm not going to debate the merits of AI; I think medicine has already gotten so far away from looking at symptoms and working with patients that no amount of technology can come to the rescue.

The last section of the Time issue is on *Precision Medicine (PM)*, which is described as the opposite of "one size fits all" in medicine. The article states they will find the "right" solutions for individual patients through precision medicine. This would include precision drugs, precision foods, precision diagnostics, etc.

I read with interest the journal, *Precision Medicine*, for years. However, many of the topics included drug development and genomics. In a recent issue regarding precision science, medicine and commercialization (Messerschmidt et al), the result of the rush to develop more "precise" products and pharmaceuticals is that, over the past few years, over 400,000 clinical trials studying over 21,000 pharmaceuticals yielded a success rate of only 13.8%. This means that most of what is put to market for human consumption is a failure. The crux of this article stems from commercialization or bringing new and "precise" products to market. The issue of profits over health is evident in this publication and is synonymous with the way pharma produces, and sells, its products.

Contrast that with *Precision Wellness*, which uses technology to enhance health through cellular regeneration (Nano Vi machine), energy medicine (PEMF devices), enhanced circulation (HBOT and compression sleeves) and pain management (cryotherapy). These are all non-toxic, inexpensive and highly effective when compared to current pharmacology



Eric Durak, MSc

development (where over 30% of drugs that come to market each year are quietly taken off).

If we compare the compression sleeve (which has been on the market for decades) with stent procedures, we see that a lot of time, energy and money are still going into devices that may not improve health over the long haul, as three months using the compression sleeves improves ventricular collateral circulation (new blood vessels) by up to four-fold and this change in physiology may last for up to three years. Compression sleeves have also had great success in building collateral circulation for women with breast cancer, building the lymphatic systems in many types of patients.

Dr. Francis Collins of the *NIH* states that the "promise of precision wellness" is the opposite of "one size fits all" medicine where treatment and prevention of everything from blood clots to heart attacks is improved and may impact all forms of cancer treatment by knowing specific genes and DNA changes. What Collins fails to realize is that the "one size fits all" COVID mRNA shot set American (and world) medicine back 50 years, and the trust that many people have for any form of medicine has waned greatly. It's going to take a lot more than robots and nano particles to restore the trust in a system that many feel has been bought by pharmaceutical companies. And, with such an overall failure rate, it's hard to see that any reversal of current trends will help to do the one thing that any medical center, practitioner or product should do, restore and maintain high levels of health while preventing many diseases from occurring in the first place.

Reading through the TIME magazine article, I see a door that is WIDE open for those in the health and wellness (See Eric Durak, MSc Page 15)

...Norm's Notes

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together for supervised education, training and fitness.' Whether in large groups, one-on-one, in small studios, online, indoors, outdoors, our industry is all about bringing people together to improve their physical and mental health. And, this is exactly what makes the IHRSA Convention & Trade Show special: This event, and our Association, brings people together to advance our collective interests. Thank you for your support of the association, for your belief in the power of together, and for joining us in San Diego. It's time to power up, come together and kick some ass! This is the year of redemption!" **RIGHT ON, LIZ!**
WE AGREE WITH YOU!

■ *Making Sense of the Financial Landscape - The 26th Annual IHRSA Financial Panel* at IHRSA 2023 shared insights on the current economic climate. **RICK CARO**, *President of Management Vision Inc.*, moderated a smashing panel with some of the best financial minds in the world. **SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION** to Rick, and to his always great IHRSA Financial Panelists, which this year included:

RANDY KONIK, *Managing Director, Jefferies & Company;*



Rick Caro

KURT CROSS, *Managing Director, Morgan Stanley Investment Banking Division;*
JON CANARICK, *Managing Partner, North Castle Partners; and*
COOPER McGEE, *Managing Director of North Point.*

WELL DONE GENTLEMEN!

■ **GALE LANDERS**, *Owner of Fitness Formula Clubs and IHRSA President in the year 2000*, was honored at IHRSA 2023 with the Association's *Advocate of the Year Award for 2023*. On Day 2, during the Opening Keynote address, **CHRIS CRAYTOR**, *IHRSA's Board Chair*, presented the award to Gale. As part of the award presentation, Gale was presented a United States flag that had recently flown over the U.S. Capitol Dome.

Craytor commented about this honor for Gale: "This award reminds us all of the importance of public policy for fitness. Gale has worked tirelessly to advocate for health and fitness clubs on the State and Federal level. Gale gives freely of his time and has generously contributed financially to grow, promote and protect our industry on behalf of us all. And, Gale's work on behalf of the industry continues. He is the *current Chairman of the National Health and Fitness Association (NHFA) Advisory Council*, an *Illinois Fitness Alliance*



Liz Clark

(IFA) Board Member and has worked closely with **U.S. Representative MIKE QUIGLEY (IL-5)** and **U.S. Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH (IL)** to introduce the **GYMS Act** coming out of COVID-19. Landers is currently working with the NHFA Advisory Council to pass the **PHIT Act**, recently reintroduced to Congress."

Landers Added: "If we learned one thing coming through COVID-19, it was how incredibly valuable it is to be proactive with our health by building and reinforcing our immune system. We as a nation need to focus on supporting a healthy-care lifestyle vs. just paying for sick care. Passage of the

PHIT Act will allow millions of Americans to use their HSA or FSA to pay for gym memberships, fitness programs and youth sports activities up to \$1,000 annually for individuals and \$2,000 for families."

IHRSA released a statement which, in part, read: "We applaud Gale Landers for all his efforts and passion, and we thank him for the indelible mark he's left on the industry."

SINCERE THANKS, APPRECIATION and CONGRATULATIONS GALE!

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

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...Crunch Fitness

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momentum and appealing segments within franchising that examine profitability for the franchisee, management teams, product or service offerings, unit openings and closings, recent litigation and financial backing of the brand. Finalists were drawn from the Franchise Times Top 500 database, which is a 24-year-old research tool covering more than 650 U.S.-based franchise systems.

Entrepreneur's Franchise 500 10+ Club honors an elite group of franchises that have earned a spot on the list for 10 or more consecutive years. Crunch was named to the list for the 10th time this past winter for successfully adapting and

evolving to meet the unique challenges and changes that have shaped the franchise industry over the last year. In recent years, the list has offered a comprehensive overview of the state of the franchise world as it emerges from the most challenging days of the pandemic into uncertain economic conditions.

Additionally, Crunch was listed as #30 on *Entrepreneur's Top Global Franchises* list among those successful franchises with international opportunities.

Crunch is the Original Founder of the "No Judgments" philosophy, providing members and franchisees alike with a culture of positivity, encouragement and inclusivity, all while being a place for fun, fitness and entertainment.

...Norm's Notes

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■ Also during IHRSA 2023, **CAROL NALEVANKO**, *President of DMB Sports Clubs*, was the recipient of the **JULIE MAIN Award**. This was well deserved! And, in fact, years ago, Carol helped create the Award! It was presented at the *Women's Leadership Summit* on Monday, March 20th. If you didn't attend and you'd like to send Carol congratulations, you can do so by emailing cnavankoc@dmblclubs.com. **CONGRATULATIONS CAROL!!!**

■ The *IHRSA Conference and Trade Show* would not be complete without the night life! Many social events occur throughout the annual IHRSA Show, some open to all, others by invitation only, so I want to share the events we attended across several nights and thank those who made it happen.

On *Night One*, we attended *REX Roundtables' Annual Special Event*. This took place at *Petco Park* (San Diego Padres' Home Stadium), which we had to ourselves! *How Cool!* During the event, attended by more than 100 REX Members, **LEO BOTTARY** gave an interesting talk, provided a signed copy of his book to

each attendee, and those who wanted to explore received a behind-the-scenes tour of the ballpark. It was a great time, and we sincerely thank **EDDIE TOCK** for the invitation. Importantly, folks, REX Members were responsible for **18 sessions** during the Conference element of IHRSA 2023! **Incredible! Keep up the great work Eddie and Team** (See the Photo on This Page).

Next, on *Night Two*, we attended the open-to-all *IHRSA 2023 Opening Reception*. As always, this was a homerun to begin IHRSA. Each year, this event sets the tone for several days of learning, meeting new people and the future. If you have attended IHRSA but have not attended this event, you are missing out! And, for any newbies reading, be sure to attend this annual event in the future!

Finally, on *Night Three*, we ran the gauntlet, going to back-to-back-to-back-to-back events. First up was **PETE MOORE's HALO Happy Hour Networking Event**. This was a fun event, as it always is, but then something happened. Out of nowhere, Pete began giving out Awards! I am **TRULY HONORED** to announce that **JUSTIN** and I received **HALO's Best Father and Son Team!!!** Talk about making an event **FUN!!!** Thank you **PETE MOORE** and **DAVID GANULIN** for the invite, as well as the Award!!! Folks, check out *Integrity Square* (www.integritysq.com). Next, we went to the *Club Automation Party* by invite of **DARON ALLEN**, **MARIO BRAVOMALO**, **STEVE AYERS** and **RUDY NIETO**. This event had great views and even better people. Importantly, in case you have not yet heard the news, I want to introduce you to **RUDY NIETO**, who is the new *Chief Revenue Officer of Club Automation* (Check out the **VFPnext Ad** on Page #5). Continuing on, we made it over to **BILL McBRIDE's Active Connections Party**. Folks, this was a wild one! And, we sincerely thank Bill for the invite. At this point, I was a bit tuckered out, so **JUSTIN** then made it over to the *Launch Party for Gym Revenue*

by invitation of **BOB SURFACE**. Ironically, this one was also at Petco Park, so as Justin told me, he ended up where he began with this year's social events. However, rumor has it that Justin made it back to the Active Connections event and helped shut that down after Bill extended it by an hour! I bet they were hurting the next day... **Good On Ya Boys!**

To close this Note, **thank you again to everyone for your events and the invites to them**. It was a pleasure to see everyone we did during these events. The list is too long to share here... But, I will say that it is the people who make everything work during IHRSA, and these events showcase that!!!

■ I want to say **THANKS** and express my **SINCERE APPRECIATION** to **GEORGE JACKSON**, *Founder and Co-Owner of TG The Clubs*, an eight-club chain in Southern California, for the amazing tour he gave me of four of their clubs while I was in San Diego for IHRSA 2023. During my 49 years in our industry, I've seen a lot of clubs all across the country. *But, I must honestly say here that George's clubs, and his* (See **Norm's Notes** Page 10)

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...Norm's Notes

continued from page 8

many special partnership relationships, with many of them now over 35 years, are particularly unique and special. So, I want to **Tip My Black Hat** to George and his Team of partners in their eight clubs. And, I want this Norm's Note to stand as a "Preview" for the Cover Story I'm planning to do about George and his TG The Clubs. I can already tell you George's cover story will be *ONE for the ages*. Thanks to you George, and to your partners, for sharing your excellent clubs with me. And... **Y'all STAY TUNED Folks!**

■ To close out my **IHRSA 2023 Coverage**, during the three-day event, I came across many folks I've been friends with during my 40+ years of involvement in the industry and IHRSA, and I just want to say that **it was my pleasure to see you all!** As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words, so folks, be sure to check out our annual **IHRSA Slideshow** by going to www.clubinsideronline.com/ihsa2023.

■ **U.S. Congress Re-introduces PHIT Act to Incentivize Physical Activity...** this written by and shared here via the courtesy of our long-time friend, the lovely **PAMELA KUFAHL**, *Club Industry's Content Director*.

March 16, 2023 - The *Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT)* Act was reintroduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on March 14. If passed, the PHIT Act would allow Americans to use a portion of the money saved in their pre-tax health savings account (HSA) and flexible spending account (FSA) toward qualified sports and fitness purchases, such as gym memberships, fitness equipment and youth sports league fees. Currently, Americans can designate up to the maximum, \$3,050 in 2023, pre-tax to an employer-managed FSA or HSA to purchase nonprescription items, glasses, sunblock, bandages, over the counter products and a variety of products and services to protect and improve their health. This includes services such as in-home lead paint abatement, disability adaptive programs and services, transportation for medical appointments and services, as well as thousands of products sold by retailers, drug stores and suppliers.

Important To Know: If funds are not used by the spending deadline, the money is forfeited to employers. About 40% of people with an FSA don't use all of their contributions, on average losing about \$339 to \$408 each year. In 2019, those who contributed to their FSA forfeited in total about **\$3 billion**, while in 2020, they forfeited about **\$4.2 billion**, according to analysis by **Money.com**.

IHRSA, the trade association for health clubs, praised the reintroduction of



George Jackson

the PHIT Act, saying it, "brings equity to the tax treatment of products and services that directly benefit the physical and mental health of consumers and supports behavior that improves health and fitness."

Liz Clark, IHRSA President and CEO, commented: "The health and fitness industry is as diverse as the communities we serve, and that is why more than 70 million consumers regularly visit clubs, studios, classes, community programs, and other group and structured exercise programs. Better fitness improves individual health [and] community health, will support better military recruitment and retention, and helps provide vital mental and physical health for all Americans. We applaud our bipartisan leaders in the House and Senate and look forward to mobilizing our nationwide grassroots coalition to push for passage."

The PHIT Act has been introduced in every Congressional session since the 109th Congress. In 2018, the PHIT Act passed through the U.S. House of Representatives as part of the *Restoring Access to Medication Act of 2018*, a broader package on HSAs. It was the first and only time the legislation passed the entire House. It did not pass the Senate that year.

IHRSA encourages health club and studio operators to contact their Congress members about passing the PHIT Act and offers more information on its website, ihsa.org.

■ The following was written about **LYNNE NIETO** by the folks at **Augie's Quest** before **AUGIE** passed away. I quote them here:

"Lynne Nieto is honest and deliberate, a graceful and energetic realist. She is guided by a tenacious spirit and resilient approach to caring for her husband, her partner and life-long love, Augie Nieto (who was diagnosed with ALS in 2005). Lynne and Augie grew up together, they were childhood best friends and high school sweethearts. Augie even stood up in Lynne's wedding to her first husband as one of her bridesmaids; yes, that's right,

Augie served as one of her bridesmaids! It wasn't until years later that Lynne and Augie realized the real twist their lifelong connection needed to take, finally marrying and continuing the next and most significant chapter of their love story.

Today, Lynne is the passionate and grateful heart, reliable backbone and steady voice of Augie's Quest. Lynne represents Augie's Quest in major events and speaking engagements. She is frequently sought after by donors, corporate partners and media, alike, to share her family's story, showcase the Augie's Quest purpose, urgent cause and groundbreaking innovation, and to help others uncover and quickly appreciate humor in even the most unlikely points of the ALS journey. Lynne is also a Board Member of the *ALS Therapy Development Institute (ALS-TDI)*. Her energy, leadership, vision and constant focus on the bottom line, where her professional accounting background really shines, are key to the organization's success.

After graduating from the *University of Colorado* with a BA in Accounting, Lynne joined her family's real estate development and management firm in 1980. Early in her career, Lynne focused on the single-family home division of the business, building upwards of 200 homes per year. She later became *President of Classic Management*, the company's property management division, and grew its portfolio of apartments from 800 to 1,200 units, while overseeing the commercial and office building portfolio. She retired from the firm in 2000. Lynne continues to be involved in real estate investing and served on the Board of CT Realty, a California real estate investment company. Lynne and Augie lived in Corona del Mar, California with their dog, **Ruby**. Together they have four adult children, each married, and seven busy, smart and beautiful grand babies."

Folks, if you have not already, be sure to read our *March 2023 Cover Story* about Augie, and in this edition, be sure to check out the **Full Page Ad for Augie's Quest** that appears on the **Opposite Page**. Let's all help Lynne carry on with Augie's Mission... **Finding a CURE for ALS!**

■ The following is from **MARK de GORTER**, a friend of mine and a long-time friend and associate of **AUGIE NIETO**, who commented on the passing of our friend, Augie. Mark comments:

"It's been a very sad week. The world has lost an amazing and inspiring leader, a true force of nature, with the passing of Augie Nieto. For me, it's more personal. I met Augie in 1982 when we were both 'KIDS' in the fitness business. I was working for an advertising agency about to do a TV commercial for our client, *Health & Tennis Corporation*, and Augie reached out to me to see if I could get this new product of his that was just starting to get traction, the *Lifecycle Exercise Bike*, into

the commercial.

To this day, I still don't know how he found out we were doing that commercial, but that's Augie, always in the know about things across the industry. As two young guys the same age, we hit it off immediately (and in the end, I got the bike into that commercial). Over the years, to say his career took off to stratospheric heights would be the understatement of the millennium, but we still remained friends. He always made sure to take my call (or return it) despite the demands placed on him, and he was always there to lend a hand, a contact or advice as I progressed through my career.

For the past 17 years, I've had the honor and privilege to serve with him as a *Member of Augie's Quest for the CURE* of ALS, alongside a host of other amazing industry leaders, as we collectively raise money to find a cure for ALS, the insidious disease that grabbed him 18 years ago, and ultimately, took him from us. **To date, under Augie's inspiration, leadership, and sheer will, we've helped raise nearly \$200 million to find a cure, with promising drugs in development and distribution.**

Because of Augie, the ALS-TDI group he led is the only non-profit organization, **EVER**, to successfully bring a new drug to market as part of his goal to eradicate the disease. Augie's physically gone, but his spirit burns brightly within the Augie's Quest team. Our commitment to continue Augie's quest and vision with his wife, Lynne, remains steadfast. Of course, Augie wouldn't want it any other way. Anyone who has had the opportunity to know and work with this amazing human being is so much better as a result. **Augie, I'll miss you terribly... RIP, my longtime friend!**

They say that if you don't know someone with ALS, you probably know someone who knows someone with ALS. I always said it was our goal to put Augie's Quest out of business, because that would mean we **FOUND the CURE**. With his inspiration, drive and determination as our North Star, I'm now more confident than ever we'll be able to add to his legacy with Augie's Cure."

Well said, Mark. Thank you for your comments. Folks, please go to augiequest.org to learn how you can help.

■ In the past, I've promised to you all that I will "TELL - IT - LIKE - IT - IS!" even when **BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO ME**. Unfortunately, **NOW IS THAT TIME!** Read on, please...

Today, I want to close these *Norm's Notes* with a sincere apology to **TERRIE FAUST**, my long-time friend, and the widow of our good friend, **DR. GERRY FAUST**, for not being in attendance at the dinner party in Gerry's memory our friend, **RICK CARO**, had arranged in San Diego (See *Norm's Notes* Page 15)

“They might call it Lou Gehrig’s Disease,
but they’ll call it
Augie Nieto’s Cure”

After courageously fighting ALS for 18 years, Augie left us on February 22nd, 2023. His legacy and Quest to Cure ALS lives on.



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Augie’s Quest to Cure ALS raises the funds and awareness urgently needed to advance cutting-edge research, fast-track effective treatments, and ultimately, find a cure for ALS.



...Jeff Quinn

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and where did you grow up?

Jeff Quinn (JQ) - I'm from Southern California. My father worked for IBM, so they moved him around California: Claremont, Riverside, La Verne, San Dimas... But, Claremont and Rialto is where I say I'm from. And, eventually, that's how we ended up moving from California to Atlanta, Georgia during my junior year of high school. Kicking and screaming, I went from an open campus, very diverse Southern California lifestyle to North Atlanta in Alpharetta. It was a shock.

C.I. - Small world! I used to live in Alpharetta, and years ago, before *Club Insider*, our Wildwood Athletic Club served the IBM campus there on Windy Hill Road in Marietta, Georgia. So, where did you go to school, and what did you study? Did you play any sports?

JQ - Dekalb Jr. College and Georgia Tech. I played baseball growing up through college. Our Summer league team, the *Chastain Tigers*, won the *College World Series* in 1989. **James Beaver** was the coach, and we had players from local colleges and big universities. It was a great experience.

Entering the Health and Fitness Club Industry

C.I. - When and how did you become involved in the health and fitness club industry?

JQ - In Atlanta, I started at *Sports Life* as a Personal Trainer. **Jerry Alles** was the owner, and he had seven clubs: Alpharetta, Stone Mountain, Buckhead, Town Center, etc. I think he sold those to *Crunch*, but that's where I got my start. When I started, I really just wanted to meet girls, full disclosure (laughing). I was young, right? But, then, the first person I helped, **Ms. Belay**, lost 40 pounds. I was hooked. The gratitude that I felt was overwhelming.

Later, I was a Club Director at *Sports Life*, and a gentleman named **Mike Bolt** asked me, 'Hey, have you thought about a career in health and fitness?' I answered, 'No.' So, he added, 'You should get into sales.' I explained, 'I'm not a sales guy. My Dad is a sales guy.' He continued, 'If you honestly believe the person in front of you can benefit from it, is it really selling?' He got me.

I went to *Bally Total Fitness* and worked my way up, entry-level to one of the *Area Vice Presidents*, 1994 to 2006. What I took away from Bally was a ton. It taught me everything I know about the business, including but not limited to sales, marketing, operations, HR, knowing our Profit & Loss statements and EBITDA, as well as what not to do with customer service, retention and programming. The company was the best at generating new members, but it was just as bad at keeping them!

C.I. - The Churn!

JQ - Exactly, the churn. And, in hindsight, the reason why is that it's more important to have programs to service members than it is to get a new deal. If you don't have customer service and aren't about the member experience, then there's always a new, bigger club, and people have more options now more than ever.

I left about six months before Bally filed Chapter 11 and the storm hit. I took six months off, then teamed up with **Ken Davies** at *City Fitness* (See the *July 2021 Club Insider Cover Story*). His story is amazing. Ken started with virtually no members because he had no experience. When he opened up, he was losing money on Day One and had the wrong people on the bus. I was able to help *City Fitness*, and Ken helped me grow. At Bally, we had huge budgets and department heads with two assistants for each. Looking back on my time with *City Fitness*, Ken gave me a different but still valuable experience of



Jeff Quinn and the Chungs

being in a start-up company. Ken went from knowing very little about the industry to now being a leader in our industry. He inspires so many people, including me.

Echelon Health & Fitness

C.I. - When and how did you become involved with *Echelon Health & Fitness*.

JQ - **Carmen Ferullo**, a former Bally team member, and **David Chung** reached out to me for help in opening *Echelon Health & Fitness* in 2015. So, I started consulting for **David and Susie Chung** a year before *Echelon* opened in April of 2016. Then, after two years of consulting the Chungs and *Echelon*, they brought me on as the *Managing Partner*. David and Susie are truly amazing! We make a great team.

C.I. - That's excellent! Please tell us about the club.

JQ - Absolutely, *Echelon Health & Fitness* is a 32,000 square-foot, full-service club. We offer weight areas and cardio decks, an indoor track, two studios (group exercise, mind/body, barre, yoga, etc.), a five-lane lap pool (child and adult swim lessons from the *British Swim School*), whirlpool, dry sauna, recovery area (HydroMassage, cryo bed, red light therapy and Hyperice), as well as an outside area called *Lotta Gains*. We utilize *Myzone* and *Inbody* throughout the facility. Importantly, we have two exclusive programs that are only offered in South Jersey, here at *Echelon*: *MBSC Thrive* and *MemberPERX*.

MBSC Thrive is a personal training program with a hyper focus on

group training. The program is developed by **Mike Boyle**, a well-known strength and conditioning coach. The *MBSC Thrive* program is designed to help individuals achieve their fitness goals through personalized training plans and a supportive group environment.

MemberPERX provides its members with discounts and savings at over 800 local businesses. Since 2016, members of *MemberPERX* have saved **over \$500,000**, and even during the six months of COVID-19 lockdown, members still saved thousands of dollars. In exchange for providing discounted services to our members, we offer participating businesses a complimentary membership and 30 days of *Thrive* training. Further, with *FitPERX Media*, from our *MemberPERX* Partners, we create 30-second commercials that play on screens throughout our facility.

C.I. - What are your price points, and how many members do you serve?

JQ - We have **6,500 members** and are growing. Our average monthly payment is **\$32** with a range of payments from **\$19.99 to \$79.00**.

C.I. - What do you consider your key market differentiators?

JQ - My partners, David and Susie, and I are laser-focused on our member's experience. I'm sure everyone says, 'a clean club,' or 'great programming.' For us, it's our team members, including the best Group Fitness Instructors and Members, in addition to the two things we just discussed: *MBSC Thrive* (See **Jeff Quinn** Page 13)



Echelon Health & Fitness



NOW HIRING

GROUP FITNESS INSTRUCTORS

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...Jeff Quinn

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and MemberPERX. These separate us because no one else in South Jersey has anything like it, and it helps us fulfill our core value of helping the community.

Further, since COVID, my partners and I have reinvested about a million dollars back into the club with new equipment and programming. A lot of facilities chose not to do that or weren't able to, but we are always looking to improve. It might sound corny, but we're always striving to improve the member experience through the interaction with our staff, messaging, programming and equipment.

Finally, I will say another differentiator is being part of REX Roundtables. Through the years of working with Ken, I saw what REX did for him, both in his personal life and business life. Now, we've been part of REX for almost three years. The bond and the feedback is incredible. You see what other gyms are doing and using, what works and what doesn't. To me, if you own a gym and are not part of REX Roundtables, you should reach out to them today. The brother- and sister-hood is next level, so we will continue to be part of REX. Eddie Tock and Justin Tamssett are amazing!

All of the above is to help improve

our member's experience.

C.I. - Please tell us about your Best of Family Awards.

JQ - A South Jersey paper, *Suburban Magazine*, has a *Best Of* every year. Their readers voted us *Best Gym* six years in a row! And, our *Thrive Training Program* has been voted best by the readership the past three years. We're excited about that. Being a small company, any recognition we can get goes a long way.

C.I. - Do you have additional locations on the horizon?

JQ - We have a new location set to open very soon in Audubon New Jersey, and I will start working on the third club shortly thereafter. Our goal is to have ten locations by 2033 through a combination of acquisitions and new builds.

The club opening up in Audubon is an existing 22,000 square-foot club that closed during COVID three years ago. We had our eyes on it for a while, and it took about a two-year process of negotiation. We signed in August and are set to open in the next month or so. We began marketing pretty heavy about six months out.

FitPerx

C.I. - You are also the Founder and CEO of

FitPerx. Let's discuss this. First, how did it come to be?

JQ - When Ken Davies and I worked together at City Fitness, we were pretty aggressive with community outreach. Co-op lead boxes and working with local businesses have been around since gyms have been around. When we began our *MemberPERX* Program, it was really that but on steroids (laughing).

Via charged listings, on all digital platforms, we could track how many times members used a discount and how much they saved. At the time, we had 200 local businesses paying a fee. Then, we turned it into a pure lead generator. We began to offer the service for free to each business, but they had to offer our members a solid discount. And, on top of that, we gave the owner/managers complimentary memberships and 30-day trials of *Thrive* training. Over time, 80% of those trials converted into paying participants of *Thrive*. And, once we established the relationship, they would put a *MemberPERX* sticker on the windows of their businesses saying customers can save there by showing their membership.

At the time, getting rid of the fee paid by 200 local businesses might not have seemed like a good idea, but it was one of the best things we have done, and it has paid dividends at Echelon.

C.I. - Well, it's exponential. Exponential foot traffic and viewing of the program with all the different storefronts, wherever they might be.

JQ - Yes, every time someone uses *MemberPERX*, it sounds something like 'Hey, I'm a member of Echelon Health & Fitness, and we receive a 15% discount simply for being a member.' It just builds more value into the membership base. We've had people who moved slightly out of the area, and they downgrade their membership but keep *MemberPERX* active so they can still get the discounts.

Our retention has improved dramatically, and this is the kicker... During COVID, a well-funded, successful company came in right next door to us. And, when they tried to go into the local businesses to generate leads, they were shut out of 99% of the businesses!

C.I. - Wow, now that is incredible!

JQ - Don't get me wrong, I've been on the record saying this and I still say it: Other clubs are not the competition; they're part of the solution. But, that was pretty interesting. So, because of our relationships with local businesses, they helped us grow. They are our members. And, they help us retain members. It's kind of the next level of loyalty. Our members go to these businesses, and

(See **Jeff Quinn** Page 14)

...Jeff Quinn

continued from page 13

they show their mobile app. The managers say, 'Oh, I'm a member, too. I love Echelon!' It's awesome, and it just builds a fitness community outside of our walls.

C.I. - Obviously, as a newspaper Publisher, I always tell prospective advertisers they should strive to be seen across multiple mediums. And, more than one time! What you describe is the same thing. People walking down the street see the stickers on the windows. They grab a paper to read, and they see you've won the Best of Family Award six times in a row. Maybe something comes for them in the mail. And, boom, there's that connection for them. It's huge. It all reinforces each other.

JQ - Exactly. It just helps on so many levels. Also, because of MemberPERX, we have a *Summer Fit Challenge*. We give away a Nissan every year (a two-year lease of a Nissan or \$4,000 cash). During the Summer, entries are earned by checking into the club, by checking into a class or for every receipt turned in. The year before COVID, because it was 1,000 entries for every receipt, we had 10,000 receipts turned in from our PERX members. We wanted to drive our members to our MemberPERX Partners.

Then, we have a big event to celebrate and select the winner. Obviously, the more entries, the more chances one has of winning. And, we use a company called *Realtime Media* to certify ten winners. Of course, you have to be present to win, which creates a lot of fun as well. I'm not sure how many small businesses like us are giving away a car every year. That's a bit different and FUN!

C.I. - I love it. It's the 21st century raffle. Everyone has done an old school raffle before, but this takes it to a whole new

level! And, of course, anything to increase the FUN is a good thing!!! Where does the MemberPERX go from here?

JQ - We started first at City Fitness, then Echelon. Now, it is in about 20 clubs and businesses, from New York to Florida. Once I became a partner here at Echelon, I had less time to focus on growing FitPERX and just offered my experience to REX Roundtables Members when I'm asked. But, be on the lookout for *PERX Preloaded!* For Echelon, we will continue to grow MemberPERX because it builds value into our membership. It's a lead generator and community builder.

The Future and Key Advice

C.I. - What else is on the horizon for you, in business and personally?

JQ - In addition to growing Echelon to ten clubs, growing MemberPERX to over 1,000 locations per neighborhood and continue growing *FitPERX Media*, personally, I will continue to improve on being grateful and humble like it's my air. I also want to spend more time with my family and work on my Golf game while spreading awesomeness everywhere I go (Positive Energy).

C.I. - That's beautiful. Now, after years of experience, what key pieces of advice do you have for anyone who is reading this?

JQ - First, it's all about the member experience. This is just one example, but when COVID hit, we were closed for six months, and then, we were only able to do outside workouts. I looked out in our parking lot where we would be doing classes, and I could see oil stains. I wouldn't want to work out on those, so I painted the parking lot. Each space alternated between light and dark blue. The reason we did that was for the member experience. It's hard enough to get people in the gym, so if they're having a bad experience (if there are no paper towels, or if someone doesn't say 'hello,'



Workout Floors at Echelon Health & Fitness

any small thing), it can trigger that person not to come back. Instead, we want to trigger them to come back.

Second, anyone can build a PERX Program, but it takes time and a strong commitment. I have and will continue to help any of my REX brothers and sisters when asked. Anyone can do what we have done with our PERX Program, but you have to be committed to it. You have to have time, and you have to commit your staff to it. Like any program, you have to reinvest in a work ethic; it doesn't happen overnight. There's a lot of turnover in these businesses, so you always have to constantly remind the managers and remind the team. But, the time and energy it takes to build a gym is worth it.

I'll put the same creed to it: The time and energy needed to build your PERX Program will be worth it, and it doesn't happen overnight. Because you're building value in your membership base and building value in the community, essentially, you're helping to build your community. Sometimes, people just don't have the time or the will to do it, but I assure you, anyone can do it.

C.I. - I can see the power of reinvestment there. This time and effort creates future members, as well as future retention, so it's a worthy investment of that time and that energy.

JQ - Yes, exactly. And, we want all the businesses around us to succeed, especially because so many businesses closed during COVID. So, we're deeply

entrenched in all aspects of our community, and MemberPERX is the bridge that brings us together.

C.I. - I love it. That is fantastic. To close, I welcome anything you would like to say to our readers.

JQ - I implore other club owners to work together to help their community and not look at each other as competition, but rather, as part of the solution. **Our competition is inactivity and people's couches.** So, let's all work together to help the community get off the couch.

■ ■ ■

Thank you to **Jeff Quinn** for his time interviewing for this cover story, as well as providing photos and graphics.

(*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 38 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 by phone at 863-999-2677 or email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.)*



Lotta Gains at Echelon Health & Fitness



...Norm's Notes

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during IHRSA 2023. As I explained to Terrie and Rick, the reason that I had failed to attend this *very special dinner party* was because I was suffering from what may be the third kidney stone I have had in my lifetime. During all of IHRSA 2023, *even walking* was a challenge for me. But, with sheer determination, I dealt with the pain then, and throughout our April Edition production, now a period of ten days.

As you read this, we have gone to press, so I am working to have x-rays done, which is the same procedure I went through 25 years and 15 years ago when I was hit with kidney stones. The good news is if they find it is a kidney stone hurting me, they have what I call a "BLASTER," which

will electronically destroy the kidney stone (s) and I will be able to pass them when I use the restroom.

TRUST ME FOLKS... a kidney stone is clearly one of the most painful afflictions there is on Earth and only PRAYER and determination has gotten me through this point to where I am finishing this April Deadline. I'm NOT a QUITTER! NEVER have been! NEVER will be!

Folks, for 30 years now, I have promised to "TELL - IT - LIKE - IT - IS!" and I have done JUST THAT RIGHT HERE and NOW! SO... STAY TUNED, Y'all!

■ **JUSTIN** and I want to say Thanks for reading Club Insider!

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■ 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 49-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 30th 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 Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. You can reach Norm by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)

Make It Fun Every Day!!!

...Eric Durak, MSc

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field to spread their wings and soar to help many people through proper nutrition and exercise counseling, the offering of clean and well equipped facilities for patrons to come to, not only to improve health, but to build community. The areas I see are as follows:

■ **The application of medical fitness** for the majority persons in nations who do NOT use health clubs as their primary form of health enhancement. Medically-integrated programs work on basic issues such as weight loss, but deeper medical conditions such as hypertension, cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's, MS, spinal cord injury, risk of falling, osteoporosis and pain management. The applications are massive.

■ **Nutrition Programs** - Although many health clubs don't want to be in the dietetics business, this profession (like medicine) has some major repair work to do as they recommend high-sugar foods and processed foods to persons who have no business consuming them. The use of amino acid supplements, whole food supplements and innovative eating patterns (keto diet, Mito diet, intermittent fasting) can and should now be part of health club wellness programs with qualified professionals at the helm.

■ **Precision Wellness**, a topic in the TIME article, is also a fast-growing component of the health club scene. Products like Nano-Vi, compression sleeves, HBOT units, cryotherapy and PEMF are growing in the U.S. and other nations. They should because they represent a huge area of healing and therapy and can be practiced

alongside any fitness program. Many will allow frail and "in treatment" members to take advantage of clubs prior to starting rigorous exercise programs.

■ **Health Care Outcomes** - The ability to quantify exercise and nutrition and blood data will become an integral part of medically-based fitness and wellness programs. Trainers will become more highly trained in these specialties and allow more people to join health clubs knowing they are in good hands.

• • •

Lastly, a very recent report by Lopez in JAMA Oncology cites the global cost of treating cancer now at over \$25 trillion dollars. Doctors are scrambling to do anything to ease this economic burden of one of the world's most common

diseases. If we look at exercise alone, it can reduce the risk (primary prevention) of most cancers by over 50% and can reduce cancer recurrence in those who maintain a long-term exercise program. Combined with proper nutrition, stress management and group interaction, the burden of cancer using wellness may be the most important factor in both prevention and chronic care.

We are at a "tipping point" of sorts with a shift towards more self-care. Clubs can take advantage, and the use of more technology PLUS more personal care will lead to a growing membership base for essential businesses: health clubs.

(Eric Durak is the President of Medical Health and Fitness. He has a 30+ year career in fitness, healthcare, medical research and education. He can be reached at edurak@medhealthfit.com.)

The Future of Health and Fitness Club Design

By: Bruce Carter

In planning any size new club or renovation, taking the time to contemplate what the future holds for club design is a valuable step. Often, past trends can help to provide some insight into the future. However, the club industry's most recent past was totally dominated with COVID, causing clubs to close (25% of clubs closed permanently according to a recent IHRSA study), then clubs were allowed to reopen with abnormal spacing requirements.

So, will COVID have a strong impact on the future of club design? The primary answer is no, but the effect on the economy from COVID will continue to have an effect on club design now and in the future.

One might think that with the social distancing past experience, clubs of the future would be larger in size to account for more space and future possible viruses. This seems not to be the case as the variables affecting club design and size in the future will not be directly related to viruses. However, it also should be noted that any new design should incorporate Post-COVID ventilation-related strategies as part of any HVAC system.

One trend seems to be clubs are getting smaller. Boutique-style, studio-sized specialized fitness clubs in the 1,500 to 3,500 square-foot range have continued to grow whether part of major chains or individually created operations. Now, studios are starting to grow in size,

referring more to themselves as "clubs" and more in the 3,500 to 8,000 square-foot range. These offer a combination of regular health club memberships as well as small group training and personal training.

Can a club sell both memberships and selected specialized programs such as interval and high intensity and prosper at smaller sizes, such as 5,000 square feet? From a design point of view, it is difficult. Having limited space while trying to compete with other larger membership clubs and smaller specialized boutiques is challenging. The logical solution for smaller clubs is to charge higher fees for membership and training packages, yet in the club industry, this is "much easier said than done." Higher fees allow for fewer members, and less space is needed for this formula. But, the marketing and operations side of this type of club has to be exceptional, as well as the club interior. Trying to ask for more dues without having a dynamic environment is a high-risk formula. The good news is that, overall, there are more people willing to spend higher dues and fees for clubs, and this small but growing percentage of the market is one factor helping to "fuel" smaller club growth.

Another factor affecting club design (and size) is rising construction costs. Any size new club or renovation will cost a minimum of 20% more than it did two years ago. It takes a combined effort by owners, architects/designers and contractors to get more for fewer

dollars. Solutions include prioritizing what expenditures are more needed than others, especially those that will have a direct impact on sales and retention.

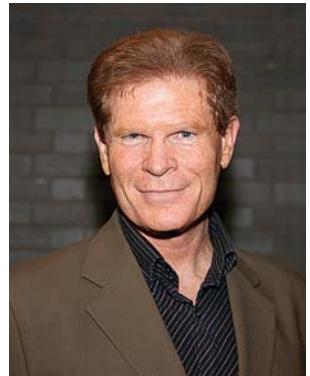
More clubs in the future will offer unisex locker/bathroom areas. This saves space and construction dollars, and if designed properly, can provide as much privacy as separate locker rooms. These areas are beautifully finished with private bathrooms, showers, changing rooms and a common area locker section.

Clubs have always offered physical health, but the concept of mental health and relaxation is growing and will affect club design in the future. Recovery offerings in spa-like environments such as *HydroMassage*, cold therapy (in the form of pools, chairs or cryotherapy units), relaxation pods, red light therapy, IV therapy, compression sleeves and even massage guns will increasingly find their way into clubs. Often, these are designed to produce more revenue and should be strongly considered.

A seemingly small but very important future design trend should be to incorporate large storage areas off to the side of any group exercise room. The days of filling the perimeter walls of a group exercise room with class training items should be totally avoided. All group exercise rooms should have these types of storage areas to allow for a beautiful "feng shui," clutter-free space.

Younger members in the 18 - 40 year-old age group are increasingly looking for better strength training options, such as multipurpose power racks, platforms, multipurpose cable units and extensive storage racks for everything from kettlebells to mats and stability balls should be planned for. This may even reduce space for cardio and machines. Larger "open space" areas (such as a turf areas) will become even more common.

Technology shall continue to play a stronger role in clubs requiring more well-planned spaces for monitors that show class schedules, health education and other program offerings. Visible technology systems need to be an attractive design



Bruce Carter

statement for clubs. Well-thought-out "selfie" walls and virtual fitness areas should be part of a club's social media and marketing program.

One of the most significant trends in how an interior is experienced is dramatic lighting. Lighting is the single biggest design change in club environments and can add drama, excitement and even relaxation. Lighting options include cove, colored, theatrical, pendants, sconces and LED strip lighting. More renovations will involve substantial lighting changes.

Larger size clubs will make a comeback, yet successfully planned smaller clubs will be part of the future of club design. In an ever-increasing way, the interior finishes of clubs will continue to evolve with more and more emphasis on quality interiors. Clubs have always been about the workout. However, increasingly so in the future, clubs will be a sanctuary for social interaction, mental self-improvement and even a place to work away from home. Club design in the future will increasingly differentiate health clubs from any other spaces in a market. They will be a uniquely special place for people to improve their lives.

(Bruce Carter is the owner of Optimal Design Systems, International. Bruce can be reached at bruce@optimaldsi.com.)

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Getting Results: A Strategic Management Approach

By: Frank Guengerich

I've owned/managed a variety of businesses for over 30 years. Several of those businesses were complex and required a very clear and coherent strategic management approach that the entire leadership team could understand and easily implement. In addition, I've always been in a highly competitive business climate that required substantial financial success. This forced me to learn a methodical approach to accomplish an initiative so that our team would win.

The approach I will share with you has been tried and tested many times, and it works. However, for it to work, it is vital that everyone involved aligns with the goals and objectives and that each person is fully committed to the plan. Pull everyone together, go thru the stages outlined in this article and have everyone report on the progress weekly.

The Six Stage Approach

Learning

Before you decide how you want to approach a project or take on a task, the first thing you should do is learn everything there is to know on the subject matter. Get all opinions: pros and cons. The broader your knowledge is, the better.

Make sure your entire leadership team is involved in the educational process so they are engaged. This is a professional development opportunity for everyone and will assist the entire team at getting better.

Make sure to avoid the pitfall of only listening to advice that you want to hear. I've seen and made this mistake myself. You may have a particular bias because you feel the project is worthy of pursuit or it should be taken on in a certain way. Don't stop being curious. Learn everything about the subject matter and listen to all sides.

Only then can you make a fair assessment and approach a task with confidence that you've done our homework. There is a saying that goes, "we make sufficient decisions with insufficient information."

It's okay not to know everything, just know as much as possible!

Planning

Once you have learned everything possible about the task you are taking on, then you should create a plan. I have always subscribed to the **S.M.A.R.T.** planning process. The plan should be

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound.

Create a worksheet (or email me and I can send you what I use) that has each of these letters/words and a space for you to write out the answer to each item.

When putting together goals and objectives, make sure each of these boxes are checked off when describing the item(s) you plan to accomplish.

Executing

Once the plan is created, the most important thing you do is to fully execute the plan. When I was COO at *WTS International*, one of the things our executive team realized is our field team had inconsistent results. These leaders were all smart, competent leaders, so it was puzzling. What we came to realize is the level of execution was what was inconsistent, thus causing results to be hit or miss. So, we decided to go out and learn everything we could about how to execute.

What we landed on was an approach called *The Four Disciplines of Execution* by **Sean Covey**. He wrote a book that provided a framework for how to understand the process of execution.

The primary problem with most that fail to execute is they focus on the wrong things and don't pay attention to those things that are predictive of success and that can be influenced by actions taken.

I continue to feel strongly that this process works and our financial results at *VERDURE* reflect that. We've had three consecutive years of record results, even with COVID.

Evaluating

Once knowledge has been gained, a **S.M.A.R.T.** plan has been developed and the plan has been executed, the next stage is to evaluate your outcomes. Did you meet the goals and objectives you planned to achieve and was that the intended result?

The evaluation process might be very easy to complete. It could be as simple as: Did you achieve a financial metric or not? However, it may be more difficult to evaluate, so you may need to use a survey tool such as *MXM Medallia*, or you can put together a focus group to discuss outcomes.

Adjust / Pivot

Once you've completed an evaluation process to determine if you've met your goals, if you indeed did achieve

the goal, modify it accordingly in order that you can continue to maximize the goal.

However, if you didn't achieve your goal, it is critical that you take decisive action to adjust and pivot your approach. It could be that the plan wasn't **S.M.A.R.T.** There may have been a failure to execute, or perhaps, the team wasn't fully knowledgeable about the subject matter to begin with and didn't understand everything necessary to accomplish the intended goal. Any one of these things will require the team to adjust the plan and pivot to a new direction. Pivot with velocity so that you don't continue down the same path of failure expecting things to change.

Start Over

Once you decide what adjustments need to be made, go back to Stage 1 (Learning) and start over.

Pivot with velocity so that you don't continue down the same path of failure expecting things to change.

Learn any new or incomplete information, formulate a new **S.M.A.R.T.** plan, reset the expectations on execution, then once again, evaluate success. REPEAT until you win!

• • •

In conclusion, in order to get results, it is vital that you establish a clear



Frank Guengerich

approach on how you expect to achieve those results. If you follow this six-step approach, you will be on your way to consistently and reliably achieving results.

(*Frank Guengerich is the President of Hospitality and Lifestyle at the Williams Group. The Williams Group is a Texas-based, multi-company organization specializing in real estate development. The Williams Group owns several brands, one of which is VERDURE. VERDURE is a luxury multi-sport athletic, wellness and lifestyle brand. For information on partnerships or consulting, email frank@williamsgroup.com.*)

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Journey Into Wellness

How One Long-time Fitness Operator Transformed His Club Model

By: Casey Conrad

Imagine making the same profit with half the members and in one-fifth the space! That is the story of **Tasso Kiriakes** (See *Club Insider's* August 2006 Cover Story), who has been operating fitness clubs in Florida for 45 years. His journey is both intriguing and inspiring, and it offers other operators key insights into how wellness modalities can be successfully integrated into their facilities.

From the beginning of his fitness journey (starting as a nationally-ranked athlete in high school and college), Tasso was an early adopter who constantly innovated, especially with fitness programming. With a Master's Degree in Biochemistry, Tasso was on the lookout for the latest and greatest in anything health and fitness related.

Tasso's fitness career started at the *Omega 40 Racquetball Club*, which was owned by his older brother. He found himself giving training advice long before personal training became a thing. In 1986, inspired by *Nautilus* equipment and coordinating *Nautilus Diet Book*, he converted one 800 square-foot racquetball court into a one-on-one training facility. In addition to the strength equipment, he had a scale, a *Lifecycle* bike, a rower and a *Stair Master*. The success was so profound that, in 1988, he renovated 1,400 square feet of the club into a larger one-on-one

facility, adding more strength and cardio equipment. In addition, he encouraged two of his most successful clients to become personal trainers and coached them through the process. The cornerstone of success continued to be results, which the program delivered.

With the success of his one-on-one program growing but at odds with his brother about the direction of the club, in 1989, Tasso left to open his own facility, *Bodez by Tasso*. A temporary 1,200 square-foot location was set up while his permanent location was built-out. In 1990, the 4,000 square-foot facility was opened and included an aerobics room, a *Life Circuit*, a full line of *Med-X* for the one-on-one area and cardio equipment with *Cardio Theater*.

Tasso's business continued to grow rapidly, and in 1994, he bought an 11,000 square-foot building, expanding each area of the smaller facility and adding the *Life Fitness Life Center* system, which connected all pieces of exercise equipment for tracking users' progress. Again, being one of the first in the industry to embrace new technology. In 1995, the club added a second line of *Med-X* equipment into the one-on-one personal training area.

In 2000, Tasso was the second club operator to launch my *Health Inspirations Weight Loss* program, which combined one-on-one coaching and accountability using grocery store foods, mandatory

exercise and relaxation sessions, and optional beauty and spa therapies.

In 2007, Tasso added *SciFit* equipment. It was during this year that he read **Jim Collins'** book, *Good To Great*, and also joined **Phil Kaplan's** *Mastermind Group*. Soon after, Tasso began to make a significant shift in his "fitness philosophy." Kaplan was advocating a more holistic approach to fitness, tapping into functional medicine principles. One of Kaplan's primary beliefs is that inflammation is the cause of all disease states and that stress is the match that ignites and magnifies all disease into disease. In 2008, Tasso launched Kaplan's *ALIVE* program, which is an acronym for "Aggressive Lifestyle Intervention Via Exercise." It was a complete program that included meditation, breathing, eating styles as well as the exercise protocol.

Although continuing to innovate, Tasso's membership numbers were declining. His best year had been 2003, reaching over 2,000 members. Unfortunately, by 2011, after three back-to-back devastating hurricanes; the recession; the opening of a YMCA, a hospital-based facility, several niche facilities; and the proliferation of the low-price club boom, Tasso went from being one of the only clubs in the Ormond Beach, Florida area to being surrounded by 14 competitors within a ten-minute drive! Yikes. Membership was now fluctuating between 800 - 1,000 members.

But, as the motivational speaker **Jim Rohn** preached, "Out of every adversity comes the seed of an equal or greater benefit," Tasso knew he had to reinvent himself, and both his long-time mentors (Kaplan and myself) were telling him that wellness was the future. Looking at the increase in chronic disease while the number of fitness offerings exploded, it was clear that a new approach was necessary. This realization began the sequential integration of more wellness and biohacking products into his facility and his programs. Here are the things he introduced to his members through education and program offerings:

- *Young Living* essential oil products (supplements, detox, lifestyle changes) in 2011;
- *Quantum Biofeedback* testing and *Aroma Dome* therapy (lifestyle change suggestions, stress relief, relaxation) in 2013;
- *Ionic Foot Bath* (detox) in 2015;
- *Bio-Electric Magnetic Energy Regulation* (circulation therapy, stress relief, relaxation) in 2016;
- *Normatec* compression, *HydroMassage* bed (circulation, recovery, relaxation)



Casey Conrad

in 2020.

As each product and/or modality was added, Tasso would create new programs that would incorporate one-on-one personal training with a selection of products and therapies. He watched the results of his clients improve. And, profound emotional and physiological results occurred, while significantly increasing his per-member revenue!

In 2021, Tasso took a huge leap; he sold his building, shut down the "club," opened a 2,500 square-foot facility and called it *Bodez Personalized Fitness*. The facility has 20 pieces of *Med-X*, a small area of cardio and *SciFit* machines (for Burst training) and a full Biohacking area he branded the *WE Center* (Wellness and Energy). The center, which utilizes only 330 square feet of his entire space, has the following:

- 3 Bio-Electric Magnetic Energy Regulation (PEMF) mats;
- 2 Anti-aging beds;
- 2 4-D massage chairs;
- 1 Hydro Massage bed;
- 1 Cryo Couch;
- 1 Far Infrared Sauna;
- 1 Ionic detox footbath;
- 1 complete set of Normatec compression, Hyperice and Venum devices.
- Next on his list to add will be a *Hyperbaric Chamber* and a *Tesla Current Machine*.

When someone asks what kind of facility he has, Tasso now touts, "We are a healing and wellness center, and our trainers are *Health Catalysts*." Someone can only become a member by doing a minimum of four one-on-one workouts a month **starting at \$229 per month**. This membership gives them access to everything in the *WE Center* except the (See **Casey Conrad** Page 19)

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Fitness as Wellness

By: Sara Kooperman, JD

Growing up as a child in the 1960s, '70s, '80s and '90s, U.S. public schools required children to take yearly *Presidential Physical Fitness Assessment Tests*. It was essential to make sure youth achieved necessary fitness levels to pass as "healthy." Yet, today, fitness is deemed "non-essential" by government regulators and other health care experts. Interestingly, a study recently published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (December 2022) advocates that those who suffered the least and experienced less severe outcomes due to illness and complicated infections, including death, from COVID-19, were individuals who were physically active before the pandemic. Exercise is conclusively seen as an extra layer of protection against disease and unforeseen illness. As a result, it appears that many people are finally now prioritizing fitness.

The fitness industry has changed. Its focus is no longer just about "losing weight or body fat," its direction has shifted to health and wellness. Exercise is not firmly a part of the health continuum. Many fitness facilities and individuals have adopted a more professional wellness persona. Health clubs and trainers no longer view their profession as an appearance-only business or a money-grab (buy-my-membership) institution, the direction is now a solution to our health crisis. Fitness centers and teachers are committed to being part of a wellness offering, and even more so, part of the medical community.

Back in the 1980s, fitness was all the rage, and society viewed this industry

with excitement. It was popular to be a group fitness instructor (hence, **Jamie Lee Curtis** in the movie *Perfect*). Personal trainers were not even an option yet. Then, over the next several decades, fitness grew with a frenzy. Health clubs exploded, turning fitness into a true money-making business, causing a glut of fitness centers to open. Then, the pandemic struck, and thousands of clubs and studios closed (25 - 30% mostly boutique and small centers). But, while COVID-19 decimated the fitness club, ironically, it woke up the medical community to the value of exercise. Doctors, physical therapists, social workers, psychologists began to enthusiastically emphasize the value of physical fitness as it relates to building both physical and mental health. This epiphany awakened society, making wellness the focus of physical exercise.

Fitness has a different meaning and purpose to society depending on who is promoting it. Health professionals see exercise one way, and fitness pros look at it from a different position, but ultimately, everyone is and should be focusing on wellness, building immunities and emphasizing quality of life. It is not about how big your muscles are or how small your waist is. It is about how you feel and what you can do. One of the benefits or silver linings of the pandemic was that fitness became evident to much of society that health and wellness does not need to be extreme. It is attainable by all. A simple short walk several times a week is enough to keep you healthy. Our "fitness viewpoint" has shifted and must continue in this direction. The goal is to improve your *Activities of Daily Living*, which in turn, will

dramatically improve your general quality of life.

Now, there is a growing demand for fitness professionals, and these professionals must be qualified. As a result, certification is a must. The pandemic brought about virtual training and virtual education. Online and live stream programming became the norm, and SCW *Fitness Education* was luckily fully prepared to transition to online education. SCW built and hosted the *first Live Stream Fitness Convention* in the virtual world. Thankfully, this pivot from in-person to online provided the opportunity for many not involved in the fitness education community to become certified and educated.

Workforce scarcity is hitting everyone, and in particular, our industry. Currently, there is a shortage of instructors and trainers. Many instructors and trainers left fitness altogether during the pandemic because of closed clubs. And, sadly, many club owners lost touch with their front-line workers, specifically their group exercise staff and personal trainers. Hence, we need staff, and this staff must be educated and prepared to deal with both the fit, and more importantly, the unfit. Group exercise staff and personal trainers must be certified.

There are many levels of certifications that individuals can attain, and this is important. We need these different entry points. What is worrisome about the certification industry right now is a claim that only certain certifications must be accepted. Unfortunately, many do not require (or specifically do not want) practical live training, and some actually (and specifically) exclude it from their



Sara Kooperman, JD

education. To help grow the shrinking fitness industry, a variety of courses, levels and prices need to be offered to entice new folks to enter the industry and enhance the portfolios of those already invested. Right now, the goal must (and should) be to inspire new instructors and trainers to join our forces and work in our industry.

For anyone interested in entering the fitness world, luckily, there aren't too many barriers they need to break. With the variety of educational options available, and the different paths that are offered, we should be able to fill the open positions at health and wellness facilities. Being able to get trained in your state, in your club, and even in your home makes for accessible training and quality opportunities.

When looking for a trainer or instructor, consumers should be trained (See **Sara Kooperman, JD** Page 20)

...Casey Conrad

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Aroma Therapies and Ionic foot bath.

Tasso notes, "The fact that we offer a complete, holistic approach is highly attractive. Even more so is the fact that members can physically get through the challenging workouts because they look forward to the post-workout relaxation and recovery therapies. It is literally like a huge carrot for them!"

Now for the bottom line: With only 160 members, Tasso is grossing more with greater profitability than he did with 1,000. Most importantly to him, his clients are getting better outcomes with a much higher retention rate.

When asked what advice he had for other traditional club operators, Tasso was quick to reply: "Follow Casey's advice! Seriously, this journey has been

made easier because I invest in mentors and consultants who don't spend all their time inside the club. Therefore, they can identify trends more successfully." In terms of specific, actionable items, here is what Tasso suggests:

1. Start with simple investments that can be wrapped into your existing client offerings (like PT, massage, etc.), and incorporate programs to drive new members. If that type of creativity isn't your thing, get professional help.

2. Don't just buy equipment without the program programming and vision of your system. Any big box can add a modality for sizzle, but does that addition create better results for most members if it isn't combined with a well thought out, holistic approach?

3. Get clear with your messaging so that your members are part of the wellness transition process and that prospects know

how you are different than other fitness facilities in the market.

4. Finally, do not wait any longer! More clubs are adding therapies as well as the individual operators. Franchise recovery centers are popping up everywhere. If they aren't there yet, they will eventually be in your market. If you don't carve out your slice of the pie now, you will watch your hard-earned members give their dollars to another business.

• • •

It took Tasso close to 15 years to get to where he is today, but a lot of that was because he was forging the path and figuring it out as he went along. Today, adding wellness to any fitness facility is much easier. Recovery and biohacking modalities are more accepted by the general public, and the market is growing with the continued rise of chronic disease.

People are searching for alternatives. Yes, there are many choices, but if you understand your market and go back to the criteria that I discussed in the first article of this series (space, budget, staffing, etc.), you can make intelligent choices and begin your journey into wellness.

(Casey Conrad is a long-time industry sales and marketing consultant. She has authored numerous industry books and has spoken worldwide. For the past four years, Casey has added wellness facilities and holistic practitioners to her list of clients with a primary focus on using recovery and medical devices as a marketing magnet and revenue generator. She is now bringing these strategies back into the fitness industry. Casey can be reached at 401-932-9407 or CaseyConrad11@gmail.com.)

Group Fitness Should Run Like a Restaurant

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

We often use the analogy of a restaurant when talking about all things group fitness: the menu (the schedule), the ambiance (the room), the main courses and specials of the day (the workouts), the staff (instructors, of course), and even, the marketing (promoting your menu and selling the experience). If you are frustrated with the inconsistencies of your group fitness department; if it's an ancillary service more than a staple of your business; if it's not performing to your liking; or if it's just a pain in the neck to manage, here are some lessons we can learn from restaurants, minus the

curse-laden celebrity chef intervention.

Great restaurants start with great food. Let's be honest, if the food is terrible, it doesn't matter how great the atmosphere is. If the food tastes bad, you won't attract new or repeat customers. On the flip side, there are restaurants that have amazing food and get away with pretty B- accommodations. If you ever visit New Orleans, ask a local where you can find the best Po Boy sandwich. Chances are, they'll send you to *Mother's*. You'll wait in a line outside, wrapped around the block, and it's not because they have new tables and fancy chairs, or expensive technology like iPads for ordering your food. They

just have amazing Po Boys. If your group fitness workouts aren't Mother's-level great --innovative, energizing and engaging--you'll never have people lined up out the door waiting for the next workout.

Great restaurants have dedicated staff. Imagine a chef who travels around from restaurant to restaurant. They cook breakfast at one place on Mondays and Wednesdays, another place on Tuesdays for brunch, and on the weekends, they set up a cart at a busy intersection. They've actually considered a digital service where they can sell direct, especially to people who think the restaurant is too expensive.

(See **Jeffrey Pinkerton** Page 22)



Jeffrey Pinkerton

...Sara Kooperman, JD

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to pay attention to their Group Exercise Instructor's (GXI) and Personal Trainer's (PT) education and certifications, making sure they are current. Most certifications must be renewed after two years, and unfortunately, many instructors have let theirs lapse over the pandemic. Clients should also look for specialized training that correlates to their age and ability, but more than anything, look for the professional's dedication to health and wellness. And, anyone promoting a quick fix should be avoided.

Our industry must support a variety of certification options but must also pay close attention to educating the public on the value of a certified professional. We must lead the charge on informing society of our commitment to quality.

The pandemic also adjusted the way people viewed social media. More and more people communicated through social media and sought information through social media. There was a huge growth of "influencers," content providers who reach thousands, if not millions of followers. If you were (or are) beautiful, sexy and young, then you can influence. Many of these influencers were and are untrained, causing a negative effect on the outlook in both the physical and virtual worlds. They often demonstrate and promote unsafe and untested exercise programs that may result in injury.

Further, in the past, as well as now, there seems to be a dichotomy of focus for our industry. Some fitness facilities concentrate on health and wellness, and others focus on appearance, splitting between virtual and real life. With this being said, kudos to the experienced instructors educating people online as a way to entice the unfit to train. I guess you could say social media has both a negative and a positive influence on the fitness industry, inspiring people of all ages, ethnicities, sizes and abilities to move.

The biggest question post pandemic is, "How do we make fitness part of the healthcare continuum?" First, we need to gain the respect of the public health agencies and the general public. And, more importantly, we must start with gaining the respect of our OWN industry. Our front-line workers, group exercise instructors and personal trainers are sorely underpaid and under-respected. In order to legitimize fitness, these workers need to be paid more so that they can afford the training that they need. Additionally, a salary bump will also attract quality people to these much-needed professions.

In the past, there has been a push to have the government license group fitness instructors and personal trainers. Unfortunately, this is an incredibly expensive endeavor. The U.S. Government may never take this approach, although the U.K. and Canada have. The USA simply does not have the funds, especially after the pandemic. Furthermore, with the pressing inflation, this may never happen; therefore, it is up to us to self-regulate. This means that we, as an industry, need to self-manage this process and set our own standards.

The United States is a capitalist society, so those who are good get paid, but those who are great get paid better. It's pretty simple. So, if an instructor attracts people to their class, then they probably get paid more than another instructor who is not attracting as many participants. The same happens for personal trainers. If a personal trainer is talented, caring and charismatic, then they probably have a strong following and are being well paid. But, to elevate all instructors and trainers, clubs, studios and centers must pay their instructors and trainers more so that they can afford the training that they need to improve and also to gain the respect of public health agencies.

To legitimize fitness as a key component of healthcare, we must get Congress to pass the *Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT)* Act, which is

Federal legislation incentivizing physical activity. The PHIT Act will allow Americans to use pre-tax dollars --flexible spending accounts (FSAs) and health savings accounts (HSAs)-- to pay for health club memberships, fitness equipment, exercise videos and youth sports leagues. If passed, the PHIT Act would enable individuals to use up to \$1,000 per year, up to \$2,000 for families, to cover physical activity-related expenses tax-free.

As we all know, when you get a paycheck, the Government takes out a percentage of the check to cover Federal and State taxes (to pay for schools, fire and police protections, etc.). The PHIT Act will allow everyone to use pre-tax dollars to pay for fitness programs. By allowing the use of pre-tax dollars, it will be less expensive for people to exercise, and this will in turn get more people exercising, as it will be more affordable. Then, as an industry, we will be able to attract more members and retain more clients.

Additionally, as an industry, we need to keep preaching the value of fitness and promoting its importance. We need to make exercise and wellness more affordable and approachable. And, to do this, we must stop showing the extreme intensities of exercise. This scares people off and only seems to get the fit fitter. We need to demonstrate and offer programs that can accommodate all individuals at all fitness levels, ages, ethnicities and socioeconomic levels.

At this point in time, fitness professionals do not have the training to act as healthcare providers; they need to work with the healthcare providers. Reaching out to physicians and connecting with hospitals is an effective way to professionalize fitness. It is also a way to build respect in the medical community. If we look at occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants, the cost to become one far exceeds the economic rewards; therefore, a shortage of individuals pursuing this much-needed path exists. Many times, we find these occupational therapy

professionals (and physical therapists) offering personal training on the side because they can earn much more, leading us back to capitalism in its healthiest form: those that are good get paid, and those that are great can retire one day!

Unfortunately, there still remains a huge population of individuals who are underserved and can't afford personal training, and in some cases, even quality insurance.

Who knows if there is really any direct path to the medical community's full acceptance and support of fitness, but I do know that we are getting closer. The general realization that wellness is important is key!

According to an article written by **Madeline Holcombe** of CNN, this year's top health-related Google searches reveal people are no longer focused on COVID-19 or vaccines. Instead, key word internet searches are focusing, "on physical and mental recovery, how to get healthier and how to cope with issues like anxiety, depression..." and other emotional issues.

If you ask any fitness professional their thoughts on the current state of the industry, the answers will be all over the map, but everyone will agree that we all need to work together as a team, show respect, support, and most of all, compassion. It's who we are and will always be. Wellness is our focus for 2023.

(*Sara Kooperman, JD, CEO of SCW Fitness Education, WATERinMOTION, and S.E.A.T. Fitness sits on the Gold's Gym Think Tank and the canfitpro Advisory Panel and was a Founding Board Member for the Women In Fitness Association (WIFA). Recently nominated for the IDEA Fitness Leader of the Year Award, Kooperman won the 2022 Most Innovating Fitness Pro by Fitness Industry Technology Council. She is also an inductee into the National Fitness Hall of Fame, an Illinois State Businesswoman of the Year and a panelist for IHRSA's Talks & Takes Monthly Talk Show.*)

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...Jeffrey Pinkerton

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Sound familiar? If your group fitness team is not dedicated to your mission and your members, it will always struggle. If you think your instructors "need" to teach all over town in order to get enough classes, you've been duped. Contact me, and we can do the math together.

Great restaurants have smaller menus. "Almost always, less is more... a lengthy menu confuses and confounds guests." (Forbes, "What Makes a Perfect Restaurant?") Imagine a restaurant that has 50 - 100 menu items, each with its own title and description. Various options for breakfast include: Super Star Sampler, Sunrise Sampler, Super Sampler Platter, Super Duper Sampler, Super Sizzlin' Sampler and the Slamin' Sampler. All of them include eggs, bacon and toast and... various equipment for strength training depending on the instructor's preference. Renaming all of your freestyle strength classes "Serious Strength" (but still knowing that the recipes are all completely different depending on the instructor) isn't creating a smaller menu. It's creating serious confusion.

Great restaurants have positive reviews, both word-of-mouth and online. My wife and I recently went out to dinner at a restaurant recommended to us by friends. Based on their glowing recommendation (complete with their list of must-order tapas) and the reviews and photos online, it sounded and looked like the perfect spot for us to celebrate our wedding anniversary. We had a great table on the side patio, with just the right amount of music spilling out from the DJ inside. The waitstaff was lovely, the atmosphere was great, the crowd was electric, eccentric and diverse. The wine was amazing, and the food was incredible. We loved it. Cheers to 25 years of marriage... and a recommendation gone very, very right!

Great restaurants have easy-to-navigate websites. Imagine a restaurant website with no photos. Or, maybe worse, imagine a website filled with only stock photos. "We have the BEST breakfast in town!" But not one photo of the actual breakfast? Very suspicious. Imagine a restaurant website trying to market the menu of breakfast options from above (Super Sizzlin' Sampler and such). At best, they could say, "We Have 100+ Breakfast Options Per Week!" or maybe

"We Have the Best Chefs!" or "We Have Breakfast Options for All Fitness Levels!"

These messages, while probably accurate, don't give people enough information and certainly don't create a compelling marketing message. Before you go to a new restaurant, do you visit their website and review the menu? Do you choose the exact menu item you are going to have? A lot of people, my wife included, apparently do. When the waiter hands her the menu, she'll browse a little just for fun, but she made her decision before we walked in the door. Use your website to showcase what people can expect when they visit. Give them a taste of what they will hear, see and feel when they experience one of the workouts on your menu.

Great restaurants deliver a great experience. It is the combination of everything under your roof --your menu of programming, your people, your place and group fitness space-- that creates a great experience for guests and members. Like restaurants, people have plenty of options on how to spend their time and energy and money. Low-price, low-service? Big-box chain? Order-in and stay at home? Or, get out and enjoy the social, musical, energy and excitement of the live experience.

• • •

Build a better menu, incentivize your team to be exclusive and committed to your business, refresh your website so it's both informational and inspirational, and maybe, the next time someone is searching for a place to work out, they'll find your site, they'll check out your menu, they'll read a review or get a recommendation from a raving fan friend. They'll visit, knowing exactly what they'd like to try, have a lovely interaction with your team and have an amazing experience. This is how restaurants create regulars. And, you can do the same.

More than ever, people need the encouragement, the social engagement and the accountability that only a live, instructor-led, group fitness experience provides. Learn more about MOSSA's recipe for running a great group fitness program at www.mossa.net.

(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.)

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Thank You to Our Contributing Authors

- **Bonnie Patrick Mattalian** - Independent Consultant - bmattalian@gmail.com
- **Bruce Carter** - President, Optimal Design Systems International - (954) 888 - 5960
- **Casey Conrad** - Sales and Marketing Consultant - CaseyConrad11@gmail.com
- **Cathy Spencer Browning** - VP of Training & Programming, MOSSA - (770) 989 - 4700
- **Chris Stevenson** - Founder, The Empower Group - chris@stevensonempowers.com
- **Daron Allen** - President & CEO, Visual Fitness Planner - dallen@vfp.us
- **Derek Barton** - Owner, Barton Productions - derek@bartonproductions.com
- **Frank Guengerich** - President of Hospitality, Williams Group - frank@williamsgroup.com
- **Gary Polic** - Owner, Polic Consultants Group - (630) 410 - 1120
- **Herb Lipsman** - Author and Industry Consultant
- **Jeffrey Pinkerton** - Business Development Manager, MOSSA - (770) 989 - 4737
- **Jim Thomas** - President, Fitness Management USA - (800) 929 - 2898
- **John McCarthy** - 25-Year Executive Director Emeritus of IHRSA
- **Karen Woodard-Chavez** - Premium Performance Training - karen@karenwoodard.com
- **Mark Williamson** - Co-Founder and Principal, ClubIntel - markw@club-intel.com
- **Mike Alpert** - COO, Smart Health Clubs - mike@smarthealthclubs.com
- **Paul R. Bedard, Esquire** - Crunch Fitness Connecticut - paul@crunchct.com
- **Paul Bosley** - Owner, Business Finance Depot - (800) 788 - 3884
- **Rick Caro** - President, Management Vision, Inc. - (212) 987 - 4300
- **Sara Kooperman, JD** - CEO, SCW Fitness Education - scwfit.com
- **Thomas Plummer** - National Fitness Business Alliance - (800) 726 - 3506

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