

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

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Luke Carlson's Discover Strength *Be Unstoppable*



JULY 2024

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CLUB INSIDER

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Luke Carlson's Discover Strength *Be Unstoppable*

By: Justin Cates

Specialization. It occurs in all industries, and it has come to the health and fitness club industry. We have seen it in the boutique movement, whether cycling, Pilates, yoga and many others. In the case of this month's cover story, we will delve into specialized strength training.

Luke Carlson, CEO of Discover Strength, can be considered a young gun whose aim has been set on affecting change in his clients utilizing a very focused 30-minute, one-on-one or small group (3:1 ratio) format. The model is built on education and provides results in a safe and regulated environment.

Beyond Discover Strength, Luke gives back to our industry and other

industries with his public speaking, as well as Board service for the *Health and Fitness Association (HFA)*. Most recently, he was named *Vice Chair of the HFA Board*.

In this month's cover story interview, Luke will speak to all of this and more. I invite you to read on!

An Interview With Luke Carlson, CEO of Discover Strength

Club Insider (C.I.) - Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Luke Carlson (LC) - I was born in a small town called Shakopee, a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

C.I. - Where did you go to school, and what did you study? Did you play any sports?

LC - I went to *Shakopee High School* and then went to the *University of Minnesota* for my undergrad.

I was a high school athlete. I loved sports, and I was Captain of the football team. I also boxed competitively as an amateur boxer with my father as the coach. He coached *Golden Glove Boxing* for 40 years, so I was coached by him. We traveled and fought everywhere, and that was a wonderful experience.

In college, I studied kinesiology for my undergrad, and I went right into the Master's program for exercise physiology. So, I have a Master's from the University of Minnesota. I didn't play sports at the University of Minnesota, but during undergrad, I started working as an

(See **Luke Carlson** Page 10)



Luke Carlson

Trive Capital Invests in JF Fitness of North America, a Leading Crunch Fitness Franchisee

RICHMOND, VA and DALLAS, TX - **Trive Capital**, the Dallas-based private equity firm, and **808 Capital Partners** announce their investment into **JF Fitness of North America**, a leading **Crunch Fitness** franchisee serving the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern U.S.

Headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, and founded in 2014, JF Fitness operates 16 gyms across Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas. In connection with Trive and 808's investment, JF Fitness acquired **Team Roldan**, a rapidly growing Crunch franchisee operating eight gyms across Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

John Freeland, CEO of JF



Fitness, stated, "We are delighted to partner with Trive and 808 in this next phase of our growth. In addition to aligning culturally, our teams possess a shared vision for the long-term success of our company, comprised of

(See **Crunch** Page 8)

Fitness International Acquires XSport Fitness, Expanding Chicagoland, New York and Virginia Markets

IRVINE, CA - **Fitness International, LLC**, operator of **LA Fitness**, **Esporta Fitness**, **City Sports Club** and **Club Studio** brands, announces its acquisition of **XSport Fitness**, marking a significant expansion of Fitness International's offerings in the Chicagoland, New York and Virginia markets.

"We are proud to add XSport Fitness' facilities to our nationwide network of health clubs," said **Jill Greuling, President, Club Operations of Fitness International**. "This expansion solidifies our position as one of the largest privately-held health club operators in the United States and provides the opportunity to bring our best-in-class fitness experience,



with the widest range of amenities and the friendliest service at an affordable price, to more people across the country. With today's acquisition, Fitness International has once again invested in its members."

Effective immediately, Fitness International will assume operations of XSport Fitness' 35 locations and will honor all the active membership agreements that

(See **Fitness International** Page 8)

Inside the Insider: Edition #367

- "Insider Speaks" - Character Matters - **By:** Herb Lipsman
- Overcoming Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Personal Trainers in 2024 - **By:** Gary Polic
- Enhancing Positive Energy: Harnessing Feng Shui in Health Club Design - **By:** Bruce Carter
- To Strengthen Your Membership, Strengthen Your Strength Training - **By:** Cathy Spencer Browning
- The Health & Fitness Association Helps Highlight Structured Exercise in U.S. House GLP-1 Bill
- Discover Strength and Minnesota Distance Elite Celebrate Partnership Success as Dakotah Lindwurm Heads to the Paris Olympics
- And, of Course, **Norm's Notes**

Norm's Notes

■Hello Everybody! This is your Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 checking in with our 367th monthly edition of this 31+ year running club business publication I refer to as: A Labor of Love! I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of Norm's Notes, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of "Telling-It-Like-It-Is!" I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to THANK YOU ALL for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, so please read on!

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

■As I write this, it is Saturday, July 13th, and I was just about to write the Norm's Note following this one --chronicling the passing of the one and only RICHARD SIMMONS-- when at about 6:30PM, there was an attempted assassination of former PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP.

To say this was a *horrific event* is a total understatement. Miraculously, the former President survived because the bullet fired by the would-be assassin, whom I will not name here because he should never gain the fame he desired, from a warehouse rooftop about a football field's distance (100 yards) away hit the former President's right ear in the front and exited the back of his ear without serious damage to his skull. If the bullet had hit the former President one inch to the left of where it actually hit, were he facing forward which he was NOT at the moment the bullet hit him, it would have killed him immediately. Thank GOD the worst did not occur.

■Folks, the following is how I was going to lead off this month's Norm's Notes:

I'm gonna lead off my Norm's Notes this month with the very sad news I received today, July 13th. The one and only RICHARD SIMMONS, the legendary fitness guru and TV star, died at the age of 76, at his home in Los Angeles. Reportedly, the Los Angeles Police Department responded to Simmons' home after a call from his housekeeper. It appears that Simmons died of natural causes and no foul play is



Richard Simmons



Norm Cates

suspected. Sadly, the day before he died, he had posted a message to his fans on Facebook that read: "Thank you, I never got so many messages about my birthday in my life! I'm sitting here writing emails. Have a most beautiful rest of your Friday. Love, Richard."

Simmons burst into the spotlight in the 1970s and '80s when he opened a number of gyms and produced fitness videos. After winning a legion of fans with

his infectious enthusiasm and positivity, Simmons slipped away from the limelight later in his career. The Obituary for fitness guru Richard Simmons reads: "Known for his energetic personality and high-intensity workout programs, Richard Simmons passed away at the age of 76. Simmons, who stepped away from the public eye in 2014, had celebrated his 76th birthday on the day he died, July 12th, and he (See Norm's Notes Page 7)

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

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Thanks and Appreciation

At Club Insider, we are excited to be in our 31st Year of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was founded to serve an industry I truly love, and so that I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin, is still intriguing and amazing to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere Thanks and Appreciation to everyone who has made this amazing 30+ year run possible.

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

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

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

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

Norm Cates, Jr.



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“Insider Speaks”

Character Matters

By: Herb Lipsman

I recently listened to the new book by **Jean Becker**, entitled *Character Matters*. Jean was *Chief of Staff for President George H. W. Bush* for more than 25 years. During my 13 years with *The Houstonian Hotel, Club and Spa* in Houston, Texas, I had the good fortune of forming a friendship with the former President, as well as **Barbara Bush** and a few other members of the family.

Character Matters provides an inspiring collection of stories by those whose lives were positively impacted by this incredibly accomplished, yet humble leader. I strongly urge you to order the book today and take the time to read or listen to it at your earliest convenience. It will make you a better person.

My story of meeting and befriending the former President begins in 1993 when I was hired to lead The Houstonian Club for *The Redstone Companies*, owner of The Houstonian. One day, while in an executive team meeting, my assistant interrupted to ask me to take a call. She said: “He says it’s George Bush, but I don’t believe it’s really him.” I excused myself and stepped out to take the call.

“Herb? George Bush here. I have a doubles game scheduled for today at noon at the *Forrest Club*, and our fourth just bailed on us. I’ve heard you are a pretty good tennis player and wondered if you could get free to join us today?” I paused for a moment to digest what I was hearing. I knew that the former President and Barbara were members of The Houstonian and had used the property as their Houston address while serving as Vice President and President. I also recognized the voice to sound awfully lot like the man I had seen so many times on TV. So, I gulped and said “Sure!” He said, “Great! See you soon.”

It was about 11AM at the time. Note that I didn’t have my racquet or tennis gear at the club, so I had to make a bee line to the pro shop to find tennis clothes, shoes and borrow a racquet. I also had to let my boss know I was ducking out

on our meeting to go play tennis with the former President.

I had never been to the Forrest Club before, but I knew it was close by. I headed there while trying to calm my nerves. Upon arriving, I immediately noted only a couple of cars in the parking lot and no one on any of the courts. I made my way into the clubhouse and found no one at the desk. After a few moments, a woman came out of an office and asked what she could do for me. I told her I was invited to play tennis with the former President but did not know if I was in the right place. She assured me I was and that I should head out back to the courts.

As I slowly wandered out to the courts, I remember noticing a woman sitting on a bench and one player hitting off a backboard. Looking closer, I could see the earpieces in each of their ears... *Secret Service*. Shortly, a black sedan pulled up and out jumped former President Bush and two friends dressed in tennis gear. He graciously greeted me and introduced me to his two friends. He said, “Let’s play one set with each other, partner, and we all agreed.”

During the first set, I was playing against the former President. My favorite memory was chasing down a deep shot on the clay courts and not being able to tell for sure if it hit the line... The *Secret Service* agent, positioned close by, looked me in the eye and said, “He once headed the CIA... I’d say it was good.” He did not even smile while saying this, so I called it good. We finished our rotations with me as a partner with the former President, which we won. He thanked all of us and said he couldn’t wait to get together again for our next game.

This was the start of a friendship that lasted until he passed a few years ago. I soon found that he had thousands of these kinds of friendships with people from all walks of life. During the time I knew him, he graciously invited my daughter, who was writing a book report about him in middle school, to visit him in his replica Oval Office at his offices in Houston. He spent some 20 minutes with her showing her around and

making her feel like a VIP. He also sent an overnight letter to my dad, who was dying of lung cancer in 2000, thanking him for his service during *World War II*, while knowing that my dad had been a lifelong Democrat.

President and Mrs. Bush both enjoyed coming to the club for workouts or for a massage at the spa. I always marveled at how kind and engaging they were with everyone they encountered, from frontline staff to members. The Secret Service would show up in their black vehicles, and then in would walk the former President, climb onto a recumbent bike next to another member, and reach out his hand saying, “Hi. I’m George Bush!”

In my recollection, his greatest traits were his kindness, decency and humility. He treated whomever he met as an equal, and he treated everyone in a friendly, respectful manner. He was genuinely interested in the people he met. He was curious about people in general and always engaging. Here was the once most powerful man in the world talking to you as if you were his equal. It was truly remarkable.

I’m sharing this personal recollection because our world, our country and particularly our industry is starving for this kind of humble, compassionate and courageous leadership. President Bush truly believed one person could make a huge difference in the lives of those they touched, and he was right. He was once quoted saying, “Never mistake kindness for weakness.” This quote has stuck with me throughout my career.

If you are a leader in the club industry today, you have a huge opportunity and obligation to use your influence to positively impact the lives of those you serve. You cannot be duplicitous (acting one way in the workplace and with little or no moral compass in your personal life). If you think your employees don’t know how you really are... you’re only fooling yourself. If you rationalize that our political leaders are getting away with so many indiscretions and that somehow makes it okay for you, you are sadly mistaken.

I have zero tolerance for leaders



Herb Lipsman

who say, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Character not only matters; it matters more than anything else. If you think otherwise, just ask **Warren Buffet**.

Sorry for getting on my soapbox, but we all need a dose of self-reflection. We must set the example for our children and grandchildren that character matters!

I hope you will carve out time for this important book.

*(Herb Lipsman is a veteran of the club industry, having managed some of the most prestigious athletic clubs and golf/country clubs in the Houston, Texas market over the past 30 years, most notably The Houstonian Hotel, Club and Spa. Lipsman has served on the Board of Directors for IHRSA. He was appointed by Mayor Bill White to serve as Chairman of the Mayor’s Wellness Council for the City of Houston. Lipsman has also been invited to speak at numerous industry conferences and conventions around the world, including the U.S., UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, Russia and Mexico. Most recently, Lipsman authored and published his book, *Caring (The Sequel): Valuable Insights into Effective Club and Hospitality Management*. Learn more about Herb and order his book at bit.ly/herb-lipsman-caring.)*

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...Norm's Notes

continued from page 4

expressed gratitude for his life and the opportunity to help others."

According to *TMZ*, Simmons' housekeeper called 911 around 10AM on Saturday (July 13). When police arrived, they found Simmons unresponsive and pronounced him dead at the scene. Earlier this year, Simmons revealed that he had been diagnosed with skin cancer. He shared his journey with his fans, detailing the diagnosis and treatment process. Despite the health scare, Simmons remained positive and used his platform to encourage others to take their health seriously. Simmons was a beloved figure in the fitness industry, known for his "Sweatin' to the Oldies" workout videos and his energetic approach to exercise. His death marks the end of an era in the fitness world. **MAY RICHARD SIMMONS REST IN PEACE.**

■ *Trive Capital*, the Dallas-based private equity firm, and *808 Capital Partners* announce their investment into *JF Fitness of North America*, a leading *Crunch Fitness* franchisee serving the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern U.S. Check out *Crunch's Ad* on **Page #2**, as well as the **Press Release** on **Page #3**.

■ **VASA Fitness Builds Out Exec Team, Eyes More Expansion** - *VASA Fitness*, a high-value, low-price gym (HVLP) chain, is bringing on senior leaders, including a former *Planet Fitness* exec as it looks to continue growing in the Midwest and surrounding area, including 6 - 8 new clubs in 2025.

As it looks to the future, the company has onboarded **DAVE McKLVEEN** as Senior Vice President of Human Resources; **MICHELE DODD** as Senior Vice President of Development and General Counsel; and **COREY CHYR**, as Vice President of Construction.

McKlveen has expertise in scaling businesses, having assisted restaurant company *Cava* in scaling from five locations to 280 and *Chipotle* to double in size. Similarly, *Dodd*, the former *Chief Development Officer and In-House Counsel* for *Planet Fitness* franchisees, has worked with *Planet Fitness Corporate* and *Atlantic Street Capital* to hit growth targets. *Chyr* served in Senior-level Construction and Development roles for property management companies *Grand Peaks* and *Red Oak*.

Stay Tuned!

■ This from our friend, **GRETA WAGNER**, EVP at *Chelsea Piers* and *HFA Board*

Member: Chelsea Piers Athletic Club announces the return of founding *Chelsea Piers Aquatics Club (CP-AC)* Head Coach, **Jamie Barone**, to lead the club to national prominence in 2024 - 25. *Barone* previously oversaw the club's prosperity from 2012 through 2021, earning CP-AC recognition as a top 20 program in the United States, and designation of a "Silver Medal Club" in 2016, and "Gold Medal Club" in 2020 by USA Swimming. This week, *Barone* was named to the U.S. Paralympics coaching staff that will support the 33 American swimmers headed to the 2024 Paralympic Games. **Stay Tuned** and **Go Team USA!!!**

■ **How SAFE Are Our Members and Staff in Our Gyms?** This item has been submitted to *Club Insider* by **DR. GARY ALLEN**, who writes:

Have you ever been pretty sure you got sick from exposure in your gym? How would you know? You're in there almost every day, so if you start symptoms on a given day, was it from the gym or from work or from shopping? In your mind, the gym is not to blame, but the airplane is. The same calculations that convinced me and the FAA of the problem on airplanes has convinced me that the risk of infection is similarly high in a crowded cardio, aerobics or biking room at the gym. Not every room in the gym, just the rooms that are crowded with people at elevated exercise levels.

I'm a scientist, not a salesman. I spent most of my career developing new lighting products, technologies and applications. In retirement, I'm committed to spreading the word and spreading air disinfection devices into high-risk settings to help save more than 100,000 deaths/year in the U.S. from infectious diseases, most of them spread through the air. The technology that I've helped develop disinfects the air and surfaces in a gym or in an airplane safely, unobtrusively and affordably. They look like a smoke detector in the ceiling: small, silent, odorless, certified safe.

*Articles in this series that I will provide to *Club Insider* can provide details about the fitness industry and about*

(See Norm's Notes Page 8)

The Health & Fitness Association Helps Highlight Structured Exercise in U.S. House GLP-1 Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Health & Fitness Association (HFA) commends the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee for its proactive steps in considering H.R. 4818, the "Treat and Reduce Obesity Act of 2023." This legislation marks a significant stride toward addressing the obesity epidemic by expanding Medicare coverage for GLP-1 weight loss drugs.

The HFA is proud to share that its dedicated advocacy efforts have been instrumental in crafting language within the bill that directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to initiate a reconsideration of the national coverage determination entitled "Intensive Behavioral Therapy for Obesity." This critical development will enable HFA to collaborate

closely with HHS and share valuable data on clinical guidelines and scientific literature, emphasizing the positive impacts of structured exercise on weight management and chronic disease prevention.

"Our engagement and advocacy have been pivotal in ensuring that the importance of structured exercise is recognized alongside pharmaceutical interventions," said **Mike Goscinski**, HFA's Vice President of Government Affairs. "This legislation represents the first substantial policy conversation around the integration of weight loss drugs with physical activity and lifestyle changes. We are honored to have a seat at the table and to contribute to a comprehensive approach to health and wellness."

In a letter to Chairman Smith



ASSOCIATION

and Ranking Member Neal, submitted to the congressional record, Goscinski highlighted the essential role of structured exercise in maximizing the efficacy of GLP-1 medications.

"Our members play a crucial role in helping patrons live healthier lives, which leads to positive public policy outcomes such as the reduction of overall healthcare costs," said Goscinski. "We urge Congress to view the expansion of Medicare coverage

for GLP-1 drugs not as an isolated solution but as part of a broader, integrated approach to health and wellness. By recognizing the complementary role of lifestyle interventions alongside pharmaceutical treatments, we can help individuals achieve lasting health improvements and support sustained health outcomes. This holistic approach will ultimately reduce the long-term need for medication while ensuring sustained healthy lifestyles."

...Crunch

continued from page 3

thoughtfully executing our defined growth strategy, investing in our key leaders and employees and relentlessly delivering a market-leading experience for our valued members."

As a result of the acquisition, JF Fitness has become one of the five largest Crunch Fitness franchisees with 24 combined gym locations. Trive and 808's investment will also support the company's continued footprint expansion in the Southeastern U.S. via new gym openings and select acquisitions.

Jared Reyes, Managing Director

at Trive Capital, said, "We are thrilled to partner with John and the JF Fitness executive team. John has invested in the people, processes and capabilities that have together driven an impressive track record of successfully launching new gyms. We look forward to supporting the team as they build on this track record and expand the company's club footprint within its attractive Southeastern U.S. markets."

With 2.5 million systemwide members, Crunch Fitness is the fastest growing big box franchised fitness club system in the High-Value/Low-Price ("HVLP") category. Crunch offers a comprehensive gym experience, with high-quality cardio, strength training

and weightlifting equipment, in addition to group fitness, high-intensity interval training, indoor cycling, and yoga classes. Crunch's members also enjoy a range of value-added amenities, such as personal training, fitness assessments, a variety of Relax & Recover services and childcare.

"The HVLP segment remains a compelling sector for investment given the consistent, long-term growth trends we've seen in both the value and broader fitness categories. We are excited to support the JF Fitness team as a leading operator within the fast-growing Crunch system," added **Shravan Thadani**, Partner at Trive Capital.

Chequan Lewis, President of

Crunch Fitness, said, "We're thrilled for Trive and 808's support of the Crunch brand through its investment in JF Fitness. We look forward to the next phase of these clubs and markets, which will inherently drive further rapid growth and expansion with Crunch."

King & Spalding LLP served as legal counsel to Trive. **Roth Jackson Gibbons Condlil PLC** served as legal counsel to JF Fitness. **MOK Advisors** served as financial advisor to Team Roldan.

Check out the **Crunch Ad** on Page #2.

...Norm's Notes

continued from page 7

infectious disease transmission, therein. In the meantime, I want to close this initial article with a single thought for you all: "There are so many ways that you can differentiate your gym with inexpensive actions, not just words, to keep your members safer."

You can reach **Dr. Gary Allen** by email at gra6000@gmail.com.

■ This from our friends at *Athletech News: When It Comes to Functional Training Equipment, Versatility Is Everything* - Roughly 1 in 6 Americans practice yoga, according to new data from the CDC that sheds light on the wellness modality's rising popularity. Yoga has had the greatest rise as a complementary health approach in the past two decades, with women twice as likely as men to participate in the ancient practice, according to a new data brief from the CDC that sheds light on who practices yoga and why. Using data from the 2022

NHIS, a survey conducted throughout the year by the National Center for Health Statistics, authors **NAZIK ELGADDAL** and **JULIE D. WEEKS** found that 16.9% of adults practiced yoga in the 12-month period studied. Participation percentages were highest among women ages 18 - 44, Asian adults (22.5% compared to 19.3% of those white, non-Hispanic) and those with family incomes at 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or more (23.0% vs 10.4% among adults with family incomes less than 200% of the FPL). Women were more than twice as likely to practice yoga as males (23.3% vs. 10.3%, respectively). However, among adults who practiced yoga to restore overall health (80.0%) there wasn't a significant difference observed between men and women.

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

YOU DO, PLEASE TELL 'EM Club Insider SENT YOU! THANK YOU ALL!

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

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 31st 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.)

...Fitness International

continued from page 3

it purchased, at their current rates, including those for personal training. All active XSport Fitness members with multi-club privileges will have access to all LA Fitness locations nationwide. All active single-club members will have the same single-club access they have had with XSport Fitness. LA Fitness has been meeting with all interested XSport

Fitness club-level employees to discuss employment opportunities, and many have already on-boarded.

In keeping with its mission to provide quality fitness experiences to its members, Fitness International plans to invest in and enhance these new locations, rebranding under one of its four brand names.

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

IHRSA is now the HEALTH & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

After two years of discussion and planning, IHRSA has made the next move in our evolution—we've rebranded as the Health & Fitness Association!

Our new name more readily reflects the amazing community of health and fitness leaders that we represent worldwide.

We will be transitioning to the new name during the next several months, so watch our website as we transition our url, social media platforms, newsletters, and more.

healthandfitness.org



...Luke Carlson

continued from page 3

Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Minnesota Vikings. That was really formative for me to be able to work in the field, not in a club, but in strength and conditioning.

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

LC - Well, I started working as a strength and conditioning coach in the NFL early on during undergrad, and I worked there all through undergrad and graduate school. I also ran a large high school strength and conditioning program, a small college football strength program and began personal training at a studio opened by a former strength coach with the Vikings. So, in addition to going to school full-time, I was working around the clock, and it was awesome because it allowed me to immediately apply everything I was learning during my coursework. I was also very connected. By the time I graduated, I had attended strength and conditioning clinics, conferences and events all over the country. And, I hosted a big conference, multiple times.

At that time, I thought I was either going to get a PhD in exercise physiology or be a Head NFL Strength Coach. But, I had a wonderful mentor who was formerly on the cover of your publication. His name is **Jim Flanagan**, and he is like a second father to me. He encouraged me to think about opening a business. And, to that point, I had met one club owner ever, and that was **Joe Cirulli**.

Joe is a legend, but of course, I didn't know he was a legend. I met him because he had a leg press at his facility that we were going to buy for the Vikings. So, I had flown there to use the leg press and didn't pay much attention to meeting Joe. About a year later, I'm 23, and I want to open a business. So, I called Joe and asked

if I could visit. I flew to Florida, and Joe and I go out to lunch. He was so generous with his time. We talked for three hours, and he tells me his rags to riches story that's now been on the cover of magazines (including yours) and told many times. Finally, I'm leaving Gainesville, and he said, 'You got to learn something about business. Read this book.' And, I think the book he told me to read was either *Good to Great* or *Built to Last*. So, I read both of those books by **Jim Collins**.

He also encouraged me to attend an HFA Show (formerly *IHRSA*). So, about two years before I ever opened the first *Discover Strength*, I attended my first *IHRSA* show. It was in Las Vegas. I was in graduate school and had no money, so I flew there and stayed in the cheapest hotel I could, far from the action. And, I didn't know anybody, yet. *IHRSA* is a massive social function, but I didn't know a single human there. But, I was on top of the world and so excited. Looking back, I believe this past year was my 25th show.

Discover Strength

C.I. - That is awesome! I believe you describe how many feel when entering the industry, not to mention attending one of the industry's great shows for the first time. Please take us through the creation of *Discover Strength*.

LC - I'm sitting in Starbucks, and I had just read Jim Collins' *Hedgehog Concept*.

1. What are you passionate about?
2. What drives your economic engine? Meaning, it doesn't matter if you're passionate about it if you can't also make money.
3. What can you be the best in the world at?

Jim Collins would go on to say that it's not a rhetorical question. If you can't be number one or number two in the category, you need to narrow the scope of the category.

Well, as I'm reading that book, I



Specialized Strength Training at Discover Strength

had just come back from visiting the most profitable health club in the world, which was Joe Cirulli's *Gainesville Health and Fitness*. And, being in Minnesota, I'm in the backyard of *Life Time Fitness*. So, at the time, I thought, 'Well, I can't be the best health club in the world. I just saw the best health club in the world.' Further, I wasn't passionate about all things for health clubs. I'm not passionate about childcare centers and cafes and massive locker rooms. What I am passionate about is strength training.

So, this was the genesis of our strategic niche: *Personalized Strength Training*. We focus on strength training, one-to-one or small groups, and small group to us is a three-to-one ratio. I had just read a research paper that said the results people get from strength training diminishes when supervision goes beyond a three-to-one ratio. So, if you have one instructor watching ten people work out, they do get good results. But, if it goes three-to-one or under, the results were even better. And, that's kind of what we had done in the NFL. I thought, 'Well, I want to do the same thing.' So, that's where our concept came from: We're going to do one-on-one or small group for 30 minutes. Again, for us, small group is a three-to-one ratio, whereas for the rest of the industry, it can be 15:1.

We opened our first location in 2006 with about 1,600 square feet. By 2012, we were doing a thousand dollars per square-foot there. I didn't know that we were doing well. I had people reaching out to me saying our numbers could not be true.

C.I. - Thom Plummer would be drooling at those numbers! (laughing)

LC - I went to Thom's events, and I found out

we were doing better than the examples he was sharing. I just had no idea how well we were doing. I am obsessed with learning, so I would go to every HFA Show, and I'd go to the old *IHRSA Profitability Conference*. I'd go to anything and everything. My assumption, and I believe a healthy way to approach it, was that everyone else is doing better than we were. So, I would be willing to learn from anyone. I'd hear people speak and think, 'God, they're great! I want to be on that level.' Of course, I had no idea that we were, from a financial standpoint, far ahead of that level. I think what fostered or fueled my learning is the idea that there's so much out there that can be borrowed and adapted. There are so many people to learn from.

C.I. - Please describe a typical facility, and then, please describe your model and its effectiveness.

LC - Today, it's around 2,000 square feet. One might be 1,800, another 2,200, but 2,000 is the average. It's a really high-end build-out: the right wall coverings, expensive flooring, no locker rooms. We have one changing room and one bathroom with wonderful finishes. We're attempting to be the *Ritz Carlton* experience of our industry, but that has more to do with customer service than it does with the build-outs. The equipment is all high-end, medical-grade. It's a combination of *MedX*, and then, one of *MedX* engineers spun off and created a company called *Imagine Strength*. They're a new startup that's supplying us. Then, we do a little bit of *Nautilus* and *Hammer Strength*. I'm heavily influenced by **Arthur Jones** (inventor of *Nautilus* and *MedX*), so all of our equipment comes from his legacy.

(See **Luke Carlson** Page 12)



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venmo

...Luke Carlson

continued from page 10

Our average machine costs **\$10,000** when the average machine in the industry costs **\$4,000 to \$6,000**, so we're investing heavily in equipment.

I have health club colleagues ask me all the time, 'Wait, you guys focus on strength training and use machines? I thought it's supposed to be racks and barbells.' Well, that's never been our thing. We primarily use machines, and the workout is 30 minutes. Each facility's *Exercise Physiologists* have to have an undergraduate degree in exercise science and be certified by the *American College of Sports Medicine*. They are highly educated and learning more, reading scientific journal articles every week. That is our *Brand Promise*. There may be better personal trainers out there, but there's not going to be higher-educated personal trainers. They wear a shirt and tie every day (or the equivalent) when they come to work. So, when you walk in the door, they're going to be dressed professionally.

C.I. - I immediately noticed that in your photos. **LC** - Correct. And, in a 30-minute session, we're going to brutalize you. We're going to select 10 to 12 strength training exercises based on who you are. And, the commonalities are intense; we're going for muscle failure. It is safe, though, meaning no one's going to get injured during our workout. Everything's going to be performed in a slow movement. You're lifting the weight slow and lowering the weight slow. We're going to be obsessive around joint function and biomechanics to make sure that you can train incredibly hard but also incredibly safely. That allows us to appeal to a 38-year-old. It allows us to appeal to 92-year-olds. The target market is about a 55-year-old male or female. And, the price point is up there. For a 30-minute workout, we're close to **\$60 to \$70**, depending on

the market. Our customer loves it because they don't want to spend more than 30 minutes working out. They definitely don't want a 90-minute workout. They want to be in and out. They also want to get their ass just absolutely kicked, so that's the focus. They strength train with us twice per week, and that's it. We strenuously discourage training three times per week. It's twice per week, and course, most of our customers jump into another boutique or another studio club membership or have a membership to a Life Time Fitness or someone else to perform some cardio or take advantage of additional amenities.

C.I. - Wow, that is something else. So, what about recovery in this model, especially since you're talking about intentionally reaching muscle failure? You're going really hard for those 30 minutes. How do you guys handle recovery, or what do you tell them to do to recover?

LC - Simple. I tell them they should sleep and avoid exercise.

C.I. - Excellent. What do you call your customers? Do you call them 'members'?

How many does a typical facility serve?

LC - We call them 'clients,' and a typical studio will have 200 to 400 clients.

C.I. - What do you consider the keys to ensuring effectiveness at each facility?

LC - First are systems and processes. A customer won't walk into a Discover Strength and not be greeted in a really specific, nuanced way. We utilize *Learning Management System (LMS)* content to make sure that every aspect of that greeting is the same across all locations. But, it affects every aspect of the experience. For example, when the client is at the point of momentary muscle failure, what does the exercise physiologist do at the point? There are hundreds of pages of processes and hours of LMS content for our team to utilize.

Next is our meeting cadence. We



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have a cadence of meetings to ensure our general managers and exercise physiologists are staying on the same page with the delivery of the Discover Strength experience. And, we have an annual franchise convention that we call the *Discover Strength Summit*. Because all we do is strength training, all of our intellectual energy can be focused in this one area. We intentionally put all of our eggs in one basket, and then, we watch that basket.

C.I. - All in all, what do you consider your key market differentiators?

LC - First, we're telling you we want you in and out in 30 minutes, and we only want you to come twice per week. That's different than **Bahram Akradi's** Life Time Fitness. His message is, 'We want you to be here, drop your kids off at childcare, take a yoga class, eat some food at the café, buy some apparel, and sit by the pool.' We want efficiency.

Second is what we call *Expert-educated Trainers*. Our whole industry has been built on trainers who can build relationships, who may be good at selling, maybe who are passionate about fitness. They aren't necessarily knowledgeable.

From the first day we opened, we said we want to be the *Mayo Clinic of Fitness*, so our trainers have to be exercise physiologists; they have to be experts. They may not be good looking, they may not be muscular, they may not be high energy --oftentimes, they are those things, though-- but our brand promise is they're going to be experts at the top of their field. There's not a day that goes by that we don't have a health club operator, health club owner, NFL Strength Conditioning Coach reach out to us and ask, 'What does the research

currently say about this or that? Fill me in.'

Finally, is being Evidence-based. This just means everything we do is going to be based on the preponderance of scientific research. We're never going to follow; we're never going to look at a trend. We're never going to go to a convention and say, 'This is what the other clubs are doing.' We are only going to look at the scientific research and bring that scientific research to what we're trying with the clients.

Those are the three things that make us different from our competitors.

C.I. - How many locations are now open across how many states?

LC - We have 20 open right now and a total of 48 in development across eleven states; many of these are company-owned, and many of these are franchise locations.

C.I. - You now operate as a franchise model. Please tell us about that. And, where can our readers go to learn more?

LC - We went all in on franchising in 2019. We continue to grow with company-owned locations and franchise locations. You can learn more about our franchise at www.discoverstrengthfranchise.com.

C.I. - Before we switch gears, is there anything else you'd like to add about Discover Strength?

LC - The only other thing is our commitment has been to be what we've always said is the Nordstrom or the Ritz Carlton of our industry. Right now, it's a battle between Tesla and us as the highest Net Promoter Score (NPS) in any industry in the world. We love fitness, but we really want to be the best customer service company in the

(See Luke Carlson Page 13)



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...Luke Carlson

continued from page 12

world. We use the word customer service and hospitality interchangeably, but that's where our real passion is. Of course, NPS measures how a company delivers on a brand promise, but I think winning over the hearts of a customer is at the core of that.

Sharing Knowledge

C.I. - Like all the greats we have interviewed over the years, they have a passion towards giving back in terms of sharing their knowledge. You fit that bill perfectly. To start, please tell us about your public speaking.

LC - I started speaking about 15 years ago. You know how it always works... Someone asks if you can speak about a particular topic, whether it's strength training or something else. Someone in that audience hears you speak, and they ask, 'Can you come speak at this event?' The same thing happens at the next event, and it becomes like a web. It has spiraled from there. Last week, I was in San Francisco, speaking on how to lead a firm through a storm. Yesterday, I flew back from Cabo where I was at Nobu speaking to a collection of marine industry companies at their annual leadership event. I'm home for a few days, then early next

week I fly to Lisbon, Portugal to speak at an exercise science conference. I do most of my speaking on the business approach and strategy that Discover Strength is taking and how you can apply it to your business. But, I still give a lot of presentations on exercise. In a given year, I'll probably be on a plane a minimum of 50 times speaking somewhere.

C.I. - Do you craft a message specific to each organization or is it more generic? Why do you select the approach that you use?

LC - I have five to six topics that I speak on most often, but these topics change based on the audience, the industry, and mostly, how I'm currently thinking about business, leadership and management. My one rule is that I simply won't speak about "ideas." Everything I speak on are things I'm actually doing in our business.

C.I. - You also serve as a Board Member for the *Health and Fitness Association* (formerly *IHRSA*). First of all, thank you for your service. Second, please tell us about that experience so far.

LC - In general, serving on the Board is rewarding, exciting and fulfilling. I think anybody who has ever served on the Board would say that. To be around a group of people who care so much about the industry,

an industry that matters and being around leaders of that industry that really care is awesome. However, I feel like my Board service has been during just about the most interesting time period you could ever serve on the Board. When I joined the Board, we were a month out from the pandemic where the convention was canceled, our CEO was terminated, and we had a Board Chair step down. We needed to go out and hire a new CEO, as well as get back to having live events, repairing relationships with vendors. Then, we created a new strategy and went through a rebrand. So, I think I've lived through the most interesting Board term one can possibly imagine.

As I came on, everyone that was on the Board agreed; this was not normal. We were seeing things we hadn't seen before. So, I'll use the same adjectives again. It has been exciting. It has been rewarding. And, it has been a learning experience that has been fulfilling. I've thoroughly enjoyed all of it, and I love where we're at now, relative to one year ago, relative to three years ago, for sure.

C.I. - Amen to that! Now that things are

seemingly back to normal, what would you say to anyone considering Board service?

LC - I'm biased, but I would highly encourage it. We're looking for unique perspectives. We're looking for people with

unique backgrounds. I think the Board is loaded with talented people. I can't speak to five years ago, or 10 years ago, or 15 years ago. The people that are applying for Board service now and who are on the Board now, I look left and right at meetings, and it's nothing but incredibly talented, incredibly committed people. So, I would highly encourage it. I think it's rewarding, but I would say that shouldn't be the mentality. The one lookout is you shouldn't join the Board for the recognition. You shouldn't look at it as a career milestone. You shouldn't look at it as a way to serve your ego. You should look at it as what it is, which is service. You should look at it as a responsibility. You should look at it as rolling up your sleeves and doing the work.

Now, by doing the work, I don't mean you're actually in the trenches, executing operationally... That's what the incredible HFA staff is for, not the Board. And, it's not about standing on stage during a convention and being applauded by colleagues. No, it's about rolling up your sleeves and doing the work to make sure the Association and the industry is in a healthy place moving forward.

C.I. - Well said. Can you share anything about the renaming and rebranding process?

LC - I was part of the small team that got

(See Luke Carlson Page 14)

Discover Strength and Minnesota Distance Elite Celebrate Partnership Success as Dakotah Lindwurm Heads to the Paris Olympics

ST. LOUIS PARK, MN - *Discover Strength* is proud to celebrate the ongoing success of its partnership with the *Minnesota Distance Elite (MDE) Running Training Group*. This collaboration has already led to remarkable achievements, including MDE runner **Dakotah Lindwurm** qualifying for the *Paris Olympics* this summer.

The MDE is a renowned organization dedicated to developing top-tier distance runners. Led by a team of experienced coaches and trainers, MDE has garnered a reputation for nurturing

talent, achieving remarkable results and fostering a supportive and collaborative training environment. *Discover Strength's* support has further empowered MDE to enhance its training programs and produce exceptional athletes.

"Discover Strength is honored to support the Minnesota Distance Elite Running Training Group," said **Luke Carlson**, CEO of *Discover Strength*. "We believe that the power of strength training optimizes athletic performance and prevents injuries. Witnessing Dakotah

Lindwurm's journey to the Olympics has been incredibly rewarding, and we are confident that our partnership will continue to drive success for all MDE athletes."

This successful partnership represents a significant milestone for both *Discover Strength* and the Minnesota Distance Elite Running Training Group. With their shared commitment to excellence and performance, this collaboration promises to continue propelling MDE athletes to new achievements on the national and international running stage, mirroring the success of MDE runners like Dakotah.

...Luke Carlson

continued from page 13

together off-site and just talked about strategy, the Association and the name needing to reflect that. It was really fun to be part of that. Change is always hard right? And, for the people who created something, it's tough to have what you've created go through a significant change. But, I also think that, in this case, the change was necessary. And, I think it was essential when we are really focused on having a seat at the table in Washington, D.C. At the Federal level, at the State level, advocacy becomes a priority. There needs to be clarity as to what our Association is about when **Liz Clark** and her team is meeting with a member of Congress at a fly-in or another event.

Previously, we would sit down with these folks and say, 'We're *IHRSA*... the *International Health, Racquet and Sports Club Association*...' We'd get a blank stare. Now, we can say we are the *Health and Fitness Association*. It just adds clarity, and when you're speaking to Congresspeople, Senators and their staffs, clarity wins. You have to be clear about who you are. *IHRSA* was a powerful brand and a powerful name to people who are within the industry, but we're trying to affect change with people who are outside of the industry.

C.I. - Congratulations on your appointment as Vice Chair of the HFA Board! Please tell us about that.

LC - Thank you. I'm very excited to work closely with *Chair, Chris Smith*, and the rest of the Board.

The Future

C.I. - You are still young and have achieved much! What is next on the horizon for you? *Discover Strength*? The industry at large? **LC** - I want to focus on leading *Discover Strength*. I feel I have a tremendous responsibility to lead the organization, to continue to open locations, to continue to open franchise locations, to continue to help our franchisees become incredibly financially successful. All of that centers

around us delivering a distinctive client experience and an unbelievable employment experience for our exercise physiologists. So, that is my personal passion; that is my professional passion. We're going to continue growth in terms of franchise locations, growth in terms of owned locations and what's going on in a *Discover Strength* location. It's not going to change. Those things are going to stay the same, but we aim for growth consistency and delivery experience.

In terms of the industry, we have a few trends going on. I think we're going to continue to see more consolidation, so when we see a merger between brands like *Anytime Fitness* and *Orangetheory Fitness*, that's a big deal. These are massive mergers that mimic, I think, what we see in other industries. We're not behind, but specialization is what we have seen over the last ten years. We've seen that in medicine. We've seen it in retail. And, every other conceivable category. So, now, people go to one place for yoga, another place for Pilates, somewhere else for bootcamp. That is specialization. It finally came to our industry, right? And, the industry was surprised by it. This is a normal thing that occurs in every industry. I think we're going to continue to see specialization where you have to decide what you really want to be known for and differentiate yourself from the rest of the marketplace.

Finally, I think we're going to see more and more pressure for operators to adopt the *Exercise IS Medicine* approach. There's been so much discussion over a 20-year period without much progress around how we position our industry as part of the healthcare continuum. How do we play a bigger role in prevention? I think we're going to see more significant change there in the next five years than we've seen in the previous 20 years.

So, that's what I see in the future. But, I love the **Jeff Bezos** question. What's on the horizon in the industry is never the important question. The important question is what's going on right now that's not going to change over the next ten years? Because the answer to that question is what we can build a business around. What's not

going to change is we need relationships with people. We need expertise. We need people to actually push us. We need professionals to push us. We're going to care about elevated customer experience. We're going to care about being connected to a brand that represents who we are as human beings. These are the things that aren't about to change. I think we can continue to build our confidence around those things.

However, the thing I am most excited about, personally and professionally, is the team that I get to work with each day. We have a wonderful team of senior leaders at *Discover Strength*. We have great managers across the system. We have great franchisees. Jim Collins' calls it *'First Who... Then What'*? So, as much as I'm interested in our facilities, our build-outs, our equipment and all of that, the 'who' is much more exciting, and I'm really excited about our team of senior leaders, our team managers, our exercise physiologists, across the system. I'm really excited about the people.

C.I. - Who are some of those key folks (name, job title, tenure if possible)?

LC - My senior leadership team includes:

David Gschneidner, VP of Operations (8 years);

Hannah Johnson, VP of Sales and Marketing (and I think the preeminent marketing thought leader in our industry - 14 years);

Jessica Medvedev, VP of Finance (and truly one of the most strategic financial leaders in any industry - 6 years); and,

Scott Briemhorst, VP of Franchise Development (2 years).

I also work incredibly closely with my *Chief of Staff*, **Heather Lizaola**, who serves as an extension of me and our leadership team.

C.I. - To close, what lesson and key pieces of advice do you have for our readers, whether new to the industry or long-time veterans?

LC - Be obsessed with learning. There is

a great **Howard Schultz** (long-time CEO of *Starbucks*) quote. We used to think that, if you are passionate about something, you'll go learn more about it. We found it's actually inverted. It's not that passion leads to learning; it's that learning fuels passion. The more they taught a barista about the coffee bean, the more excited he got about *Starbucks* coffee. So, be obsessed with learning. The more you're committed to learning, the more you're going to fuel your passion for every aspect of your business.

Think about attending an HFA Convention or another industry convention. Just continue to fuel your passion and performance by putting yourself in a learning environment.

Next, learn inside and outside of the industry. Related to that, foster relationships with people in our industry. There are so many role models, so many colleagues you can learn from and who are willing to share. That's one of the things I've appreciated about our industry. I'm sure it exists in other industries, but it's definitely a powerful component of my growth in this industry.

• • •

Thank you to **Luke Carlson** for this incredible interview, as well as his service to our industry. With leaders like him at the helm, we know this industry will continue to ascend to great heights!

(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.)



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Overcoming Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Personal Trainers in 2024

By: **Gary Polic**

As we all know, it is a never-ending battle to recruit and retain high-quality Personal Trainers in our industry. With that said, we at *Polic Consultants Group, LLC* would like to refer to our *Personal Training Group Specialist* **Victor "VMan" Verhage** once again.

VMan is internationally recognized as a Personal Training Educator and Fitness Management Systems Expert. He is an experienced Fitness Solutions Specialist with a demonstrated 28-year history working in the fitness, health and wellness industry. Skilled in maximizing usage, profitability and member traffic in the Personal Training, Small Group Training and Group Fitness areas and spaces.

Let us dive into a Q&A with VMan to discuss solutions to implement today! Enjoy the read!

Polic Consultants Group (PCG): What are the primary challenges in finding high-quality personal trainers?

Victor "VMan" Verhage (VMan): Finding high-quality personal trainers can be daunting due to several factors. Just know it is an area you must be paying close attention to:

- 1. Talent Shortage:** There is often a limited pool of truly exceptional trainers who possess both the technical skills and the interpersonal abilities needed.
- 2. High Demand:** With the growing popularity of fitness and wellness, the demand for top trainers exceeds the supply.
- 3. Cultural Fit:** It is crucial to find trainers who not only have the right skills but also fit well within your gym's culture and values.
- 4. Competition:** Other gyms and fitness centers are also vying for the same top talent, making the hiring process highly competitive.

Solution: Develop a robust talent pipeline by partnering with certification programs



Victor "VMan" Verhage



Gary Polic

and fitness schools. Attending industry conferences and networking events to identify potential candidates. Additionally, offer internships and mentoring programs to cultivate relationships with emerging trainers.

PCG: How can fitness centers attract top talent in such a competitive market?

VMan: Attracting top talent requires a multi-faceted approach, but most important is the people behind each of the following items:

(See **Gary Polic** Page 16)

Enhancing Positive Energy: Harnessing Feng Shui in Health Club Design

By: Bruce Carter

In the pursuit of holistic wellness, creating a harmonious and inspiring environment goes beyond physical fitness equipment and amenities. *Feng Shui*, an ancient Chinese practice centered around energy flow and spatial arrangement, offers valuable principles for cultivating positive energy within health club spaces. One may question the concept of *Feng Shui*, but it can be assumed that anything around for thousands of years must have some meaningful value, especially since clubs are so much about energy.

Here is how integrating *Feng Shui* principles into health club design can enhance member experiences, promote wellbeing and foster a sense of balance and positivity:

■ First is understanding *Feng Shui* and its effect on balancing energy for optimal wellbeing. At its core, *Feng Shui* seeks to

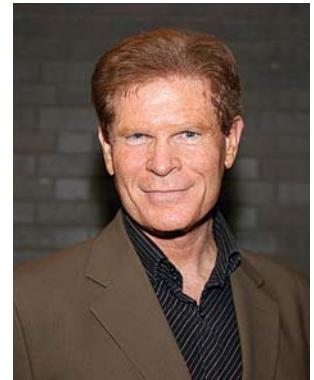
harmonize the flow of *Qi* (life force energy) in a space to promote health, prosperity and harmony. The term *Feng Shui* means, literally, "wind-water" or fluid. Clubs should consider the flows of good or bad energy and abundant or lacking energy. Therefore, applying principles such as proper orientation, clutter management and the strategic placement of elements, health clubs can create environments that feel inviting, balanced and energetically supportive to members.

■ The second aspect is the optimal layout and spatial arrangement. The layout of a health club plays a crucial role in influencing the energy flow and member experience. According to *Feng Shui*, clear pathways and unobstructed entrances allow *Qi* to flow smoothly throughout the space, promoting a sense of openness and vitality. This is key in entering, then flowing from one space to another as well and flowing through a space. For example, having a

group exercise room down a hall, instead of being positioned with other spaces, would negatively affect the flow of energy. The same would hold true with equipment layout. Clear pathways through equipment areas are important instead of having to "zig-zag" to get from one area to another. If possible, designing spaces with rounded edges and avoiding sharp corners helps to soften the energy and create a more welcoming atmosphere.

■ The third is incorporating natural elements and materials to bring nature indoors. It is interesting that there is a contemporary term for this aspect, which is *Biophilia*. This means humans have a deeply engrained love of nature, which is an intuitive and natural drive imprinted into our DNA.

Overall, there are five elements that can be integrated to evoke desired energy levels or evoking a sense of tranquility and connection with nature,



Bruce Carter

enhancing the overall wellbeing of members. The five elements of *Feng shui* are earth, metal, wind, water and fire. Wood, stone and plants are strongly suggested to

(See **Bruce Carter** Page 17)

...Gary Polic

continued from page 15

1. Competitive Compensation: Offer competitive salaries, benefits and performance-based incentives.

2. Professional Development: Provide ongoing training and development opportunities to help trainers enhance their skills and advance their careers.

3. Positive Work Environment: Foster a supportive, inclusive and motivating workplace culture.

4. Brand Reputation: Build a strong brand reputation in the industry, highlighting success stories and unique selling points.

Solution: Create a compelling employer brand by highlighting your gym's achievements, community involvement and testimonials from satisfied trainers. Use social media and other marketing channels to promote your gym as a great place to work. Offer unique benefits like flexible schedules, wellness programs and opportunities for professional growth.

PCG: What are the key challenges in hiring the right personal trainers?

VMan: Hiring the right personal trainers involves several challenges. Here are my top picks:

1. Evaluating Skills: Assessing both technical expertise and soft skills during the hiring process.

2. Background Checks: Ensuring trainers have credible certifications and clean professional histories.

3. Cultural Alignment: Finding trainers who align with your gym's mission, values and client expectations.

4. Timely Hiring: Filling vacancies quickly without compromising on quality.

Solution: Implement a comprehensive hiring process that includes practical assessments, personality tests and thorough background checks. Use behavioral interview techniques to gauge cultural fit and soft skills. Streamline your hiring process to reduce time-to-hire while maintaining rigorous standards.

PCG: How can fitness centers retain high-quality personal trainers?

VMan: Retaining top trainers requires ongoing effort and strategic initiatives. Here are a few I am currently using:

1. Career Advancement: Provide clear career paths and opportunities for promotion.

2. Recognition and Rewards: Regularly recognize and reward outstanding performance.

3. Work-Life Balance: Support a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout.

4. Feedback and Communication: Maintain open lines of communication and actively seek feedback from trainers.

Solution: Develop a retention strategy that includes regular check-ins, performance reviews and personalized career development plans. Offer competitive benefits packages, including health insurance, retirement plans and wellness rewards. Create a positive work environment where trainers feel valued and supported.

PCG: What creative and original solutions can be implemented to solve these problems? **VMan:** Here are six methods I am using for that:

1. Collaborative Hiring Practices: Involve existing top trainers in the hiring process to ensure new hires meet high standards and fit well with the team.

2. Customized Onboarding: Design an immersive onboarding experience that acclimates new trainers to your gym's culture, values and processes.

3. Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship programs where seasoned trainers guide and support newer hires.

4. Innovative Training: Use virtual reality or other advanced technologies for training and development sessions to keep trainers engaged and updated.

5. Community Building: Foster a sense of community among trainers through team-building activities, social events and collaborative projects.

6. Flexible Work Arrangements: Offer flexible work hours and remote training options to accommodate trainers' diverse needs and preferences.

Solution: By implementing these creative solutions, fitness centers and gyms can differentiate themselves from competitors, attract top talent and build a loyal, high-performing team of personal trainers. Investing in your trainers' growth and wellbeing not only enhances retention but also contributes to the overall success and reputation of your fitness center.

In Conclusion: None of the above is easy, in my experience, it is always the people placed in the positions of leadership that attract high quality, committed fitness professionals or they attract mirror images of themselves. There's great growth or there is not. If you think you are the real leader, look over your shoulder and see if anyone is following you, then you will know.

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To Strengthen Your Membership, Strengthen Your Strength Training

By: **Cathy Spencer Browning**

If we could sell health and fitness in a magic pill --and I'm not the first to suggest this, of course-- everyone would take it. But, alas, we don't. What we are selling, exercise, is potentially uncomfortable, inconvenient, and for many, intimidating. And, this "gymtimidation" is likely most prevalent when it comes to strength training.

Maybe that's because, years ago, strength training was bodybuilding. It was a means to an end, and that end was to build muscle mass and sculpt the body. It was basically about aesthetics.

But, here's the truth: strength training *is* a magic pill. One that we all, 100% of us, need to swallow. So, it's up to us in the fitness business to make it appealing and approachable for the largest possible population. The question is: Is strength training *strengthening* your facility, your group fitness and your members?

Strength Training 101

Versus the early days of body building, today we know strength training does so much more than build biceps. In fact, it's one of the best things we can do for our overall health. And, while you're probably aware of its benefits, let's take a refresher on why strength training is essential:

Stronger Muscles: As we get older, our

muscles naturally start to lose their strength and size. In fact, we can lose up to 8% of our muscle mass every decade! And, there's a villain called *sarcopenia* that can make this muscle loss even worse, especially for folks over 60. It can make daily tasks harder, lead to falls and fractures and even make it tough to stay independent. Strength training is the ultimate weapon against sarcopenia and age-related muscle loss.

Improved Bone Density: Bones adapt to the loads placed upon them. Engaging in strength training subjects the bones to mechanical stress, accelerating the remodeling of bone to make them denser and stronger.

Weight Management: Strength training helps us manage our weight, because among many things, muscle tissue is metabolically active, meaning it requires more energy (calories) to maintain compared to fat tissue. By increasing muscle mass through strength training, we elevate our *Basal Metabolic Rate*. Strength training also improves insulin sensitivity, allowing the body to use glucose more effectively for energy rather than storing it as fat. This helps regulate blood sugar levels and reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Improved Joint Health: Or, as I would say in Australian, "less niggles!" We all want to feel better in our bodies, which generally means less aches and pains.

Strength training can significantly improve joint health. Simply, strong muscles surrounding a joint provide better support and protection and simultaneously stimulate the circulation of synovial fluid, which helps lubricate the joints, improve their function and deliver essential nutrients to the cartilage, promoting joint health and repair.

Improved Mental Health: Lifting weights for stronger mental wellbeing? YES! Strength training triggers the release of endorphins, the brain's natural pain relievers and mood enhancers, leading to feelings of euphoria and overall wellbeing, often known as the "runner's high." And, more simply, the sense of achievement from lifting heavier weights or conquering challenging workouts can be empowering, fostering a more positive self-image.

Improved Cardiovascular Health: It might seem counterintuitive that strength training contributes to improved cardiovascular health because, well, we all think it's "cardio" that does that. But, there are some key links between strength training and cardiovascular health. By strengthening the heart and improving blood flow, strength training can reduce the workload on the heart and lower blood pressure levels, a significant influencer of heart disease. It also increases levels of HDL "good" cholesterol and decreases levels of LDL "bad" cholesterol, improving overall cholesterol profiles and reducing the risk of



Cathy Spencer Browning

heart disease.

Strength training has been shown to reduce markers of inflammation in the body, which can help protect against heart disease and other inflammatory conditions. And, we have already covered weight management, reducing the risk of obesity, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Why Isn't Everyone Doing It?

With a list like that, everyone should be strength training, right? But, too many people rank lifting in the weight room right up there with public speaking, which is consistently a number one fear. Here are a (See **Cathy Spencer Browning** Page 18)

...Bruce Carter

continued from page 16

be part of any club design, believed to bring grounding energy and vitality to a space. Metal in the form of equipment is an obvious part of the offering. Water features are always a positive feature to have in a club, and technological advancements allow for enclosed units that look and sound great but do not require plumbing. Large fans can bring a soothing subtle energy (wind) to workout areas.

Consider light to be the "fire," having an impact on the energy of a space. It should be noted that the flow of energy from the five elements can be positive or negative. Natural plants can be positive. Natural plants not taken care of and doing poorly can create a negative energy flow. The same is true of lighting. Too much or too little can have a negative impact. This has to do with the lumens (level of brightness) and with different levels and color temperatures known as the Kelvin scale or "K." As a guide, the old 100-watt bulb is equal to 1,600 lumens. Too bright of white lighting, such as 5000K - 7000K can actually drain a space of energy with

overwhelming vibrations; therefore, 3000K - 4000K is usually good for clubs. Yet, too little light (amount of lumens) in an exercise space won't support the energy flows. To get lighting with just the right flow of energy, it is best to install all lighting in a club with dimmers. This will allow for the necessary adjustments to achieve desired energy flows, whether it be for workout areas or soothing soft energy for locker areas or classes such as yoga. Lobbies should have a balance of lighting energy. Natural light is always welcomed in a space. However, having large windows and too bright of light shining in should be mitigated with shades, window tint or film.

Color psychology plays a significant role in Feng Shui, as different colors are associated with specific energies and emotions. For instance, soothing blues and greens can promote relaxation and calmness in yoga or meditation areas, while accents of vibrant reds, yellows and oranges may energize and invigorate fitness zones. Energy colors work best when they are used as accents contrasting with larger amounts of whites, light greys and beiges. By strategically selecting colors based on the intended purpose of each space, health

clubs can evoke desired emotions and enhance member experiences.

Balance is a fundamental principle in Feng Shui design. Achieving a balance of yin (passive) and yang (active) energies ensures that spaces feel harmonious and supportive to both relaxation and physical activity. For example, balancing high-energy areas like cardio zones with quiet retreats for stretching or meditation creates a diverse environment that caters to various members' needs and preferences. So, if a club has a stretching area, different colors, lighting and materials such as wood on the walls would add to the desirability of this area.

With increased emphasis on the mind, body and spiritual components

of fitness clubs, integrating Feng Shui principles into health club design offers a holistic approach to enhancing member experiences and promoting positive energy. By aligning spatial arrangements, natural elements, color schemes and energy flow with Feng Shui principles, clubs can create environments that support physical fitness, mental wellbeing, and emotional balance. Embracing these ancient practices not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of a health club but also fosters a deeper connection between members, staff and the space itself.

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

Make It Fun!

...Cathy Spencer Browning

continued from page 17

few reasons why people might be avoiding your weight room:

Intimidation: Experienced lifters, complex machines and even social anxiety can keep people from the "public" space of your weight room. The idea of having to interact with others or the idea of feeling judged by fellow gym-goers can be overwhelming.

Fear of Injury: Many are fearful of getting injured. Concerns about using improper form, lifting too heavy or a lack of knowledge about proper strength training techniques, programming and progression can lead to fear of not knowing what to do or how to start.

Appearance: This is two-fold. First, consider the 360-degree mirrors. Everywhere you look, you see yourself, playing into body image concerns. Second, some individuals worry that lifting weights will make them look bulky or masculine, which may not align with their desired physique.

Difficulty: Some avoid strength training simply because of perceived effort, i.e.,

"this is hard!" Strength training is often associated with intense work, and that fear of discomfort or pushing oneself beyond perceived limits can deter individuals from even giving it a try.

Cost: A personal trainer could certainly help with all of these things, but it comes at an additional expense.

Strength in a Safe Place

Back to the original topic: Offering strength training that strengthens your people, programs and facility, giving 100% of your members a "safe place" to lift weights. You need a weight room alternative: Your group fitness room.

But here's the thing: If you want to attract everyone (men and women, all ages, athletes, new movers and everyone in between), you can't do it with pink dumbbells, bands and body sculpt classes. You have to offer a universally appealing, real and authentic solution for lifting weights. Not an aerobics class, a strength training class. A well-designed strength training workout on your schedule can be the solution to servicing large amounts of members and debunking all the previous excuses...

It can reduce intimidation: Think of it as safety in numbers. You can blend in with the crowd, so to speak. And, when everyone is following the instructor, and everyone is doing the same thing, the fear of "not doing the right thing" is massively reduced.

It can calm fear of injury: A well-trained instructor can be the guiding force a participant needs, customizing their coaching, telling them exactly what to do when and even WHY.

It's not about appearance: Again, a two-fold advantage: A strategic group fitness room isn't wall-to-wall mirrors. And, to battle the "bulky" worries, a strength training workout designed for group fitness isn't about lifting maximum weight. The weights are a little lighter, making it safer and more effective for the environment but without sacrificing the amazing benefits of lifting.

It diminishes the difficulty: One of the unsung heroes of strength training to music is that it creates disassociation from the discomfort of strength training, making it much more palatable and "stick-with-it-able."

...all at no cost! Group fitness is generally

included as part of the membership, so no added cost!

■ ■ ■

My "magic pill" for nearly 20 years has been Group Power, our strength training solution at MOSSA. It's the most popular program in clubs across the globe and on our on-demand platform, proving that (aside from the quality of the program, wink-wink!) a group fitness program anchored in strength training can be hugely popular. A pill everyone can swallow. Group Power is designed to be universally appealing in terms of age, gender and experience. It is periodized from workout to workout to create ongoing challenge for ongoing change.

If your group fitness needs a change, your members need a little magic, reach out to see Group Power in action and to talk to use about strengthening strength training in your club. Learn more at: mossa.net/workouts/group-power.

(Cathy Spencer Browning is the VP of Training & Programming for MOSSA. Cathy can be reached by phone at 770-989-4700 or email at cathy@mossa.net.)

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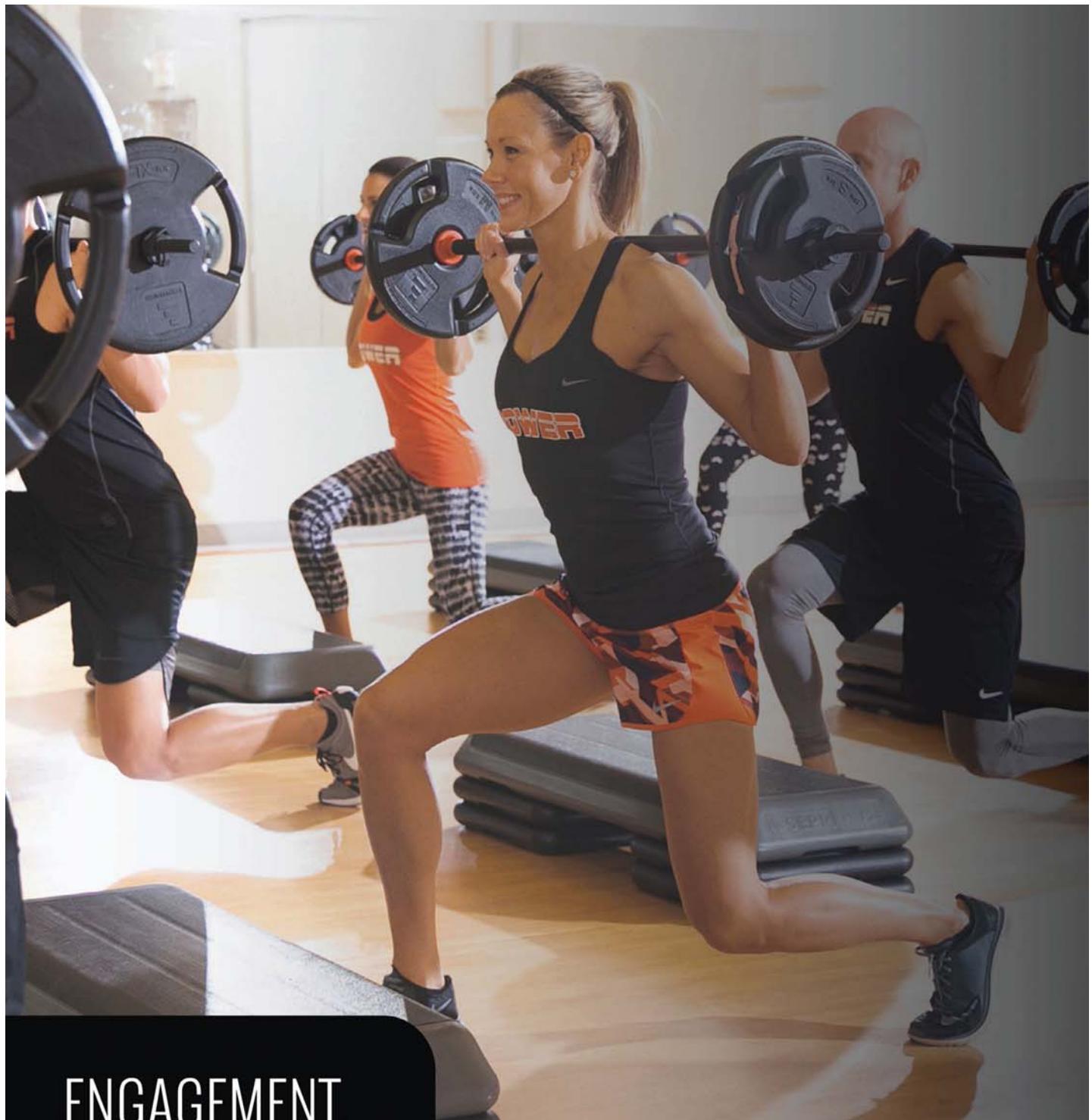


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