

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

From Learning to Leadership: *Inside the Leadership Academy powered by REX*



AUGUST 2026

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CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

From Learning to Leadership: *Inside the Leadership Academy powered by REX*

By: **REX Roundtables**

The health and fitness industry has no shortage of talented operators. Every day, capable people are promoted because they understand the business, connect with members and get results. But, the move from doing the work well to leading other people well is not automatic. A department head, general manager or future owner must learn how to build culture, communicate expectations, understand the numbers, develop people and make decisions that move an organization forward.

The *Leadership Academy powered by REX* was created for that reality. REX launched the leadership academy in 2025 to bring a dedicated, industry-specific leadership development experience back to the market after *the IHRSA Institute* ended. The inaugural leadership academy sold out, confirming that club and studio operators were looking for more than another conference. They wanted an environment built for serious growth.

That momentum continued July 21 - 23, 2026, when approximately 70 regional managers, club managers, department heads and aspiring business

leaders gathered at *Windrose on Hudson in Ossining, New York*. Over three days, attendees stepped away from the daily pace of their businesses to focus on how they lead, how their organizations operate and what they would do differently when they returned home.

More Than a Sequence of Sessions

The 2026 program covered the issues leaders face across the full business, not leadership in the abstract. Sessions explored purposeful leadership, strategy, (See *REX Leadership Academy Page 10*)



Crunch Fitness Franchise Group Nears 65 Clubs in Florida with Crunch Maitland Opening

ORLANDO, FL - *CR Fitness Holdings LLC*, a subsidiary of CR Fitness Holdings, announces the opening of *Crunch Maitland*, its 63rd location in Florida. The new 43,000-square-foot Crunch Fitness club represents a \$5 million investment in the community and brings Crunch's latest 3.0 club experience to the Orlando area.

Crunch Maitland features Crunch's latest 3.0 design, with expansive strength and cardio areas, Olympic squat racks, performance turf, HIITZone and dedicated studios for cycling, hot yoga, boxing and Abs & Glutes. Members will also have access to premium recovery amenities, including HydroMassage, tanning, saunas, contrast therapy featuring Frost Locker and infrared sauna, and other recovery offerings to support performance, recovery and overall wellness.



The club began welcoming members during a soft opening on Thursday, August 20. The grand opening celebration took place on Saturday, August 22, featuring group fitness demonstrations, personal training specials, local vendors and giveaways.

"Crunch Maitland is an important step in continuing to provide a premium (See *Crunch Page 6*)

World Gym Launches Presales for its First Thailand Club

BANGKOK - *World Gym*, the global fitness brand founded on California's Muscle Beach in 1976, announces the upcoming opening of its first club in Thailand at Imperial World Samrong. The launch will introduce the brand's world-class fitness experience to Thai members, combining internationally benchmarked facilities, advanced technology and accessible membership options.

World Gym has grown from the golden era of bodybuilding at Muscle Beach into one of the world's most recognized fitness names, today operating nearly 300 clubs across six continents and serving more than one million members worldwide. From an early training ground for icons like **Arnold Schwarzenegger** and **Lou Ferrigno** in the 1970s, World Gym is today publicly listed in Taiwan (2762.TWSE)



where it operates 140+ locations, making it the company's largest market. For Thailand's rapidly growing fitness sector, the brand's arrival brings an established international operator and a 50-year brand legacy to local members for the first time.

World Gym enters Thailand with a clear promise: premium, world-class fitness made genuinely accessible. Its first Thai (See *World Gym Page 6*)

Inside the Insider: Edition #392

- Searching for Instructors: Training or Transfer Portal? - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- Beyond the Wow Factor: How to Design Recovery Spaces That Won't Become Obsolete - **By:** Bruce Carter
- Solving the Pilates Reformer Instructor Shortage - **By:** Sara Kooperman, JD
- Isolation is the Disease; Going to the Gym is the Cure - **By:** Thomas Plummer
- 2026 HFA European Congress to Showcase New Research Shaping the Future of Fitness
- Introducing the LET'S LIVE ACTIVELY Podcast by Active Wellness
- 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 **392nd monthly edition of this 30+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of **"Telling-It-Like-It-Is!"** I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

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

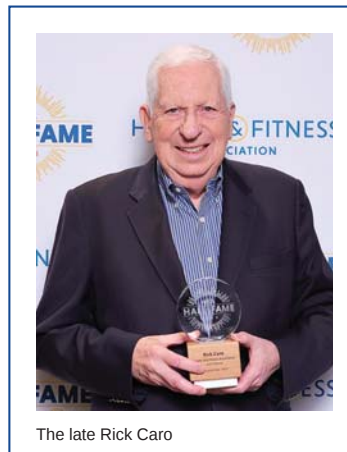
■ To begin this month's *Norm's Notes*, I am thinking about my dear friend, the industry's best friend, **RICK CARO**, who passed away a year ago on **August 31, 2025**. I imagine for anyone who knew "Uncle Rick," as we called him, this year has been one of adjustment without his

presence. I know it has been for me, as well as my son, **JUSTIN**, and *Club Insider*. So, today, I want to re-share an interview by then *IHRSA's CBI*, that featured, Rick Caro, John McCarthy and me, as we discussed the founding of the industry's pre-imminent Association, now known as *HFA*.

CBI - Describe how *IHRSA* (now the *HFA*) came to be. Who was involved?

Norm Cates - At that time, as the *NCCA President*, I spent lots of time on the phone each week with "Uncle Rick" (as I've called him for years) talking about *NCCA* matters, many of which applied to the *NTA*. It was Rick's idea to create a new trade association serving indoor and outdoor tennis clubs, and racquetball clubs.

Rick Caro (RC) - We'd held two Board meetings for both groups at *O'Hare Airport* in Chicago two weeks apart. At the second meeting, I accidentally mixed up the agendas, which, coincidentally, made it very clear that there were common issues. I nominated three people from each group to talk about our businesses and brainstorm to see if there was good reason to combine resources. They were the late **CURT BEUSMAN** and the late **DALE DIBBLE**,



The late Rick Caro



Norm Cates

as well as **TODD PULIS** from the *NTA*; and **NORM CATES**, **PETER DONAHUE** and **JENNIFER MICHELL** from the *NCCA*. Two weeks later, when we met at my office in New York, we came up with the name, the *International Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IRSA)*; later we changed the name to *IHRSA*, when we added the word "Health" to the name). This group, our first Board of Directors, designated headquarters and how our staffs would

work together, drafted by-laws and decided to hold a combined convention. Norm would be the first *IRSA President* in 1981, and I would succeed Norm in 1982.

CBI - And, your memories of *IHRSA's* first convention...

RC - It took place at the *Tropicana Hotel* in Las Vegas. The main attraction was best practices presentations, mostly by club
 (See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

About Club Insider

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Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **33rd Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was founded to serve an industry I truly love, and so that I could become a *Mister Mom* for my son, **Justin**, is still intriguing and amazing to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 30+ year run possible.

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

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

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

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

Norm Cates, Jr.



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2026 HFA European Congress to Showcase New Research Shaping the Future of Fitness

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Attendees at the 2026 HFA European Congress will get an exclusive look at new research and insights shaping the future of the fitness industry, including the 2026 HFA Global Report, new findings on GLP-1s and exercise and a preview of the industry's largest global retention study.

Taking place **September 24 - 26** at *London Stadium in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park*, presented in partnership with *ukactive* and hosted locally by *EVOLVE Founder, David Minton*, the Congress will bring together senior executives, researchers, healthcare leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators from across Europe and beyond for two days of education, connection and insights.

"This year's program reflects the incredible evolution of our industry," said **Greta Wagner**, *Interim President and CEO of the Health & Fitness Association (formerly IHRSA)*. "We're bringing together leaders from fitness, healthcare, technology, research and business who are tackling the biggest opportunities facing our industry today, from AI and healthcare

integration to leadership development and global market growth. These conversations will give attendees practical insights they can immediately apply while helping shape the future of our industry together."

As part of the event, HFA will unveil the 2026 HFA Global Report, providing new data and analysis on more than 30 commercial fitness markets worldwide. Attendees will also hear the latest thinking on GLP-1s and exercise, get a preview of HFA's forthcoming *Global Retention Benchmark Report*, and explore new insights and research on the UK market.

The Congress features two keynote presentations:

Ian Mullane, *Keepme.ai Founder and CEO*, will present an inside look at how AI agents are transforming the operations of one of the world's fastest-growing gym businesses and allowing employees to spend more time with members. His keynote is sponsored by *Keepme.ai*.

Alistair Brownlee, two-time Olympic triathlon champion, entrepreneur and

investor, will offer the second keynote, sharing what separates organizations that keep pace from those that shape the future, and why leadership, adaptability and a winning mindset will define the next era of the fitness industry.

Beyond the keynote stage, attendees will hear from an accomplished lineup of executives and thought leaders representing some of the fitness, wellness, healthcare and business sectors' most influential organizations, including *David Lloyd Leisure, Fitness First, Lift Brands EMEA, NRG Gym Limited, Obesity Coaching Academy, Retention Guru, the Royal College of General Practitioners, Third Space Group, Urban Gym Group* and more.

Other highlights of this year's Congress include:

- A panel featuring executives from leading European operators sharing lessons on entrepreneurship, investment and organizational growth.

EUROPEAN CONGRESS
 Powered by the Health & Fitness Association

- Networking opportunities at the Opening Reception.

- A new Women's Networking Summit, hosted in conjunction with *The Collective*.

- The Sponsor Marketplace where some of the industry's top suppliers are available for one-on-one conversations.

- Two options for guided tours of some of London's most innovative health clubs and fitness studios. Tours occur on September 26 for an additional fee.

View the full conference agenda, learn more about this year's speakers and register at: hub.healthandfitness.org/european-congress.

Introducing the LET'S LIVE ACTIVELY Podcast by Active Wellness

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - At *Active Wellness*, our mission is simple: to build and inspire healthy, active lives. Whether we are partnering with corporate offices, healthcare systems, senior living communities or residential property developers, everything we do is aimed at taking good care of people and we focus on improving longevity and wellbeing through the power of healthy lifestyles. Active Wellness is excited to expand our reach by introducing a brand-new resource for our members, partners, communities: *The LET'S LIVE ACTIVELY Podcast*.

Why We Launched Our Podcast?

Achieving a long, vibrant life shouldn't be complicated or overwhelming. While we specialize in delivering high-impact fitness and wellness programs, we know health journeys require personalization and continuous commitment.

We launched this podcast to provide inspiration and actionable steps to move better, feel better and live better, longer. Through deep dives into science-backed strategies from our experts, the podcast lets us bridge high-level wellness strategies with everyday habits, empowering our members to take actionable steps where real, long-term health thrives.

What You Can Expect to Hear

Each episode delivers expert-driven, actionable guidance focused on real science, longevity and practical application. Recent discussions include:

Strength for Longevity & The Minimum Effective Dose: How much strength training do we actually need to protect our health as we age? We break down data-driven approaches, like the "minimum effective dose" with industry experts to maintain physical vitality for life.

Brain Health & Cognitive Resilience: Science-backed approaches to cognitive wellness across different stages of life, including specialized insights into protecting and strengthening the female brain during midlife transitions.

Practical Everyday Longevity: Real-world advice on movement, stress management, recovery, and lifestyle habits that help individuals optimize their health span and quality of life.
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...Crunch

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fitness experience to the entire Orlando community at an affordable price," said **Tony Scrimale**, *CEO of CR Fitness Holdings*. "Being the first Crunch club in Orlando to offer innovative contrast therapy featuring Frost Locker and Infrared Sauna reflects our commitment to our members and the fitness options we provide them."

The new club opening is ex-

pected to create more than 70 local jobs across personal training, group fitness, sales, operations, member services and club leadership.

The opening marks another milestone in CR Fitness Holdings' continued expansion across Florida, with additional Crunch Fitness locations planned for the state including: Kissimmee West, Viera, Haines City and St. Cloud.

See the **Crunch Ad** on **Page #2**.

...World Gym

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club combines internationally benchmarked facilities and equipment from partners including *Matrix* and *Abs Company* with advanced technology such as *AI Posture Diagnostics*, a three-minute assessment providing personalized insights into posture, balance and flexibility, and the *MYZONE Switch* wearable for effort-based training. This members-first approach is designed to make high-quality fitness part of everyday life.

The brand will further expand its international training offering in Thailand through its partnership with *HYROX*. Already *HYROX*'s largest partner in the Asia-Pacific region, with the collaboration spanning the brand's locations in Taiwan, World Gym plans to also extend the partnership to Thailand later this year.

"Thailand is a strategic next step for World Gym. This market has the energy, ambition and rising fitness culture our brand was built on. Our promise here is simple: we're not just opening a gym, we're making world-class fitness part of everyday life. And, we're bringing our 50 years of legacy and the technology that defines the next generation of fitness here to achieve this," says **John Caraccio**, *Chairman, President, World Gym Corporation*.

See the **World Gym Ad** on **Page #11**.

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...Norm's Notes

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leaders. Thanks to the late **CHUCK LEVE**, we had a trade show, which consisted of 63 10' x 10' booths. The late **AUGIE NIETO** was the largest exhibitor with the *Lifecycle*. By the time Chuck left IHRSA, the show had 1,800 booths, making it the largest commercial fitness show in North America, second only to *FIBO* globally.

JOHN MCCARTHY (JM) - From the beginning, Chuck Leve believed that we could have a bona fide trade show, with all the suppliers (mainly fitness equipment producers) exhibiting their 'latest and greatest' to the club owners and managers who came to the convention. It quickly became the main attraction for many attendees.

CBI - Has IHRSA's explosive growth, and global reach, surprised you?

JM - My vision was simple, namely, to capitalize on the growth experiences of the industry's leading club operators in the U.S. If we could encourage a few industry leaders to talk about what made them successful, then the IHRSA meeting would become hugely successful. This was easy to do; most of those early fitness entrepreneurs were happy to share their

stories. Eventually, we brought two groups together --the major fitness equipment and health club brands-- as they are 100% dependent on one another for growth and profitability. It was not my vision to become global, but as it turned out, the fantastic success that many American clubs were experiencing inspired operators in Europe, Asia and Latin America to see, firsthand, what was happening, and these members encouraged others to join IHRSA.

■ ■ ■

Folks, the **2027 HFA Convention and Trade Show** will be held in **Las Vegas March 10 - 12, 2027. DON'T MISS IT!**

May Uncle Rick Caro REST IN PEACE. As well as Curt, Dale, Chuck and Augie.

■ Here are some news items we shared during the month of August via our *Club Insider Weekly* eblast! Released each Wednesday morning at 9AM EST, you'll find there is always a lot going on in the industry! Make sure you are signed up at www.clubinsideronline.com.

■ **VASA Fitness Partners with ISSA to Launch "Trainer in Training" Program, Investing in the Next Generation of Personal Trainers**

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, CO - *VASA Fitness*, one of the nation's leading high-value, low-price fitness operators and a certified *Great Place To Work* for four consecutive years, announces the launch of its new Trainer in Training Program in partnership with the *International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA)*, a global leader in fitness education and certification.

■ **Club Pilates Expands Global Footprint Past 1,500 Studios, Widening Gap as Industry Leader**

IRVINE, CA - *Club Pilates*, part of the *Xponential Fitness* family and the world's largest Pilates brand by number of studios, is celebrating a new milestone of 1,500 studios nationally and internationally, reaffirming its position as a global Pilates leader. This accomplishment comes on the heels of recent openings in Bangkok, Thailand and Mexico City, Mexico, as the brand continues to expand internationally through Master Franchising.

■ **Genesis Health Clubs Launches Fitness Physio Physical Therapy Services Inside Select Clubs**

WICHITA, KS - *Genesis Health Clubs*, the nation's largest privately owned fitness enterprise, announces the launch of *Fitness*

Physio, a physical therapy, sports rehab and recovery clinic located inside select *Genesis Health Clubs*. *Fitness Physio* launches this summer at ten locations in Wichita and the Kansas City area with the remaining clinics across *Genesis* throughout 2026.

■ **Amidst a Transformational Year, Workout Anytime Appoints Peter Stipher as Chief Operating Officer to Fuel Next Era of Growth**

ATLANTA, GA - Building on a momentous year, *Workout Anytime* announces **Peter Stipher** as *Chief Operating Officer*. Stipher's appointment reinforces the company's commitment to building one of the fitness industry's most innovative and scalable franchise platforms.

■ **Midtown Athletic Club Launches Alan G. Schwartz Community Tennis Program With USTA**

CHICAGO, IL - *Midtown Athletic Club*, one of the nation's leading luxury fitness, tennis and resort-style athletic club with locations across North America, announces a partnership with the *United States Tennis Association* and the *Chicago Park District* to introduce the *Alan G. Schwartz Community* (See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)

Searching for Instructors: *Training or Transfer Portal?*

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

Does your team need more group fitness instructors? If you're like most, you could use more instructors on your team. Maybe you need to build a more robust schedule. Maybe you need to build a more diverse team to attract a wider audience into group fitness – most clubs need more younger instructors and more men. To build a great team, you have two options. You can search for people with experience and try to pull them away from your competitors. Or, you can recruit new people without experience and train them to deliver amazing experiences. Where are you finding success, training or transfer?

Stop Searching for the What; Instead Search for the Why

When you search for instructors, are you looking for experience or no experience required? If you are searching exclusively for instructors with experience, with certifications – with any pre-requisite outside of potential – my guess is, you haven't had much success.

Imagine the equivalent for a Starbucks recruitment ad: "Are you a trained Barista with a Starbucks Green-Apron certification? If so, join our team!" You wouldn't attract new people. You would just announce that you are hiring. You would announce that you are looking for people who can already do the thing. And, think about it, most are likely already *doing the thing* at another Starbucks! (Or, they quit and are no longer interested in doing the thing.)

Instead, I recommend searching for great people, those who have a passion for health and fitness, who could be great additions to your team and who have an aptitude for coaching and moving in time to music. Then, train and mentor them.

Starbucks searches for great people, then trains them to deliver their product and service. Starbucks hired my daughter when she was in college. They taught her everything she needed to know, including hundreds of recipes that she had to memorize, get tested on and deliver with consistency to customers.

Come with me on a quick detour: Imagine if my daughter announced to Starbucks that she didn't want to memorize the menu, she didn't want to follow their recipes and she'd prefer to just wing it. They would never have hired her! As I wrote in last month's article, if you have an instructor recruit who doesn't want to learn programming, doesn't want to work from a proven recipe and would prefer to just wing

it every time they teach, here's my advice: Don't hire them!

There is No Instructor Transfer Portal

You *do* need to hire. You *do* need some fresh, energetic team members, so let's get back to your two options for recruiting.

Option 1: Try to lure instructors away from your competitors. Now, just like the current landscape of college sports and NIL deals, people don't often make moves for culture or coaches. They do it for more money. So, if you can pay people a lot more than what they currently make, go for it.

Advertise your generous pay and benefits, and you may have some success convincing long-time, loyal, community-connected instructors to jump ship from their current routine and fitness family, to come teach at your facility. But, it won't be easy.

Will Double Rostering Do It?

What about an **Option 1.5**, sharing instructors with the competition? Since there seems to be a shortage of instructors out there, maybe that's an idea?

Yes, and it's a terrible one. After all, you don't share your personal trainers, just like a coach wouldn't share his top players with another team.

Your people are your most important asset and one of your main differentiators. Sharing instructors dilutes the amount of time they can invest at your facility, it minimizes their influence on social media to invite friends and family to your facility, and it undercuts your ability to build a loyal, cohesive, committed-to-your-cause team.

It's a topic for another article another day, but there is some seriously fuzzy math being done by anyone who tells you instructors "have" to teach at the competition. If you've heard that before, email me with the subject line "Fuzzy Math" and I'll give you the breakdown of how sharing instructors is absolutely 100% not what you have to do.

Hire the Athlete, Train the Skill

Option 2: Build your team by searching for and discovering talent. Find people with no experience teaching group fitness, but with enthusiasm and promise, and invest your time and energy in them. Encourage them and give them confidence that you're supporting them. Train them, coach them and mentor them into great instructors.

You don't need an instructor transfer portal. You need a talent pipeline. You need the persistence and the right training partner to turn raw talent into amazing instructors, to identify the x-factor and transform it into on-stage confidence, to take someone who is curious and turn them into an amazing coach. You need to build a team, train a new generation of instructors and excite the next generation of group fitness fans – literally the future of fitness.

■ ■ ■

If training instructors isn't your area of expertise, that's okay; it's ours. Collect some recruits, and we'll come to you to train them to teach a MOSSA program, like Group Power. MOSSA trainings deliver all the materials your recruits need to get started, and we'll be your assistant coach for the future, helping you maintain a top team through mentoring, ongoing education, assessment and more.



Jeffrey Pinkerton

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

...Norm's Notes

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Tennis Program, a citywide initiative designed to expand access to tennis across Chicago. Midtown Athletic Club and the Schwartz family are contributing **\$750,000** toward a **\$2 million fundraising goal** that will enable this no- and low-cost program to run for the next 20 years.

■Planet Fitness Announces Three Development Agreements in Florida

HAMPTON, N.H. - Planet Fitness announces that it has signed three new area development agreements with Ian McClure of Gulf Coast Hotel Management.

■This Norm's Note is about *N.C. State*, my Alma Mater. The *U.S. Patent and Trademark Office* announced it will be opening a community engagement office on *N.C. State's Centennial Campus* to further the agency's outreach efforts in the Southeast. It will be the first USPTO community engagement office in North Carolina. "N.C. State has a long history of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and we are proud to welcome the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to Centennial Campus," said **CHANCELLOR KEVIN HOWELL**. "The new community engagement office will expand opportunities for inventors, researchers, students and industry partners to collaborate and bring new discoveries to market, helping solve real-world challenges."

■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, celebrating 30+ years of trust in publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President and a Co-Founder of the Association with the late Rick Caro and five others. 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.)



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...REX Leadership Academy

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culture, financial intelligence, sales leadership, the member journey, customer experience, leading different generations and the conversations that strong leaders cannot avoid.

The group learned from *REX* CEO, **Eddie Tock**; *REX* Chairs, **Brent Darden**, **Justin Tamsett**, **Allison Flatley**, **Mark Miller**, **Mary Laudati** and **Dan Duran**; as well as *industry leaders and club owners*, including **Frank Lawrence**, CEO, *Little Rock Athletic Clubs* and **Luke Carlson**, CEO, *Discover Strength* and *current HFA Board Chairperson*. Together, they connected big leadership principles to the decisions managers and owners make inside their clubs every day.

Just as important, attendees were not asked to spend the event collecting ideas that would disappear into a notebook. The final morning centered on addressing real challenges, turning ideas into actions and identifying the next conversations and decisions waiting back at the club. The leadership academy concluded with small-group work and a graduation ceremony, giving the experience a clear finish while emphasizing that the real work would begin afterward.

That focus on application came through in the attendee feedback. One participant wrote, "I came back feeling so inspired and excited to share what I learned with my team and implement some positive changes."

The Learning Continued Outside the Meeting Room

The setting was an important part of the design. Windrose on Hudson offered a 60-acre residential campus where attendees could remain present instead of scattering across a city once the formal agenda ended. Breakfasts,

dinners, breaks, cocktail hours and the popular swag exchange created room for informal conversations that often became as valuable as the scheduled sessions.

That is where the *REX* influence was most visible. *REX* Roundtables has long been built on candid peer-to-peer conversation, trust and the willingness to share both what is working and what is not. The leadership academy brought that same spirit to a broader group of leaders. Attendees could compare approaches, ask direct questions and learn from people facing similar staffing, member-experience, growth and leadership challenges.

A presentation can introduce an idea. A peer conversation can test it. A trusted relationship can help a leader carry it forward. By combining all three, the leadership academy gave participants both practical education and a network they can continue to call on long after the event.

An Experience for the Entire Leadership Pipeline

The Leadership Academy powered by *REX* is intentionally designed for leaders at several stages of their careers. It serves owners who want to strengthen the people around them, experienced managers preparing for greater responsibility, department leaders who need a wider view of the business and emerging leaders who are ready to build their skills before the next promotion arrives. Both *REX* members and non-members attend.

That mix matters. Leadership development is most effective when it is not reserved only for the person at the top. Clubs become stronger when leaders throughout the organization understand how strategy, culture, financial performance, customer experience and team development connect. Sending a promising leader to the leadership academy is not simply a reward; it is an investment in the club's future (See *REX Leadership Academy* Page 12)



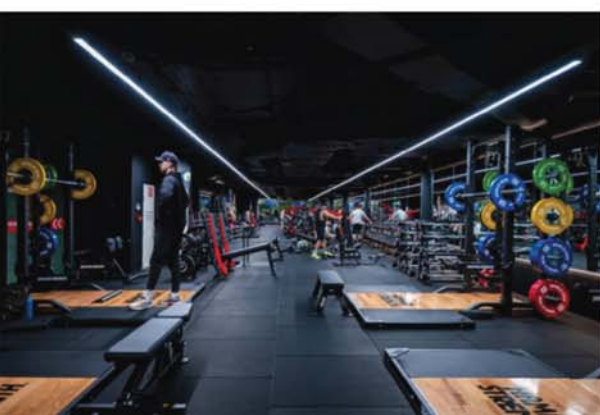
The 2026 REX Leadership Academy



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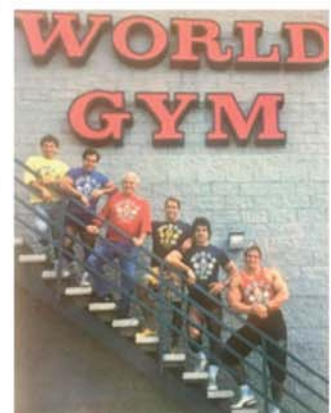
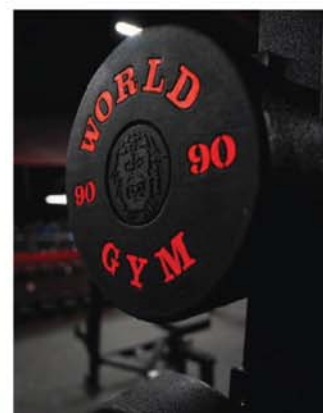
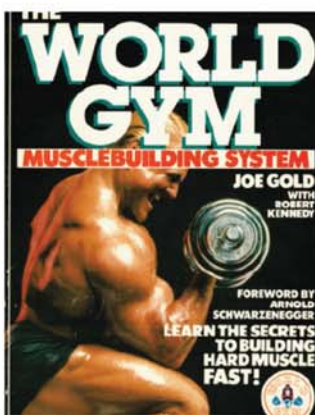
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...REX Leadership Academy

continued from page 10

bench strength.

Building Toward 2027

The Leadership Academy powered by REX will return to Windrose on Hudson in Ossining, New York, **August 3–5, 2027**. This 60-acre campus will host the immersive three-day format and once again give leaders the time and space to step out of their normal routine, examine how they lead and build relationships with peers from across the fitness industry.

Attendance will be limited to 80 people. For club and studio owners, regional

and club managers, department heads and aspiring business leaders, the limited size is part of the value: it keeps the experience personal enough for real participation, useful feedback and conversations that continue beyond a quick introduction.

The strongest leaders are not finished products. They keep asking better questions, inviting honest feedback and turning new ideas into consistent action. The Leadership Academy powered by REX exists to give those leaders a place to do exactly that, so they can return home ready to help their people and businesses grow.

Learn more and register your interest for 2027 at [rexleadershipacademy.com](https://www.rexleadershipacademy.com).



The 2026 REX Leadership Academy



The 2026 REX Leadership Academy



The 2026 REX Leadership Academy



The 2026 REX Leadership Academy



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Beyond the Wow Factor:

How to Design Recovery Spaces That Won't Become Obsolete

By: **Bruce Carter**

Recovery has quickly moved from the sidelines of the fitness industry to center stage. What was once limited to a stretching area, sauna or massage room has evolved into a growing category that may include compression therapy, cryotherapy, infrared saunas, red-light therapy, hydrotherapy, assisted stretching, meditation and other wellness services.

For club owners, this creates an exciting opportunity. A thoughtfully-designed recovery space can enhance the member experience, support retention, attract new audiences and generate additional revenue. However, it can also present a serious design challenge.

Recovery technology changes rapidly. A treatment that is popular today may be replaced by something more advanced tomorrow. If a club builds a space around one specific piece of equipment or wellness trend, that space may become outdated long before the rest of the facility.

The goal, therefore, should not be to design a recovery area that simply creates an immediate "wow factor." The goal is to create an adaptable environment that continues to look relevant, operate efficiently and support new services as the recovery industry evolves.

Begin With a Long-Term Strategy

Before selecting equipment, finishes, lighting or furniture, club owners should determine the role recovery will play within the overall business.

Will recovery be included with membership, offered as a premium upgrade or sold through individual sessions and packages? Will the area be staffed, self-directed or a combination of both? Is the club primarily serving serious athletes, active adults, older members, busy professionals or a broader community?

These decisions affect everything from the size and location of the space to its circulation, privacy, acoustics, storage and electrical requirements.

The recovery area should also feel connected to the club's overall identity. A high-energy athletic club may want a sophisticated, performance-focused environment. A wellness-oriented facility may benefit from a calmer, more restorative atmosphere. The design should support the club's brand rather than feel like a collection of equipment placed in a seldom used room.

Design for Flexibility

Flexibility is the best protection

against obsolescence.

One of the most common mistakes is designing rooms so specifically around current equipment that they cannot easily accommodate future changes. Built-in platforms, tightly fitted millwork, permanent partitions and highly specialized utility locations can limit future options and increase renovation costs.

Whenever possible, recovery spaces should include flexible treatment rooms or zones that can support multiple uses. A room used for compression therapy today might later accommodate assisted stretching, red-light therapy, massage or a new technology that has not yet entered the market.

Modular furniture, movable privacy screens, adaptable lighting and accessible power connections make it easier to modify a space without major construction. Even small decisions, such as leaving adequate clearance around equipment and providing additional outlets, can make future changes far less disruptive.

It is also wise to plan for more electrical capacity than currently required. Many recovery technologies rely on dedicated circuits, special connections, data access or ventilation. Providing infrastructure in advance is generally much less expensive than opening walls and ceilings later.

Create Zones Without Creating Barriers

Recovery includes both active and passive experiences. Assisted stretching and mobility work may involve conversation and movement, while meditation, massage or certain therapies require quiet and privacy.

These different activities should be separated into logical zones, but that does not always require permanent walls. Changes in flooring, ceiling treatments, lighting, furniture placement and decorative screens can define areas while preserving flexibility.

Acoustics are especially important. A recovery space located next to a group exercise studio, basketball court or strength-training area may never feel relaxing, regardless of how attractive it looks. Sound-absorbing ceiling materials, wall panels, upholstered surfaces and proper door construction can help control noise and create a more restorative environment.

At the same time, the area should not feel hidden or disconnected. Strategic visibility can introduce members to recovery services and encourage participation. Glass walls, colored lighting, thoughtfully-placed displays or an inviting consultation

area can create interest while maintaining privacy where it is needed. However, once in the area, members should have a degree of privacy utilizing layout and partitions that restrict site lines when using the equipment.

Avoid Trend-Dependent Design

A recovery space should feel current, but it should not be visually tied to a short-lived trend.

Highly themed interiors, excessive colored lighting or finishes selected primarily for social-media impact can quickly look dated. Instead, begin with a timeless foundation of durable materials, balanced lighting, comfortable proportions and a coordinated color palette.

Technology and branding can then provide changeable layers. Digital displays, graphics, artwork, accessories and adjustable lighting are easier to update than flooring, walls, ceilings and built-in features.

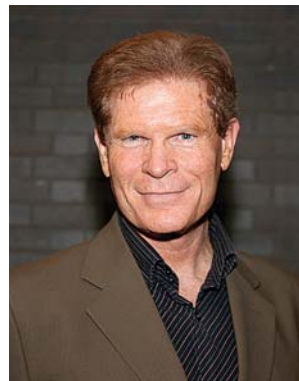
Lighting deserves particular attention. Recovery spaces should not be uniformly dark, nor should they rely entirely on dramatic colored light. Layered lighting such as recessed can lighting with RGBW lighting options gives operators greater control. General illumination supports cleaning and safety, task lighting assists staff and dimmable accent lighting creates atmosphere. Adjustable lighting also allows one room to support several types of services.

Remember the Human Experience

Technology may attract initial interest, but the quality of the experience determines whether members return.

Members need clear guidance on where to go, where to place personal belongings, how to use equipment and what to do when a session ends. They also need to feel comfortable, safe and cared for.

Allow adequate space for circulation, transfers and accessibility. Provide convenient storage for towels, supplies and cleaning materials. Select surfaces that can withstand frequent sanitation without losing their appearance. Include seating for consultations or waiting, and consider the transition from an active workout environment into a calmer recovery setting.



Bruce Carter

Temperature, scent, sound, lighting and privacy all influence how members perceive the service. These details may not appear on an equipment list, but they are essential to creating value.

Design for Participation, Not Just Presentation

The most successful recovery spaces are not showrooms for the latest devices. They are well-planned platforms that allow clubs to introduce, test, replace and expand services as member needs change.

That requires coordination between the owner, designer, equipment providers and operating staff. It also requires discipline. Not every new recovery trend needs a permanent room or major construction commitment.

Start with a clear business strategy. Invest in adaptable infrastructure. Create flexible zones. Choose durable, timeless materials. Most importantly, design around the member's complete experience rather than around a particular machine.

The initial wow factor may bring members through the door, but comfort, effectiveness and thoughtful service will bring them back. A recovery space designed with flexibility and purpose can remain valuable long after today's trends and technologies have changed.

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

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business.**



Solving the Pilates Reformer Instructor Shortage

By: **Sara Kooperman, JD**

Pilates Reformer training is one of the fastest-growing segments in the fitness industry, yet one of the biggest challenges facing clubs and studios today isn't demand... it's finding qualified instructors who are available, affordable and ready to teach.

Traditional Pilates Reformer education is exceptional and absolutely has its place. Many certification pathways require three to six months --or even longer-- to complete. For instructors seeking the deepest possible education, that investment is invaluable.

The challenge is that the fitness industry doesn't always have the luxury of waiting six months.

New clubs are opening. Existing clubs are expanding their Pilates offerings. Members are asking for more Reformer classes today, not six months from now. Operators need instructors who can safely

begin teaching while continuing to build experience and confidence.

A Practical Solution for Today's Clubs

Most fitness professionals already possess outstanding teaching skills. They understand anatomy, exercise progression, coaching, cueing, class management, motivation and member engagement. What they often need is education specific to the Pilates Reformer.

That's where SCW's *Pilates Reformer Certification* fills an important need.

Designed specifically for qualified fitness professionals, personal trainers, movement specialists and experienced instructors, the certification provides the essential knowledge needed to begin teaching safe and effective group Reformer classes immediately. Participants learn:

- Equipment setup and safety;
- Proper body mechanics and biomechanics;

- Exercise technique and execution;
- Progressions and regressions;
- Coaching and cueing strategies;
- Class design and programming;
- Client safety and movement quality.

Following the live or online certification, instructors complete a 50-hour apprenticeship to reinforce their skills through practical experience. Clubs have the flexibility to determine how that apprenticeship is completed. Some may require instructors to complete all 50 hours before leading classes independently, while others may allow instructors to begin teaching while completing the apprenticeship under supervision. This flexible approach enables clubs to launch new Reformer programs immediately while continuing to develop instructor confidence and expertise on the job.

The result is an instructor who can begin contributing immediately while continuing to grow through hands-on



Sara Kooperman, JD

teaching experience.

The Next Challenge: Creating Great Classes

Certification is only the first step. Even with a well-trained instructor, another challenge quickly appears.

How do you ensure that every class is engaging, progressive, professionally designed and consistent from instructor to instructor? How do you keep instructors inspired while ensuring members continue to experience fresh programming that motivates them to return week after week?

Creating high-quality Reformer classes every week requires significant time, creativity and expertise. Even experienced instructors eventually find themselves repeating workouts or spending hours outside of class planning new routines. As clubs grow, maintaining consistency across multiple instructors and locations becomes even more difficult.

Introducing ReFORM Programming

That's why SCW developed *ReFORM*. Rather than expecting instructors to create every class from scratch, *ReFORM* provides professionally designed monthly programming that allows instructors to focus on what they do best: coaching, motivating and connecting with participants. Each monthly release includes:

- Professionally choreographed classes;
- Detailed coaching and cueing notes;
- Flashcards for quick class reference;
- Instructional teaching videos;
- Curated Spotify playlists;
- Progressive monthly programming that keeps instructors confident and members engaged.

(See Sara Kooperman, JD Page 17)

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"I highly recommend the HWLS team. They've provided us invaluable guidance regarding membership marketing and fitness programming."

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

...Sara Kooperman, JD

continued from page 16

ReFORM offers two distinct programming options:

■ **ReFORM Original** features instructor-paced contemporary Pilates programming emphasizing strength, mobility, flexibility, balance, posture, core stability and functional movement.

■ **ReFORM Rhythm** is a music-driven Reformer experience where movements are synchronized to the tempo of carefully selected Spotify playlists, creating an energetic, seamless group fitness class.

The result is less preparation time for instructors, greater consistency for clubs and an exciting member experience that encourages retention and repeat participation. Clubs benefit from programming that is always fresh, while members enjoy new challenges and reasons to return every month. You can explore ReFORM at www.scwfit.com/ReFORM.

Designed by One of the Industry's Best

ReFORM is choreographed by Leslee Bender, creator of the inter-

nationally recognized *Bender Ball*, and award-winning educator, author and one of the fitness industry's leading experts in functional movement and core conditioning. With decades of experience educating fitness professionals worldwide, Leslee combines evidence-based movement science with innovative choreography to create programming that is safe, effective, engaging and enjoyable for participants of all fitness levels.

Helping Clubs Compete

Today's clubs cannot afford to wait months before launching a successful Reformer program. They need qualified instructors, consistent programming and an exceptional member experience from day one. SCW's *Pilates Reformer Certification* and ReFORM work together to solve both challenges.

The certification provides experienced fitness professionals with the knowledge and confidence to safely begin teaching Reformer classes, while the flexible 50-hour apprenticeship allows clubs to decide whether instructors complete the experience before teaching or while beginning to instruct under supervision.

ReFORM then provides the ongoing monthly programming that keeps instructors fresh, confident and

continually improving. With professionally choreographed classes, Spotify playlists, cueing techniques, flashcards and instructional videos, instructors always have new ideas, members enjoy new experiences every month; and clubs benefit from greater consistency, stronger retention and a successful Reformer program that continues to grow.

■ ■ ■

For more than 40 years, SCW Fitness Education has been a global leader in fitness and wellness education, providing certifications, continuing education, conferences and professionally choreographed programming for fitness professionals around the world. SCW is the creator of ReFORM Programming, as well as the internationally recognized *WATERinMOTION* aquatic fitness programs and the *S.E.A.T.* chair-based fitness programs. Through innovative education and turnkey programming, SCW helps clubs launch successful

programs, support instructors, and deliver exceptional member experiences that drive participation, retention and long-term success. You can learn more about SCW at www.scwfit.com.

(Sara Kooperman, JD, CEO of SCW Fitness Education, *WATERinMOTION*, and *S.E.A.T. Fitness* won the Most Innovating Fitness Pro by Fitness Industry Technology Council. Sara is the best-selling author of *FIT FOR BUSINESS*, an inductee into the National Fitness Hall of Fame, an Illinois State Businesswoman of the Year, esteemed host for *NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS* Monthly Talk Show and sits on the ACSM Communication & Public Information Committee. Kooperman 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). Plus, Sara was recently nominated for the IDEA Fitness Leader of the Year Award. Learn more at www.sarakooperman.com.)

Make It Fun!

Isolation is the Disease; Going to the Gym is the Cure

By: **Thomas Plummer**

He comes in daily, sits on the same stool each day at the end of the bar and orders the same sandwich and a beer, which he never finishes. He laughs at the bartender's jokes, knows the entire staff by first name and is always so polite. He sits for an hour, leaves a nice tip, then quietly leaves.

He is just over fifty and works at home. He is isolated, only going to the office once a quarter. The spouse is gone early, then home late, doing a medical job still requiring a commute. It's just him sitting at a desk in a small office tucked into a spare bedroom... a job he has done for three years. He has a stationary bike, all the rage in the time of the virus, sitting in a corner of his room, now more of a clothes rack than exercise partner.

The bike kept him sane in the virus period. He remembers the days of logging in, joining an online class of hundreds. He then noticed, slowly at first, then so rapidly, the online riders disappeared. Then, finally, the live class became a recorded thing he could access at any time, doing it on his own when he felt the need... He endured that for a few months, then cancelled the app.

How does any of this affect the fitness world of today and our future?

Isolation, loneliness, human contact, all growing issues in modern life, cannot be solved by tech, but our failure in this industry is we assume there must be an app, there must be an AI bot, there must be something we can do with technology to attract, then keep people in our gyms. We are wasting time, we are chasing the wrong solutions and we should realize more tech is not the solution. It is human connection, and we should be creating fitness facilities to accommodate this fact.

Factors you have to consider if you own a fitness business today.

Every day, 10,000 people in this country turn 65 years old. When you are over 50, this is a scary number, but if you own a fitness business, sell equipment or are one of those over achievers who is 70 and still acts 50, this number is ignored, but it should scare the hell out of you. In the next ten years, our businesses will mirror this stat, whether we are prepared or not. Will we adapt today, knowing the gray wave is coming for us, or will we cling to creating gyms as we have for the last 40 years, based upon a younger, more turn and burn population?

Couple this statistic with a research article published by *Michigan Medicine*, which found one in three older adults experience loneliness and isolation.

Like our old friend mentioned previously who hits the same bar each day, being lonely drives us to somehow seek some human contact, if only for an hour or so out of our day. He could stay at home, death scroll, eat a sandwich, having no need to leave his house, but the very nature of how he works, and how he lives, leaves him alone and isolated, seeking some form of human connection.

Another study, published in *Science* in 2026, adds to this discussion by stating that working at home can substantially increase isolation and worsen mental health. We were born as herd animals. We need people in our lives, daily, to keep us sane, and when we lose this, we often suffer mentally.

Also, by the year 2035, there will be more people over 65 than 18 or younger. Our country is aging, but our business models don't reflect this. In fact, most of what we do is totally counterintuitive to the aging trend.

In the big box gyms, we continue to recreate the 1980s by still forcing people into group locker rooms, something every woman over 40 despises if asked, although most every box gym does have that one old guy who is always naked in the locker room, foot up on a bench, chatting to anyone who will listen.

We teach group exercise from the days of **Jane Fonda**, we give little, if any help past the first day or two, we don't offer any linger or socialization space, we do not create group programming, relevant to the over 50 group, such as adult sports performance, nor do we have space, nor the interest, to add book clubs, Mahjong classes or sip and smile social hours with wine.

Our philosophy is still the same for our clients as it was decades ago... pay us to rent the equipment, come in, fight an overstuffed crowd, and if you want help, it is very expensive. While you are here, we have no place to linger and chat, and you must take your clothes off in front of ten others in our group locker room. Then, go home...

Training gyms are even worse in many ways. Most adult, upscale training gyms, defined as somewhere between 2,500 square feet up to about 10,000 feet, with 200+ members or so, and offering one-on-one, small group and team training designed to support the higher payers, have become so focused on shoving more clients into the box they have almost killed their own businesses.

These training gyms have, on a national average, over 95% of their clients over 40 years old, with the large majority of these gyms having their total membership all over 40, yet often do not understand who they serve and how to retain them

over time.

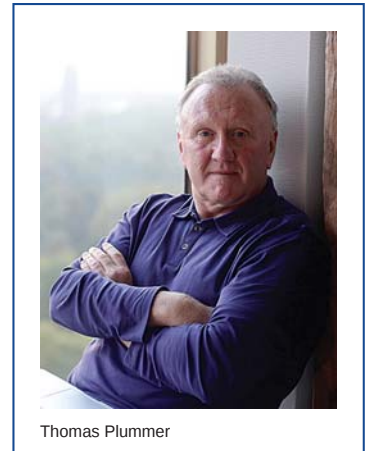
For example, a current trend promoted on social media is to get every client using an iPad with their work out on it each time they visit the gym. The theory is that, now, a single trainer can manage more clients, all at the same time, as his group is supposed to just do their own thing off the pad, and all the coach has to do is wander around checking form and answering questions.

So, we have a national isolation issue in the over 50 age group and the vast majority of our clients are nationally over 45 in the training gym model. Now, let's isolate them even more by forcing them to spend their hour with us face down on yet another electronic device, eliminating the opportunity to talk to others in the gym or even their coach. Can't they do this at home without us? We have an isolation crisis, yet we are forcing more isolation and calling it good for the client.

Let's also stuff more equipment into the box, take away all socialization space, do not offer a place to have a decent cup of coffee or shake, eliminate the intimacy of just four in small group and make them into groups of six or more where they now are forced to spread out and wander the entire gym to get a workout in. And, just for an added touch of "what the hell are we thinking," we force the top 30% by affluence of the population within five miles of the gym, a typical client stat for a training gym, to use a single toilet, something all wealthy people just can't wait to do each time they go to their gym. Even *Buc-ees*, the highest end road stop company in the country, knows that is wrong and offers bathrooms nicer than many hotels.

A final statistic we also must consider points to an epic failure across the entire fitness industry. If we consider the modern fitness business era started in 1945, about 82 years ago, at the end of WWII, and we look at the total penetration rate of the fitness world today, defined as total number of people currently working out in any fitness facility, then we are a total failure.

Our national trade association claims success, because we are now at the highest percentage we have ever achieved, which is about 25% of all people have gym memberships, or about eighty million. But, the flip of that is after 82 years of selling health and fitness to the masses, we still have 75% (out of the current U.S. population of 344 million) who still don't see any value in what we offer, even though we are also the fattest country on the planet. In other words, what is it we are doing, and what have we been doing that prevents so many people believing we can help them?



Thomas Plummer

What the virus taught us.

The virus years created an entire industry, springing up overnight like a wild weed in your driveway, then disappearing just a few years later. The mistake we all made is we did not recognize the trend as a temporary solution to a current problem but instead considered it the next step in fitness business evolution.

The problem was gym goes couldn't go to the gym in 2020, coupled with a secondary rise in the want of fitness equipment because many non-gym people believed working out could be a shield against getting sick. Hello problem and hello *Peloton*, *Tonal*, the *Mirror* and so many others rushing in to fill the need of almost 75 million people barred from their gyms who didn't want to stop working out and a few million more who thought working out at home might save them.

These companies raged for about three years. Gym owners in 2020 - 2022 sat in the dark at home, sipping cheap whiskey, wondering if the virus would end and if they would ever get their members out of the spare bedroom and off their bikes and back into their businesses.

Many believed this would be the end of the traditional fitness model. Why leave home and pay for a gym when one could just order a bike, delivered to your door, pay \$39 per month for an app and take classes from the hottest instructors in the world, while pedaling naked in your basement? Why leave home when the guy in a mirror will take you through a workout in your bedroom using a few dumbbells? But, they all finally did leave home.

If the industry was going to die, the years of 2020 - 2022 should have been the ones that killed us. But, the virus passed, gyms reopened and the world began again... and most importantly, people fled the bike in the spare room and rejoined the world of people.

(See **Thomas Plummer** Page 19)

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...Thomas Plummer

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Why? Because human beings need human contact, something you can't get from following an app, even pedaling along with a few hundred online people watching a crazy cult instructor from New York scream and yell their way through another hour spin. Inspirational? Yes. But, does it relieve the need to get out, be alive again, be near people and be part of the world? No, and tech will never solve the need to be alive and part of a social dynamic only going to a gym can offer.

Ways to fight back.

Start with this thought: if our clients are aging, and in the short-term future will reflect a much larger percentage of our memberships, and isolation is an issue now affecting people of all ages lost face down in their tech or working at home alone, what do all these people need we are not providing?

■ **Check your marketing.** Stop marketing to the people already in fitness and shift to those who don't feel they yet fit into what we as an industry offer. Almost 80% of the population doesn't belong to a gym. Do these people care about buzz

words like strength training, the number of classes you offer or pictures of your staff in workout clothes?

They do care about if they fit into your business, meaning will they be the only one that is new, or overweight, or scared or hasn't been in a gym in ten years? Testimonials were, and still are, the best way to overcome these fears, especially featuring clients who aren't perfect, were scared but then found they did belong in your business.

Make sure your social media reflects the social dynamic and human connection missing in their lives as they are now. AI generated models, in slinky workout clothes, do not speak to a woman over 40 who has esteem issues and is terrified of going to a gym.

■ **Reconsider how much help you are willing to offer up front.** Six-week trial memberships let new people know they fit, will get help and can be successful without the risk of being forced to join too quickly.

Individualize these for the person in front of you, their experience level and their broader interests, and do not default to a set, one size fits all, template. Most importantly, introduce them to people, let the staff demonstrate we are here and we care, and again work the social dynamic into the trial.

■ **Add linger spaces that are comfortable.** I come early and get a cup of good coffee. I finish and sit at a table, scrolling, drinking a \$10 shake, talking to a few people who were with me in my small group. You have a fun workout in the park on Saturday, and I am there. I am not even working out, but I stop by the gym, get a drink and just hangout for twenty minutes, just to be part of the culture. Create spaces where all this can happen, even if you start with only a few hundred square feet in a training gym.

Final Thoughts

I work at home, I am isolated, I am alone. I sit in the evening and scroll. The former pillars of the third space in life are gone. Most no longer go to church or have that special thing that gets them out and with people. Now, working in an office, going to lunch with friends, stopping for a drink after work is gone, too.

My choices are limited in the home/work life. I can sit in a coffee shop all afternoon staring at my laptop. I can go to lunch and sit for an extra hour just chatting. Or maybe, just maybe, join a gym, where I am part of a community, get real, live attention and have a place to sit and linger before and after my work out.

The future of fitness is not more tech and more AI. The virus proved tech

and working out at home was a good patch but not a long-term solution. If tech had lived up to its expectations, the fitness industry would have died in 2023.

People want, need and will pay for human interaction, but we aren't ready for this coming wave in the fitness industry. Instead, we waste time chasing the magic instead of going back to what always worked, and what will continue to work, people helping other people chase better lives through fitness.

(Thomas Plummer has been a presenter, business consultant and author in the fitness industry for fifty years. During those years, he has taught over 1,100 workshops in six countries and has sold over two hundred thousand copies of his business books, making him what many consider one of the most influential thought leaders in the history of the modern fitness industry. He is currently living on Cape Cod, still writing and is in the happy state of almost, now and then, every once in a while, semiretired, focusing mostly these days on teaching speaker development workshops for the next generation of fitness professionals. Thomas can be reached at Thomasplummer@mac.com.)

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