

Norm Cates'

# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF TRUST

## NORM CATES

### *50 Years Ago, a Fork in the Road*



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## NOVEMBER 2023

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# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF TRUST

## NORM CATES

### 50 Years Ago, a Fork in the Road

By: Anthony Dominic

**Publisher's Note:** Imagine for a moment... Your life is going full speed ahead. You are where you are supposed to be, doing what you were meant to do. Life is good. **BAM!!!** A brick wall stops you dead in your tracks. Your path is no longer clear. Everything is up in the air.

In the 1970s, this was the experience of my Dad, **Norm Cates**. Having graduated from N.C. State University, then serving in the U.S. Air Force as a Jet Instructor Pilot, he moved on to become an Airline Pilot. He was where he was supposed to be, doing what he was meant to do. **BAM!!!** The *Oil Embargo* of 1973 stopped him and the world dead in its tracks. As a junior pilot, he was furloughed

until further notice. His path was no longer clear, and in his case, he was no longer in the air.

I share this story because it happened 50 years ago, and it set Cates on a new course in life, the *Health and Fitness Club Industry*. As they say, "The rest is history." Well, what a story that history is, and I would be remiss as a son, and business partner, if I did not bring this story and that history back into view at this time.

As part of *Club Insider*'s transition to an Online Only Publication, we have paid homage to those who have allowed us to remain in business for 30 years. In recent months, we have discussed/honored our Readers, our Authors and our Advertisers. But, to you all, especially those of you

who might be newer readers and do not know this particular story, it is important to understand the life and times of my Dad, and *Club Insider Founder, Norm Cates*. From that, you will know how much he loves you, this industry and being part of it in any way he can.

To that end, this month, we represent a story originally written and published in 2017 when Cates was honored with *Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award*. It was written by **Anthony Dominic** of *Club Industry*, and we hope you enjoy it! To this day, we are thankful for the deep dive Anthony took, providing our family and industry with this story that will always be part of our family's legacy and this industry's history. Thank you all for reading.

(See **Norm Cates** Page 8)



Norm Cates

## IHRSA Named Top-Performing Association

**BOSTON, MA** - IHRSA --the Health & Fitness Association, a global community of health and fitness industry leaders-- was named a top-performing trade group as ranked by key policymakers, staff, media, influencers, lobbyists and communications professionals working in the nation's capital, according to an annual *TradeMarks Survey* by APCO, an independent global public affairs and strategic communications consultancy.

IHRSA earned the top position in five of 15 survey categories:

1. Unified Voice;

- 2. Media Relations;
- 3. Coalition Building;
- 4. Information Resource; and,
- 5. Self-regulation.

None of the other 50 associations ranked by the survey scored as many top spots as IHRSA. The association with the second most top rankings was the *National Shooting Sports Foundation* with three top spots.

As defined by APCO, the study criteria for the five categories that IHRSA ranked first in are measured as follows:

■ Unified Voice represents the voice of the entire industry and the interests of all its members;

■ Media Relations includes leveraging positive media coverage for the industry and its issues;

■ Coalition Building includes working with a broad array of industry organizations on policy issues;

■ Information Resources measures the creation and distribution of accurate and reliable information research and data to



inform policy;

■ Self-regulation promotes high standards in the industry by establishing and enforcing codes of conduct.

(See **IHRSA** Page 7)

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■ Gainesville Health & Fitness Announces Expansion To Elevate Member Experience

■ John W. Brick Foundation Launches the Mental Wellbeing Association

■ 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 359th 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 industry 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!!!**

■CECIL SPEARMAN is my long-time friend, and he is one of the key people long ago when we added "H" for Health to the acronym IRSa. Cecil not only helped **RICK CARO, JOHN McCARTHY and I grow IRSa to become IHRSA**, Cecil was also one of those in Chicago at the Faust

Roundtable Meeting when we created Club Insider, now over 30+ years ago.

On October 31, 2023 (Happy Halloween Y'all!), I got a call from Cecil. He shared some important news from his organization which I'm going to share with you all now. At age 92, Cecil has reached a point in life where he wants to turn over his **four fabulous California clubs** entirely to his sons. He shared the following with me:

"Norm, since the beginning of **Spearman Clubs**, with the opening of the **Lake Bluff Indoor Tennis Club** in 1971, I have been the CEO and COO. Also, **JEAN**, my beloved wife who died in January 2023, was serving as the *only Member of the Board* with me before she passed away. Today, I'm announcing that starting next month, in December 2023, my three sons will replace Jean as Members of this Board.

Also, starting in December, my oldest son, **MARK SPEARMAN**, will take over as COO for our four clubs as a result of his outstanding performance as *GM of our Laguna Niguel Racquet Club*. Mark will take over all of the club operations as I step up to the single role of *Chairman of the Board CEO only*. We anticipate **great results** from Mark's leadership."

Congratulations Mark, and

## Good On Ya' Cecil!!!

■Throughout the month of November, **UFC GYM** and **UFC FIT** will honor **Veterans** with complimentary recovery services, membership promotions and retail discounts. **UFC GYM**, the first major brand extension of **UFC**, and **UFC FIT** will honor active duty and retired military personnel with complimentary recovery services, complimentary passes, membership deals and more at select locations. Participants may redeem the special offers beginning on Saturday, November 11 and throughout the end of November. Veterans who are members can take advantage of complimentary recovery services for the month of November or two personal training sessions with a professional coach. Those who are not currently members may claim a *complimentary Champion Pass* to use from Veterans Day through the end of the month, or they may become members with joining fees waived and a \$10 discount on dues for any month-to-month membership. Veteran members, and non-members alike, will be eligible to receive a 30% discount on all retail purchases. Additionally, a variety of specialty classes and programming will be offered at selected locations.



Norm Cates

Folks, as the son of a *great U.S. Air Force man* who retired after 21 years of service, and me being a former *U.S. Air Force Jet Instructor Pilot* for four years, I have something I want to say about this: I **find what UFC GYM and UFC Fit is doing by honoring Veterans throughout the month of November to be a down-right GREAT THING!** I TIP MY BLACK HAT to the **UFC Folks** all across the land!

(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 **30th 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 **IHRSA** 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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# Exercise IS Medicine

By: Mike Alpert

For those of you who are familiar with Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*, you are familiar with the *Fly Wheel Concept*. Specifically, it takes time and patience to create meaningful change (I refer to Improvements vs. Change), but once it begins to be incorporated, it is like a Fly Wheel. It begins slowly, and then, as it gains more recognition and acceptance, it picks up speed and accelerates. It is my opinion that this is what is happening in healthcare today as it applies to exercise being accepted as part of the adjunctive standard of care for people affected by cancer and other chronic illnesses. And, this will mandate insurance reimbursement for exercise and nutrition programs offered at health and fitness clubs nationwide.

I recently read an important state-of-the-art review on the care of breast cancer survivors from the *Mayo Clinic* in Rochester, Minnesota.

**From the Abstract:** "Breast cancer survivors may experience significant aftereffects from diagnosis of breast cancer and cancer-directed therapies. It describes the side effects of chemotherapy and endocrine therapy and evidence-based strategies for the management of such effects, with particular attention to effects of therapies with curative intent. It includes strategies to promote health and wellness among breast cancer survivors, along

with data to support the use of integrative oncology strategies. The strategies outlined in this review are paramount to supporting breast cancer survivors' quality of life."

**In the body of the review:**

*"Integrative Oncology approaches to breast cancer survivorship - Exercise"*

"Exercise is one of the most important lifestyle interventions patients can engage in to prevent recurrence and decrease symptoms associated with breast cancer treatments. Research has shown that exercise reduces both recurrence of and death from breast cancer; one meta-analysis reported that meeting recommended physical activity guidelines (at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise a week) after diagnosis was associated with lower risk of breast cancer-related death during average follow-up periods ranging from 4.3 to 12.7 years. Exercise has also been shown to improve fatigue, anxiety, depression, quality of life, physical function, strength, sleep and bone health. Resistance training is safe in patients with lymphedema and should be encouraged. Unfortunately, most breast cancer survivors do not meet the recommended goals of 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise a week and twice weekly strength training."

So, what is *Integrated Oncology*, and what will it do to make the fly wheel

accelerate? Integrative Oncology is the use of complementary, or integrative, therapies along with conventional medicine. These therapies work together with standard treatment methods (surgery, chemotherapy, radiation) to treat the patient's body, mind and spirit. Read on!

*City of Hope* received a transformative \$100 million gift from the *Panda Charitable Foundation* to create a first-of-its-kind national Integrative Oncology program. *Peggy and Andrew Cherng* are entrepreneurial philanthropists who co-founded and own *Panda Express* and the *Panda Restaurant Group* and have grown it to \$5 billion in annual sales. According to *City of Hope's* press release, "they intend to change the way we look at cancer care."

An estimated 40% of cancer patients use integrative therapies. Studies show that integrative therapies can support better health, improve quality of life and optimize clinical outcomes. *City of Hope* says that they plan to use the *Panda Charitable Foundation* gift to make Integrative Oncology an evidence-based, interwoven standard of care that supports optimal cancer treatment and survivorship.

Once Integrated Oncology is accepted as a standard of care in treating cancer, then insurance will have to reimburse for it. And, I am sure that will lead to other chronic conditions as well. It is one more step towards third party reimbursement. Think of the millions of



Mike Alpert

people who will need exercise-based services to help treat these chronic health conditions. And, your club will be able to apply for and be reimbursed for these exercise-based programs. Is your club preparing for this huge opportunity?

If you are interested in participating in a beta trial with exercise oncology, contact me at [mike@smarthealthclubs.com](mailto:mike@smarthealthclubs.com) and remember, **Exercise IS Medicine!**

*(Mike Alpert is the COO of Smart Health Clubs. He can be contacted at [mike@smarthealthclubs.com](mailto:mike@smarthealthclubs.com) or 951 - 205 - 1136.)*

## Gainesville Health & Fitness Builds a Stronger Future: GHF Announces Expansion To Elevate Member Experience

GAINESVILLE, FL - Gainesville Health & Fitness (GHF), a cornerstone of the Gainesville community over the past 45 years, announces its latest chapter in growth and innovation. GHF, founded by Joe Cirulli, reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the local community in Gainesville by expanding the already impressive 122,000 square-foot campus by an additional 11,000 square feet.

Reflecting on the journey that has brought GHF to this exciting point, Cirulli remarked, "Back when I started GHF, I had to make a crucial decision about our future. Essentially, it boiled down to two options: Do we build a model that can be replicated in multiple cities or do we focus on serving one community to the best of our ability? We chose to focus on our community in Gainesville. Our local focus has allowed us to grow from a modest size in 1978 to an expansive 122,000 square foot campus."

GHF's unwavering dedication to meet the unique needs of the Gainesville community has led to a host of specialized offerings over the years, including a women's-only center, the Tioga location, a completely renovated indoor spa and pool area, a diverse range of fitness programs and two outdoor training spaces. Now, GHF is taking its commitment to the next level with this ambitious expansion. The expansion will feature a range of additions including:

- A unique bridge over the exercise floor to enlarge the stretching area;
- A state-of-the-art functional training space;
- A stunning new personal training area;
- A brand-new hot yoga studio, included in every membership;
- An expanded leg training area with additional weight equipment;
- An additional dumbbell area with more flat benches;

■ A versatile space earmarked for a future business, the details of which will be unveiled later.

In addition to the added 11,000 square feet of space, GHF Tioga proudly announces a significant expansion to its existing facility. The development also marks an evolution in the center's offerings. This expansion includes a revamped outdoor area featuring a functional space with a roof, upgraded flooring and new equipment. Notably, this revitalized space is set to house CrossFit amenities and a more extensive member workout area, fostering a shared fitness environment. The enhancements aim to provide a more versatile and engaging experience for members, aligning with GHF Tioga's commitment to offering top-tier facilities and services.

As GHF continues to evolve and expand, it remains committed to its core



mission of promoting fitness, wellbeing, and community among its members. The journey that began in 1978 is far from over, and Cirulli looks forward to many more years of growth and service to the Gainesville community.

## ...Norm's Notes

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■ **Nautilus Changes Corporate Name to BowFlex in Turnaround Bid** - The struggling fitness equipment maker is rallying behind its most popular brand as part of CEO, **JIM BARR**'s comeback plan. The name change took effect on November 1st and includes an NYSE ticker change from **NLS** to **BFX**.

■ **PETE MOORE** and **DAVID GANULIN** have announced that over **200 HALO Executives** have sharpened their skill set through their *Executive Bootcamp*. Moore and Ganulin invite you all to join this group and hone your *financial* and *strategic knowledge* skill sets over two weeks. All classes are taught live by *HALO Talks Podcast Host, PETE MOORE*, Founder and Managing Partner of Integrity Square.

Pete Moore is a *Harvard Business School Graduate*, and he has 25+ years of private equity, investment banking and entrepreneurial experience in the global HALO sector. Pete is the *Founder, Managing Partner and Chief Dream Architect at Integrity Square (ISQ)*. ISQ is a leading boutique financial advisory firm focused on the \$4.7T Health, Active Lifestyle, Outdoor ("HALO") sector. Since founding ISQ in 2010, the firm has played an active advisory role in 100+ mergers and acquisitions, private placements and advisory assignments across North America. Pete and his team have also invested in passionate entrepreneurs at *HigherDOSE, XTEND and Promotion Vault*.

ISQ's media and live education properties include: *HALO Talks*, a leading B2B podcast in the sector (250+ completed interviews and over 50,000 downloads), as well as *HALO Academy*, an Executive Education Bootcamp Series.

For enrollment information, contact **David Ganulin, Integrity Square Chief Marketing Officer**, at: **dganulin@integritysq.com**.

## ...IHRSA

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"IHRSA is honored to be named to this distinguished list of well-known and capable Washington, D.C.-based trade associations," said **Chris Craytor, IHRSA Board of Directors Chair**. "Under the leadership of **Liz Clark** as President and CEO, IHRSA has taken decisive action to implement active grassroots mobilization and political engagement, create a prominent and effective member and stakeholder communications program, and modernize operations with a refocused staff."

Speaking with one voice, ensuring a varied set of Association Members are involved in the conversation with legislators and maintaining bipartisanship are three important elements to building



Pete Moore

■ **COACH PRIME's Colorado University Football Team** was robbed in their locker room during their recent game/visit at UCLA. That is sad news! Police are investigating allegations by **Coach DEION SANDERS (a/k/a "Coach Prime")** and Colorado University football players who said they were missing jewelry and other valuables following the team's 28 - 16 loss to UCLA at Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena, California. Both Pasadena Police and private security were in attendance at the game Saturday. "That's awful for anybody," UCLA Head Coach, **CHIP KELLY**, told local reporters on Monday after the incident. "You would think that when you go anywhere that your valuables are safe."

Folks, way back over 50 years ago, when I played football for N.C. State, every day before practice and before all football games, we would place our valuables in a small yellow envelope and write our name on the envelope. And, during all of our practices and during all of our games, those envelopes would stay in the backpack of our *Team's Equipment Manager*. The envelopes would only be given back to the players AFTER the practice or the football game! I can only give those Colorado University folks, including Coach PRIME a **REAL BIG DUH**

on this one! With some good sense, those thefts should **NEVER HAVE HAPPENED!**

■ **Northwestern State University (NSU)** in Natchitoches, Louisiana, announced that it has cancelled the remainder of the 2023 football season due to the recent death of junior safety **RONNIE CALDWELL**. In an announcement, the school cited the mental health and wellbeing of its student-athletes as the primary reason for its decision. Caldwell was a junior safety from Cedar Park, Texas. He had been persevering through an injury and traveling with the team in a coaching capacity, helping other defensive backs with their technique and schemes. His death remains under investigation by the Natchitoches Police Department. "Ronnie was a beloved member of our community, and we miss him greatly," said NSU President, **DR. MARCUS JONES**. "While our instinct was to return to the field of play following his death, we've since learned that the hurt on our team was too deep. It is in the best interest of our players, coaches and staff to pause and to take this time to mourn, to heal and to support Ronnie's family." Moreover, the school announced that it has accepted the resignation of **BRAD LAIRD**, who was in his sixth season as *Head Coach* of the Demons Football Team. Laird commented, "Due to the loss of Ronnie and the emotional burden it has caused me, I don't feel I can give my all to these players or this program. Any coach will tell you that their players become like family, so the loss of Ronnie was like losing a son. I love this program and this university, and I know it will persevere and move forward with the competitive spirit that is at the core of our DNA."

**May Ronnie Caldwell Rest In Peace.**

*Credit to my friend, PETE BROWN'S fine Athletic Business Magazine, for providing this sad news item.*

■ **From our family to yours, we wish**

**you all a very Happy Thanksgiving!** We hope all take a moment to reflect on the important things in life. Stay Tuned next month, as we close out 2023!!!

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

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

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 49-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 30th year of monthly publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. You can reach Norm by phone at **770-635-7578** or email at **Norm@clubinsideronline.com**.)

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Liz Clark, IHRSA President & CEO



Chris Craytor, Chair of IHRSA Board

associations on both overall effectiveness and a range of detailed areas. The results

show in detail where associations must excel to enhance their impact.

**...Norm Cates**

continued from page 3

And, Dad, thank you for everything you have done for me, our family and this industry.

**A Man of Many Hats**

*Through CourtSouth, IHRSA and Club Insider, Norm Cates Has Devoted a Lifetime to the Club Industry*

By: Anthony Dominic

Originally published by Club Industry on its website ([www.clubindustry.com](http://www.clubindustry.com)), September 13, 2017. (Courtesy of Club Industry/Penton Media, Inc. and Penton Business Media, Inc. Not to be reproduced without written permission.)

■ ■ ■

If one is to tell the story of how Norm Cates helped revolutionize the health club industry, there is only one logical starting point: *the 1973 oil embargo*.

It was a cooler-than-usual October in North Central Georgia, and Cates was beside himself. A world away, the Yom Kippur War was raging, and OPEC was playing gasoline hardball with the United States. Per-barrel oil prices doubled, tripled and eventually quadrupled. Shockwaves fired off in every direction, even rattling the U.S. airline industry.

Cates, a then - 27 - year - old *Southern Airways* pilot, was among 40 new aviators who were handed a 4-year layoff. It was an abrupt ending to a journey that had been years in the making. Aviation is in Cates' DNA. His father was a B-17 gunner in *World War II's Pacific Theater*, and Cates grew up as a proper Air Force brat, bouncing from base to base, city to city. (Or as Cates, ever extroverted, tells it with a laugh: "I never met a stranger.")

Except Cates was now a stranger

to even himself. If he wasn't a pilot, who was he?

A Certified Public Accountant named **Ray Irwin** held the answer. During Cates' layoff, the two men met incidentally while waiting for a racquetball court at their Atlanta apartment complex. Irwin was property-savvy and had hatched a business plan to open his own racquetball club in the city. Cates liked the idea. It was the height of U.S. racquetball craze, and Cates needed reliable income. More importantly, he needed a purpose.

In 1976, Cates and his partners --Irwin, **Rich Boggs** and **Fred Streck**—launched *CourtSouth*, a racquetball club company that was among the first of its kind in the American Southeast. Cates, the once-unlikely club owner-operator, found himself knee-deep in a young but rapidly expanding industry.

Forty-one years later, he remains one of the industry's greatest patrons and one of its most influential leaders. For Cates, the 2017 *Club Industry Lifetime Achievement Award* recipient, CourtSouth was only the beginning of a long and storied career, one that is intertwined with the maturation of the very industry itself.

**A New Calling**

The oil crisis came and went, and Southern Airways eventually called Cates back to work. But, things had changed. He was now a successful racquetball club operator, whose first facility attracted 5,000 members in its first 90 days of business. In a pivotal moment, Cates resigned without remorse from his job at Southern Airways (which later became part of *Delta*).

"It turned out, I had just made up my mind," he said. "I wanted to stick with what we were creating. I resigned because I thought I could have more enjoyment with [the club business] if I stayed with it. I could have made a quarter-of-a-million dollars [a year] as an airline pilot. But, one of the



Norm Cates the U.S. Air Force Jet Instructor Pilot

things I learned is money's not the only thing that life's about."

With CourtSouth, Cates and his partners felt like they were "steering their own ship." If they were going to be successful, it would be because they had made the right moves. If they failed, it would be because they hadn't. These notions of freedom and responsibility took Cates back to his years as an offensive lineman at *North Carolina State University*, where he was a *First Team All-Atlantic Coast Conference and Honorable Mention All-American*.

Even though Cates was as an All-New York State football player in high school, he had been told he was physically too small to find success in Division I college football. For the young athlete, this was a challenge, not a deterrent. Cates' high school coach had taught him that the harder you hit, the better your chance is of winning the game. In other words, sheer intensity and passion will determine your successes or failures... in football and in life. Cates saw the club business in the same light.

"We ended up being successful in the club business," Cates said. "We made a dent in the marketplace in Atlanta because we created a new product mix that wasn't really there until we got started."

By today's standards, the clubs were simple facilities: courts, spas, locker rooms. But, for years, they served a growing demand and were noteworthy for being among the first of their kind in the country.

"One important thing they did is they licensed the [CourtSouth] name and some systems and expertise so people could create clubs in other areas with background and assistance but without Norm's team having to be on site full-time," **Rick Caro**, President of Management Vision and longtime friend and associate of Cates, said.

The partners expanded to nine locations before splitting the business in May 1981. The men left club-by-club ownership to fate, electing to draw names from a hat. The upside: Cates drew Lenox, the newest, and rent-wise, cheapest club in the lot, located in Atlanta's bustling Buckhead district. The downside: The greater racquetball club business was dying.

By the end of the decade, many once-thriving clubs were struggling to attract and retain members. Financially, it was disaster, prompting many clubs to close. (An old, pessimistic industry adage went: "Racquetball is easy to learn and easier to forget.")

Cates, however, was not so willing to wave a white flag.

**An Industry Takes Shape**

In 1980, Cates was elected President of the National Court Club Association (NCCA), an organization that served racquetball club owners. He also (See **Norm Cates** Page 10)



Three Generations of Cates Men



The Courtsouth Boys (L to R): the late Lyle Ray Irwin, Norm Cates, Rich Boggs and the late Fred Streck (Seated)



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**...Norm Cates**

continued from page 8

had ties to the *National Tennis Association (NTA)*, of which Rick Caro, a fellow *NCCA Board Member*, was *President*.

The then-fledgling fitness industry lacked the infrastructure it has today: trade shows, media outlets and robust associations. The *NCCA* and *NTA* conventions and trade shows were among the only forums in which club owners and operators could gather and exchange ideas. "It was a beautiful thing," Cates said. Strategies were fleshed out. Trials were scrutinized, and triumphs were celebrated. Most importantly, the best ideas floated; the weakest sank.

The meetings helped birth the multi-use club concept, a remedy to Cates' problems in Atlanta where his club had 16 courts. It was a simple but progressive idea --converting courts into exercise spaces--which many *NTA* clubs had already begun to implement.

"I ended up hiring a crew, and we got in there and tore down 12 racquetball courts with me personally swinging the sledgehammer every day for two weeks and with my team of workers hauling the busted cinder block walls out piece by piece in buckets," Cates said. "Three weeks later, we were converting those 12 former racquetball courts into aerobics studios, an expanded *Nautilus* space and free weight rooms. I also put in 30 *Lifecycles* and 30 more in my Downtown Athletic Club."

Cates knew better than anyone that operating a club could, at times, feel like living on an island. Although he was quickly realizing that formalized associations could not only support club solutions but could also create a real community of like-minded entrepreneurs.

That year, 1980, Cates announced to the *NCCA* membership his goal to double the Association's club membership from 400 clubs to 800 clubs by the end of

his term. It was an ambitious endeavor that caught the attention of Caro.

Caro was concerned that neither the *NCCA* nor the *NTA* were reporting strong membership growth. The Boards' efforts were also becoming redundant. So, he approached Cates with the idea to merge both groups into a single association that would also serve the growing number of non-court club operators.

At least four nights a week for a stretch of six months, Cates and Caro discussed this dream association over the phone. With Johnny Carson playing quietly in the background, they would talk logistics, memberships and big-picture goals.

Caro organized an exploratory meeting in Chicago in late 1980, where Cates introduced their concept to five key industry players: **Todd Pulis**, **Peter Donahue**, **Jennifer Michell Wayt**, **Curt Beusman** and **Dale Dibble**. Everyone was in agreement.

Weeks later, the seven colleagues met at Caro's New York City office, where they named and christened the new group: the **International Racquet Sports Association**, or **IRSA**. (An "H" for Health was added to the acronym in 1994, making it the *International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association*.) On the spot, the founders wrote bylaws, outlined the first trade show and strategized how they would formally wind-down and combine elements of the two existing associations.

The pillars of *IRSA* were as follows: to provide education for club operators, to support club memberships worldwide, to support regional associations and to produce a trade show. These had been the basic tenets of all of those late-night conversations.

Early on, the "IRSA Seven" also tapped **John McCarthy** as *Executive Director* and **Chuck Leve** as *Director of Associate Members*.

Most symbolically, the group elected Cates to be *IRSA's First President*.



(L to R) Norm Cates and John McCarthy



(L to R) Rick Caro, Norm Cates and Justin Cates

serving for the 1981 - 1982 fiscal year. In theory, it provided organizational continuity. The ex-Air Force brat had become a familiar face and name to many. Cates is gregarious by nature, never hesitant to walk right up, shake a hand and say hello. ("I don't make friends; I make life relationships," Cates said). This quality made him an effective club operator and a respected association leader.

"Norm always worked well with partners," Caro said. "Some people are classic individual entrepreneurs, but Norm was always comfortable in a cooperative environment, one where he worked with others. He was always a committed guy. That may come from team sports."

"More importantly, he's someone who once he gets down a path, that's the path," Caro continued. "There's no alternative. He's so committed he's going to find a way to put a flashlight through a tunnel and hopefully find the end. There is no obstacle he won't overcome once he's down the path. Following through, meeting deadlines, finding ways to succeed when dollars were limited... this drives him further down the path."

**Shifting Responsibilities**

By 1993, Cates was stretched thin. Not only was he still involved with his clubs and associations, but he now had a young son, **Justin**, and he and his wife, **Ilena**, were opening an antique store in Roswell, a suburb of Atlanta. After much deliberation, Cates devised a plan to combine the two most important aspects of his life by starting the industry publication *Club Insider*.

The monthly tabloid was Cates' solution. He could work from home and spend quality time with Justin, while still serving the fitness industry with the business-to-business-style publication.

Cates shipped 2,500 copies of the

12-page inaugural issue to the 1993 *Club Industry Show*, where he estimates he gave away 2,300.

"All we wanted to do was help everybody in our industry, both sides of the bunch, do better," Cates said of *Club Insider*, which has since published 359 issues in 30 years. "It's the theme of my life --football, U.S. Air Force jet instructor pilot, airline pilot-- everything has gone back to the need of working hard to get better."

*Club Insider* is not an ordinary journal. It's true to its name. The voice and style reflect the man behind the pages. Cates writes to the reader as if they're "sitting together in a bar drinking a sarsaparilla," he said.

One of the monthly's staples is a column titled "Norm's Notes," where Cates calls the good, the bad and the ugly as he sees it. He regularly uses the platform to spotlight unsung heroes in the industry.

"He's exactly who he says he is," Caro said. "No filter. He wears his heart on his sleeve. And, he's not been afraid to take hard stances where he felt others had hurt the industry. His publication is aimed at the little guy."

The fitness industry aside, *Club Insider* proved to be more than a stay-at-home-dad job. It turned into a bonafide father-son business. Since the 1990s, Justin has graduated from envelope-stuffer to *President* and *Assistant Publisher* (now *Publisher* as of April, 2020). He even outlined the future of *Club Insider's* business model in his 2007 *University of Georgia* business college senior thesis project.

"Justin is the finest partner and son any father could possibly hope for," Cates said, "and he, too, has been making *Club Insider* better and better and better."

The publication and the industry it covers have been integral parts of Justin's life for as long as his memory serves. He

(See **Norm Cates** Page 12)



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**...Norm Cates**

continued from page 10

can recall spending early mornings in his Dad's clubs, drying and folding towels and making sure the pools' chlorination levels were just right. He remembers playing with LEGOs while his dad, seated nearby, pecked away at the next issue of *Club Insider*.

"You can have all the passion in the world, but if you don't have the focus to execute it, it doesn't come to fruition," Justin said. "[When I was a kid], we focused on vocabulary every week. I would have 25 words, and my dad would have me sit on the couch and recite every definition and word spelling over and over."

"You [have] to have focus and a hard work ethic," Justin said, "and if anybody knows that it's my dad, no matter what he's doing."

**Lifetime Achievement**

Despite having fallen into the fitness industry by pure chance, Cates' passion for his work is boundless. When asked to speak about his career, he is overcome with emotion. Cates describes it as a "true love story," and one that is far from over.

"My love for this industry comes across every time [an associate] is with me," Cates said. "It's a relationship thing, and I don't know how to put it into words. There are people in our industry where if they need help, and I've got to get in my car and drive nine or 10 hours to get there, I'm going to be there the next day."

If Cates' reputation doesn't precede him, Justin said you can learn everything about the man by watching him walk across a trade show floor (Cates' signature cowboy hat gives him away in any crowd).

"He can't go ten feet without being stopped," Justin said. "Everyone wants to

greet him and shake his hand, and he has something nice to say to them all. He's one of the kindest and most charitable people I know, and he's not making millions of dollars doing what he does. Simply because of his passion, he truly has made a difference for clubs and the communities they're serving."

"He's a big old teddy bear at the end of the day," Justin said.

Caro said Cates, at his core, is a people person. It shows in Cates' great attention to the little things, such as customer service and employee training. "He loves connecting with others and laying down roots," Caro said, "perhaps because he was constantly moving as a kid. It was a hectic lifestyle, but it also helped him develop socially and emotionally in ways few people do."

"Norm always wanted to be grounded, and he has found that in our industry," Caro said. "He's lived in the same house for 25+ years now. He has his exercise routine. He goes for routine walks by the river. Norm has a very established concept of how to organize a life."

Cates' humility and hustle harken back to his first job as a newspaper delivery boy in the ninth grade. If earning a paycheck meant waking up at 5AM and hopping on a motor scooter, that's exactly what he would demand of himself.

"I never had a moment when I thought I was not going to flat-out succeed," Cates said. "I've lived my life that way. I also attribute it to my experiences in football. You've got a choice: You're going to get your ass whooped, or you're going to whoop ass. Unfortunately, that's how life is. But, the choice is up to you."

Cates remains energized by the continued growth and diversification of the health and fitness club industry. At the same time, he is wary of the many challenges its practitioners face, especially for independent club operators, who must navigate in a world saturated with studios and chain health clubs.



(L to R) John Quattrocchi, Norm Cates and Steve Strickland



(L to R) Ray Gordon, the late Sandi Gordon, Norm Cates and Red Lerille

In the 1970s and 1980s, independent club owners were more of the driving force in the industry than they are today, Cates said. Independent club operators, who often are married couples, put their entire lives on the line with their club business, working hard to make it as good as it can be. But, he admitted, whether a club is independently owned or not, its operators must have a rock-solid foundation in customer service if they are to succeed in the long term.

Cates learned some of his greatest lessons from former Mr. America bodybuilder and independent health club owner **Red Lerille** (the recipient of the 2011 *Club Industry Lifetime Achievement Award*), who always emphasized customer-service basics. Say "hi" and "bye." Commit members' names to memory. To club operators, Cates asks: "Are you relationship people or numbers people?"

Cates credits part of his entrepreneurial spirit to Caro, whom he often calls "the industry's best friend."

"I invite you to try to find anybody who could reach the threshold of having helped as many people as Rick Caro has helped," Cates said.

Though he is reluctant to admit as much, Cates has also helped many club operators through his advocacy with

IHRSA and his examination of the industry with *Club Insider*.

"After they put me in a vase and I've gone to the Promised Land, I want to be known as a person who truly gave a serious hoot and as a person whose passion on this earth was to help people in this industry get better," Cates said. "Because that's it. Period. I'm not trying to fool anybody."

*(Anthony joined Club Industry in September 2016 and covers fitness industry news, in addition to administering the brand's e-newsletters, social media and sponsored content. Anthony previously worked as an assistant editor at Dispatch Magazines in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned an Excellence in Journalism Award from The Press Club of Cleveland for feature writing. He also won numerous grants and accolades during his tenure as editor-in-chief of The Burr, Kent State University's student magazine, including a William Randolph Hearst Award. In 2015, Anthony was published in "Car Bombs to Cookie Tables," Belt Publishing's fifth narrative nonfiction anthology about the storied Rust Belt city of Youngstown, Ohio—located just north of where Anthony grew up. Anthony is an avid follower of boxing and basketball, and spends much of his time reading, writing, climbing and mountaineering.)*

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# Effective Hiring

**By: Herb Lipsman**

After decades of leading teams in the health club and country club industries, I keep being reminded of how important it is to hire well. Nothing contributes to the success of the organization more than a good or great hire. Conversely, nothing can be more damaging to the enterprise than a bad hire. Why, then, do so many of us mess up this critical leadership responsibility? How do we keep allowing ourselves to make rushed or desperate decisions that come back to haunt us?

If you are like most leaders facing various hiring decisions in your organization, here is a quick recipe for success that will result in a better batting average than your prior hiring results...

**Trustworthiness:**

- Can you trust that the candidate has the knowledge, skill and expertise to do the job? Are they competent to perform the required duties?

- Do you believe the candidate can be trusted with the company's assets and intellectual property? Does the candidate

possess the character, with attributes such as honesty and integrity, to be trusted?

- Can you trust that the candidate will be dependable and give you their best thinking and best effort day-in and day-out while employed by your organization?

*Aside from hiring someone you know personally, you must rely on references for insight into who the candidate really is and whether they can be trusted. Failure to properly vet a candidate is a ticket to regret.*

**Work Ethic:**

- Does the candidate possess a work ethic that mirrors that of existing top performers? Hiring a candidate who is smart, knowledgeable and experienced but who is lazy will result in regret.

- Have you explored with the candidate the work schedules they maintained with prior employers and how they responded when there was a need to go above and beyond?

*Again, be sure to check references on this subject.*

**Culture Fit:**

- Will the candidate fit in with co-workers on the team and within the organization?

- Do the candidate's personal and professional values align with those of the company? During multiple interviews, does the candidate consistently respond in ways giving you confidence they will be a good fit?

- Is the candidate likeable and do those involved in the interview process all have a good feeling about the person?

- Qualified candidates who are not good culture fits are like introducing a virus into the work environment.



Herb Lipsman

living and working here? Do you need a long-term commitment or is this a short-term assignment?

*In the club business, nearly all employees form relationships and friendships with the members. A long-term employee can be invaluable to a club, while having high turnover can have the opposite effect.*

(See **Herb Lipsman** Page 18)

# Is Your Culture By Accident or Is It By Design?

**By: Chris Stevenson**

When it comes to organizational success, few elements are as influential as culture. I've presented a lot on this topic, and it is one of my favorites because it has such a big impact on an organization's success. I am always excited to learn more, which is why I decided to read **David Friedman's "Culture by Design."** In his book, Friedman presents a compelling argument for actively designing and nurturing culture within an organization. As an avid reader, I found this book to be a valuable resource, although it didn't necessarily unveil groundbreaking concepts. Instead, it offers solid takeaways and practical examples that can significantly impact how leaders approach culture within their organizations. Here are Five Key Takeaways:

**Intentional Culture Creation:** Friedman's book challenges the passive conception of culture development, advocating for a hands-on approach in its design and implementation. He outlines specific steps for leaders to take charge of their organizational culture, emphasizing the importance of proactivity over passivity.

**Practical Frameworks for Action:** The book provides actionable strategies, starting with the foundational steps of identifying core values and purpose. This structured approach can serve as a blueprint for leaders looking to drive cultural change. Friedman's emphasis on practicality ensures that leaders have clear, actionable steps to follow.

**Leadership's Pivotal Role:** Friedman underlines the critical influence of leadership in shaping and upholding a desired culture. He offers practical advice on how leaders can embody the cultural values they seek to instill in their teams. Through anecdotes and expert insights, he illustrates the profound impact leadership behavior has on overall cultural development.

**Inclusivity as a Core Value:** The book emphasizes the importance of inclusivity within organizational culture. Friedman contends that a well-designed culture actively embraces diversity, offering guidance on creating an environment that values and leverages differences. He provides specific strategies for fostering inclusivity, ensuring that diversity becomes a driving force for innovation

and productivity.

**Real-world Applications:** Through a variety of case studies across industries, Friedman substantiates his arguments, demonstrating how intentional culture design has led to tangible positive outcomes. These real-world examples offer a tangible roadmap for readers, showcasing how cultural principles can be applied in diverse organizational settings.

■ ■ ■

"Culture by Design" is worth reading. It is a short and easy read with some good takeaways. As I mentioned earlier, it didn't introduce revolutionary ideas, but it offers solid, actionable takeaways and provides practical examples that make it easy to understand. For leaders seeking to create purposeful and impactful organizational cultures, which they all should be, this book is a worthwhile read.

*(Chris Stevenson, former Power Ranger stuntman, is the Founder of The Empower Group, a full-service consulting firm with services ranging from staff training,*



Chris Stevenson

*workshops, full facility management and more. Stevenson has over 20 years of experience in many aspects of the health and fitness industry. In addition, he is an international speaker who regularly presents at IHRSA, Athletic Business, Club Industry and many other fitness and business events. From health and wellness to business strategies. Chris can be reached by phone at 818-519-6038 or email at chris@stevensonempowers.com.)*

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## Foam Rolling and Myofascial Release for Recovery

By: Sara Kooperman, JD

Foam rolling, also known as self-myofascial release, is a method that has transformed from a once mysterious performance technique used only by professional athletes, coaches and therapists, to a familiar practice used daily in gyms for many types of training and performance enhancement. Self-myofascial release (SMR) is a safe and very effective hands-on technique that involves applying gentle, sustained pressure into the myofascial connective tissue to help eliminate muscle and soft tissue restrictions, support recovery, eliminate pain and restore range of motion.

Fascia is the connective tissue that holds muscles together throughout the body. Individuals of all levels of fitness have adopted foam rolling into their routine for enhanced performance, a speedier recovery time between workouts and better overall training results. Self-myofascial release or SMR as it is abbreviated, is a term used to indicate self-massage and can be used synonymously with foam rolling.

Recent information, new tech-

nology and affordable product designs have introduced an increasing array of foam rollers and other self-massage products for improved training and recovery into the consumer market. Foam rolling can be performed with a roller, a ball, the hands, or many other products by applying pressure to specific points on the muscles or soft tissues of the body using a systematic approach. Through this simple method, it is possible to aid in the recovery of muscles and assist them in returning to a more relaxed state; and therefore, normal function. Normal function means muscles are elastic, healthy, and ready to perform.

### The Role of Recovery

The magic of training for fitness and sport occurs in between and after the workout. The workout is the stimulus for change; therefore, recovery both post-workout and between workouts is essential for both competitive and recreational athletes alike to find homeostasis and gain the necessary improvements in strength, cardiovascular conditioning or other benefits desired. Recovery is not a one size

fits all method. An appropriate recovery program should be individualized for each individual and take into consideration:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Current fitness level;
- Volume/intensity of training;
- Type of training.

Please remember that lack of time for adequate recovery puts athletes at risk for decreased performance, burnout and injury. In fact, exercise physiologists have identified particular types of overtraining: Functional and Non-functional Overreaching (FOR & NFOR) as well as Overtraining Syndrome. Signs and symptoms of overtraining syndrome include increased fatigue, lower fitness and athletic performance, muscular and physiological stress, sleeplessness, interrupted sleep cycles, appetite issues, heart rate variability, dehydration and many others.

Overtraining is a process that can result in overreaching. Functional overreaching may be used as a stimulus



Sara Kooperman, JD

to add an extra push into an athlete's program or routine, which is particularly helpful when competition is forthcoming. So, although this type of overtraining may be helpful, it needs to be closely monitored. Non-functional overreaching is when this over training concept is taken too far for too long, and the athlete does not benefit

(See *Sara Kooperman, JD* Page 16)

## John W. Brick Foundation Launches the Mental Wellbeing Association, the World's First Certification Organization Focused on Mental Well-Being

**TIMONIUM, MD** - The John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation (JWB) has established the first certification organization focused on mental well-being: The Mental Wellbeing Association (MWA). For the first time ever, education, training and certifications will be offered in mental well-being to professionals globally. This highly anticipated initiative of the JWB Foundation coincided perfectly with *World Mental Health Day* and has the potential to improve the health and welfare of so many.

The Mental Wellbeing Association's first certification intends to bridge the gaps between the mental well-being and fitness spaces, contributing to the JWB Foundation's *Mission of changing the way the world treats mental health*. Certifications will be grounded in evidence-based research and a comprehensive psychological perspective focusing on the

four pillars of mental well-being: exercise, nutrition, connection and mindfulness.

"We started the Mental Wellbeing Association, an initiative of the JWB Foundation, to be at the forefront of the

mental well-being renaissance that is underway today. We believe this association will contribute to the global advancement of mental well-being education and will have a profound positive impact on the lives of

millions," said **Lynne and Victor Brick**, *Founders of the John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation, Owners and Founders of Ohana Growth Partners*.

The Mental Wellbeing Association has gone live! For years, the John W. Brick Foundation has been working on a groundbreaking, extensive, and carefully curated certification program that will train and certify fitness professionals in mental well-being. This certification will be the first of many issued by the Mental Wellbeing Association and will be available starting early next year.

Visit the website to join the waitlist and be the first to know about the release of the Mental Well-Being Certification for Fitness Professionals: [www.mentalwellbeingassociation.org/coming-soon](http://www.mentalwellbeingassociation.org/coming-soon).



### ...Sara Kooperman, JD

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from the additional stress but experiences diminished performance because of the lack of recovery, likely even long-term injury. Strategies for boosting acute and chronic recovery include among many things such as foam rolling and self-massage.

#### How Foam Rolling Works

The deep compression of self-myofascial release allows for consistent blood flow to the deep and superficial muscles of the body, and aids in the restoration process and recovery from exercise of healthy tissue. The body naturally wants to be healthy and strong, but often with training, poor posture, nutritional deficiencies, dehydration and other lifestyle factors, an extra boost is needed to achieve optimal muscle and tissue health. When the compression of the rolling or massage device is applied to a specific area of the body, blood flow is cut off or obstructed. This creates a blood flow deficit. However, when the tissue is released, blood flows back into the area with more pressure, flushing the tissue with oxygenrich blood and other nutrients removing waste products. This flush-back effect not only causes more nutrient-rich blood to flow back into the area, it also allows for the release of toxins. It also decreases the tendency for adhesions to develop by addressing the fascia. The foam roller or other self-massage tool can work

as an external device to release pressure and increase blood flow in these local, muscular areas.

#### The Benefits of Foam Rolling

Foam rolling can be an important part of total body recovery, the dynamic warm up or the transition out of an exercise session. The overall benefits of foam rolling can include but are not limited to the following:

**Corrects Muscle Imbalances** - Rolling can help with muscular tightness, which may in turn relieve the imbalance between muscle groups or agonist and antagonist muscles (for example a tight hamstring (agonist) may limit the range of motion in the quadriceps (antagonist).

**Improved Tissue Tolerance** - Foam rolling and self-massage can improve the toughness and density of muscle tissues, which is why with repeated rolling, denser rollers and harder surfaces are necessary to achieve the same benefits.

**Improves Joint Range of Motion (ROM)** - Self-massages using a small ball performed on the bottom of the foot may enable greater extension of the toes and the ankle joint allowing for a greater range of motion through that area.

**Decreases Muscle Soreness and Pain** - Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) has many causes. Foam rolling can help

with tissue massage, which can bring more blood flow to the muscle group(s) needing healing and recovery. This will decrease the duration of DOMS and the potential for muscle or joint pain caused by activity.

**Enhances Performance** - Releasing trigger points can help to reestablish proper movement patterns and pain free movement, ultimately with the goal of enhancing overall performance.

**Promotes Circulation** - Foam rolling and self-massage techniques can be used to promote circulation and the flushing of metabolic waste products. Total body rolling post-workout can serve to begin the recovery process.

**Trigger Points** - Foam rolling can be used to release muscle tightness in the muscles and fascia of the body. These muscular and fascial adhesions are also known as trigger points. Releasing trigger points helps to reestablish proper movement patterns and pain free movement, and ultimately, to enhance performance. Many trigger point therapies attempt to shut down pain signals with sustained pressure to the area. These techniques can result in a disruption of long-term restrictions, which can contribute immensely to inefficient and even painful movement patterns causing joints and tissues to work much harder to attain the ranges of motion crucial to movement success. Many times, these inefficiencies due to muscle restrictions, can lead to inflammatory responses in muscles and

fascia. To understand what a trigger point is, imagine a bungee cord with a knot tied into it. Envision stretching the cord which creates tension, thus stretching the unknotted portion of the cord representing the muscle and the attachment points (tendons and possible ligaments). The knot, however, has remained unaltered. Using a foam roller or other self-massage device can assist in breaking up these muscle knots resuming normal blood flow and function to the soft tissues. The goal of this corrective recovery technique is to get the athlete or fitness enthusiast back to the point of pain free, normal functioning.

■ ■ ■

For information on Foam Rolling and Certifications, please visit: [bit.ly/clubinsider151](http://bit.ly/clubinsider151).

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



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# Solving the Retention Riddle

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

The more social interactions your members have in your facility, the more likely they are to stay. Most operators agree, and every bit of research confirms it. Interactions not only create a more social culture at your club, but in addition to retention, it massively affects your reputation. But, are all interactions equal? Of course not. Just like all experiences are not equal, i.e. working out on machines alone is a totally different experience than working out together in a group. And, even in a group, one experience may vary drastically from another depending on your instructor team, training protocols and delivery standards. So, how do you solve the retention riddle? More screens and scoreboards? More trackers and technology? Might I suggest: genuine and personable interactions, and inclusive, social, shared experiences.

There are really two solutions, or at least two pathways that you could take to increase your interactions. One option is you can invest in additional staff and additional member data and interaction

technology. You can train those staff members (and hold them accountable) to have and record personal interactions with members. The technology could identify and predict high-risk members based on visit frequency, unusual gaps in check-ins, email opens and other factors. You could even build out a sophisticated system that would alert staff when a VIP or high-risk member walks into your building. This could prompt your staff to interact. But, would it make any difference? Maybe (probably) not. Because, again, not all interactions are meaningful.

A couple of years ago, I boarded a Delta flight, headed on a business trip. With Delta based out of Atlanta, I fly with them most of the time. I wouldn't say that I've had any amazing experiences on Delta, but I haven't had any miserable experiences, something that I can't say confidently for the other airlines.

My "preferred" status isn't anything to brag about, but I do get to board somewhere just before the vacationers and families with small children. On this flight, shortly after the cabin doors had closed, a flight attendant walked up to our row,

double checked our aisle number, leaned over the person sitting next to me and said, "Are you [looking down at his phone one more time]... ummm, Mr. Pinkerton?" "Yes," I replied enthusiastically, eager to hear what he had to say next (move to an exit row, upgrade to Comfort+, move all the way to First Class perhaps?) "Well, Mr. Pinkerton, we really appreciate you flying Delta. We know you have other choices when it comes to air travel, and we appreciate you choosing us. Thank you."

As he walked off, the two women sitting next to me inquired, "Are you some super-miles Delta flyer or something?" I quickly reminded them, "Would I be in the middle seat, in the back half of the plane if I was?" Apparently, Delta read the research or hired a consultant who assured them that personal connection is important, that talking to customers is better than emailing customers, and maybe (similar to the retention reports for health club members), that the more they talked to customers, the more likely the customers would be to return and fly again.

Sure, using someone's name is nice. And, thanking them for their business



Jeffrey Pinkerton

is important. But, when it's robotic and contrived or read off a screen, it loses its value. It feels forced and fake, and honestly, I would have preferred a text message and a drink ticket.

Another option for improving retention is directing more people into group fitness. And, not just any group (See Jeffrey Pinkerton Page 18)

## ...Jeffrey Pinkerton

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fitness but a group fitness experience that is inclusive, innovative and inviting to all. One that is welcoming to all fitness levels, all ages and generations, men and women. One that sets the stage for the workout by providing a social space outside the room and wows them when they walk into the room. One that harnesses the collective energy of the group, moves to motivational music (with something on the playlist they like) and helps them feel accomplished and

proud when they finish. One that leaves them with a genuine smile, thank you, a congratulations and invitation back... by name!

Group fitness builds social connections and interactions organically. It's the shared experience of being together and of moving together that creates a special kind of comradeship and connection. It's the thing that helps people disconnect from the pings and dings of emails and text messages and various screens, and challenges them alongside likeminded people, all coached by a motivating and

inspiring instructor. It can be, and should be, the key to your retention strategy.

Of course, knowing the answer to the riddle --get people to group fitness-- and solving a complex equation are often two different things. To solve the problem, you'll need to evaluate your current group fitness formula, you'll need to understand and account for all the variables, and more than likely, you're going to need to make some strategic decisions to reorder your order of operations. Oh, and you're going to have to show your work.

■ ■ ■

If you are interested in learning more about our formula for creating innovative, inclusive group fitness experience, visit [www.mossa.net](http://www.mossa.net), then give us a call and let's work on the solution together!

(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](mailto:jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net).)

## ...Herb Lipsman

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### Benefits of a Great Hire:

- Raises the performance and morale of those around them.
- Contributes new ideas for products, services, systems and procedures.
- Contributes to increased sales.
- Contributes to cost savings.
- Intangible benefits like strengthening the company's culture.

- Injecting cancer into a positive work environment.
- Creating a "time-sucking" distraction to the leader who hired the person.
- Causing distrust among existing team members.
- Causing other team members to question/doubt the wisdom and leadership of the leader who hired them.
- Harming morale and energy level of other team members.

■ ■ ■

### Regrets of a Poor Hire:

Yes, it takes more time to properly

screen, interview and vet candidates for a particular job, but there is no better use of a leader's time than to ensure the highest possible batting average of good/great hires. Hiring right moves the enterprise forward while hiring errors take the company backwards.

(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 [www.herblipsman.com](http://www.herblipsman.com).)

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