



GROUP FITNESS GONE FOR GOOD?



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IS GROUP FITNESS A DYING TREND?

For many gyms, attendance in what used to be a staple 'gym routine' for many (particularly those in their mid 20s-50s) seems to be dwindling. Step and hi/lo have slowly been replaced with more popular formats such as kickboxing and interval training classes. The latter are great additions to any group fitness schedule to add variety and intensity to a workout regimen, however it begs the question, can they completely replace more traditional class formats? While these alternate formats may have rejuvenated class attendance in the short term, have they limited the type of participant that will attend based on variables such as implied intensity of the class?

Many participants have moved away from Group Fitness formats altogether, seeking greater individual attention and personalized results through Personal Training. While the Group Fitness concept is a great way to have the external support of an instructor guiding your workout without the associated cost of individual attention, in a class of 20+ participants, individual attention just may not be possible. In addition, given that most classes are attempting to meet the needs of a wide range of ages and abilities, participants may feel that the class is not completely meeting their personal fitness needs and goals.

If the challenge is dwindling participation and a desire for greater individualized attention without the cost, what is the solution? There seems to be a moving trend towards the new catch phrase "Group Training". In essence, it is a group fitness class led by a Personal Trainer with a format that is similar to a personal training session. Sessions have a specific focus for the day (agility, speed, endurance, and power are just some) and they are led with a limited, smaller number of participants to emphasize that 'personal training' feel. This class design, along with the new, powerful title, is bringing attention back to group fitness classes but in a different light. Now people are starting to view group fitness (group training) as a completely challenging and fun way to train their cardiovascular and muscular systems in an intimate setting - without the cost of personal training.

Although Personal Trainers are the pioneers of this innovative format, here are some steps you can take to start your own Group Training Class (as a Personal Trainer or Group Fitness Instructor):

1. Develop your concept

- a. Who is your market? Be specific, the more you are able to tailor your program to a specific target market, the better results your participants will receive...and the more business you'll drive.
- b. What are the goals of the program? Consider your market group and some common goals for that specific group.

2. Create a catchy name that will capture interest

3. Determine if it will be a registered or drop-in program

- a. Registered programs will allow you to progress the class week to week and build on the information and training of previous weeks. However, there is generally a cost to such programs because of the additional effort put in to create them. Drop-in formats, on the other hand, are simple and don't require as much administration or planning, however most of the advantages of doing a registered program (such as progressive overload) are lost.
- b. Consider your availability, what day/time would generate the most clientele, and whether you will be the sole instructor or if you will have other instructors leading the group(s) as well.

4. Location:

- Will this be an indoor or outdoor led program?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?

5. Develop your program. Build an outline of what will be covered week to week including the following:

- a. Weekly goals
- b. Equipment required

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- c. Exercises taught
- d. Music (if appropriate)
- e. Other details (handouts, blogs, e-newsletters, other forms of communication to stay connected and keep the participants' interest). Remember – don't overwhelm your participants with too much information. K.I.S.S.!

6. Market your program.

Work with your facility to market the program to the members or the community-at-large using posters, email blasts, websites, word of mouth, etc. If you are running the show yourself, use your existing network of contacts to cross-promote services.

7. Run with it! Have fun with it!

Will traditional group fitness classes, such as step and hi/lo, be eliminated altogether in the future? Not likely. There will always be clientele attracted to those steadfast formats. However, I predict that the movement to fuse group fitness with personal training will impact class attendance positively, which is important because in the fitness industry, variety and offering choices to clients are key to promoting successful, healthy living.

Daniela Tempesta has 10 years experience in the fitness industry. She is a BCRPA-Registered Trainer of Fitness Leaders and Personal Trainer. She managed the group exercise department of a women's-only chain before making the move into personal training, presenting, and authoring fitness books. She can be contacted at danielatempesta@shaw.ca



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