

## Evaluating Fitness Programs

There are many aspects of fitness evaluations, and here are a few areas to consider with related questions. You can start by candidly assessing the environment where the program occurs. When you walk in the door how does the space make you feel? Is the temperature cool? How is the air flow? Are there high ceilings for a sense of openness? Light colors and natural light are desired for these emit positive feelings and energy. Are you sincerely greeted by staff? Generally, group exercise classes require separate rooms. If the club does not currently have a separate group exercise room, are there creative solutions so programs can be delivered without interruptions? For example, a dance floor in the dining room could be a quiet place to do yoga early in the morning. Does the group exercise room have a suspended wooden floor, large glass windows and mirrors on two walls? Mirrors are important for they allow participants to see their actual form and make adjustments. Is the space big enough? Generally, you need approximately 45+ square feet per participant. Recently, I witnessed a Pilates class that was so popular members were half in and half outside the doorway. Although it was great to see much interest in the program, the space was inadequate, and the overcrowding hindered the class.

How is the fitness equipment? Is there the right amount? Regarding resistance machines, less can be more which is consistent with trends of body weight and functional training. Does the facility have at least one dual cable cross? This machine has two opposite arms that move internally, externally, up and down and permits many exercise options. All commercial machines are not created equal, and after much due diligence I know of one line that actually attracts members. Also, whatever machines you have, it is important they are relatively new and in good working condition. Are there signs on broken cardio machines, or does the club systematically service all machines so one is rarely out of service? When you operate a stationary bike or elliptical machine, are they smooth and quiet? The pedals on all bikes should be straight. Does the club have a separate area for free weights? If so, there should be a rack with pairs of dumbbells from approximately two through 50+ pounds. Are the free weights left randomly throughout the space, or are they in an orderly place? The latter reflects maintenance. With group classes, like body pump and step, are there enough weights and steps for everyone in the program? A good facility design includes a wide closet where this equipment is out of sight, stored and easily accessible.

Is the fitness program delivered in a clean and safe environment? Sanitizer and towels should be readily available. On the group exercise floor, when you take off your shoes and socks do your feet get dirty? Besides the floor, equipment like mats needs to be consistently cleaned. When you look at a mat it's difficult to know whether it is clean. Now, wipe it with a white towel and cleaner and you will know. Is there a documented maintenance log where the Fitness Director and Club Manager can verify work has been done? Safety is paramount for fitness

programs and far beyond the reach this article. However, whatever format you are offering, safety must be proactively considered then delivered. For example, cardio tennis, which is a fitness program on the tennis courts, should be done with heart rate monitors. It is important to know whether the participants' heart rates are too low, and they need to move more; or if their heart rates are above a safe range, and they need to slow down. Is there a prominent defibrillator with up-to-date software and a good battery? The combination of a defibrillator and staff trained in CPR/AED can make the fitness center the safest place in the club.

Does your fitness staff have the “right stuff?” Education and certifications are essential, yet Professionals with good personalities and people skills are necessary to deliver excellent fitness programs. Top Fitness Professionals are other-centered with a servant's approach. They are very personable and truly like helping others. I recruit and hire people who already have these qualities, for I have not seen these acquired through training. Is your staff prompt with communications and timely for classes? For a class to start on time the instructor needs to show up a few minutes early to ready the equipment and setting. Is the instructor a good role model? Does her appearance exude and present health? Someone who works in fitness and is clearly out of shape sends mixed messages. As one Fitness Committee member asked, “Why would you take golf lessons from someone who could not break 100?” People learn in three different ways – visual, verbal and kinesthetic. Although most athletic learning is visual, does your instructor teach in all three modes? The best Professionals teach simultaneously in all three modes and know which way best connects to their students. Also, they give positive instructions and avoid saying “no” or “don't.” How many disciplines does a fitness instructor teach? Someone who can do multiple formats is most valuable, for she can even substitute for other classes. How is the tone of the teacher's voice? Good tonality is important for yoga and programs with relaxation. Does the Fitness Professional serve the members you are trying to target? Now, there is much interest in private clubs attracting younger members. Since most people are comfortable around others their own age, one way to attract young members is with outstanding Wellness Professionals who are in their thirties and forties.

Thoroughly assess the group exercise programs. Is there a monthly fitness center orientation open to everyone and presented by a Professional? I think this is an essential, for an orientation is a proactive way to inform members and guests about safety, etiquette and usage. Further, good orientations result in leads for other programs like personal training. Are there diverse formats for various ages and abilities? Some young adults have different program interests than many seniors. Water aerobics may serve mostly older adults yet all ages. Pilates is one of the most popular group fitness formats and will attract participants in different conditions. Is there just one Pilates mat class, or are there more than one class for different levels? One mat class can work if you have an excellent instructor who can show the various progressions of the same exercise. For programming I recommend quality over quantity. When you compare this year's fitness class schedule to last season's, are there new formats presented? Your members' fitness

can plateau, and the Director should periodically offer new programs. This may mean he has to contract an independent instructor or earn another certification. Do the days and times for formats periodically rotate? There is no perfect time for a program, and whatever time you select will exclude some people who would like to attend. Hence, offer a popular program at a new time, and you will likely gain some new participants. Is participation recorded and tacked? Through electronics or staff record the number of participants for all classes, for this serves monthly reports. You can use this information to see trends and make forward decisions.

Is the fitness program profitable? While it may be simple to assess a particular class, the more important question is how does the fitness center impact memberships? If currently you have just a small room with some equipment and no staff, you likely know these have few benefits. If you have a staffed facility, are the Fitness Director and other department heads actively involved with the Marketing Director to realize membership goals? There are specific fitness programs clubs can organize and promote to gain members and profits. Do you have a dry hydromassage table? Recently, these were introduced to private clubs which supplement massage therapy and revenues without additional staff. When prospects tour the club, do they get more than a look at the amenities? When possible, prospective members should be able to meet fitness personnel, ask questions and/or watch a program. Hence, this goes back to the importance of having staff with the right qualities – good image, people skills and great personality. Truly, the people delivering amenity operations can be some of your biggest assets or liabilities for membership.

Do you consistently solicit program feedback from members and guests? Criticism is useful, and complaints can be opportunities. Also, keep in mind some feedback is inaccurate and represents a member's personal agenda. When was the last time your fitness program was objectively reviewed by an independent professional? This is like going to the doctor for a physical and could be very beneficial to the long-term health of your program.

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