

Outdoor Group Fitness – A Peak at the Future of Fitness Boot Camp

By Mari Garner

There is a simple concept in the fitness world on increasing revenues – more clients equal more income. One way to increase the number of clients an individual trainer can work with is through group fitness programs such as fitness boot camps.

When executed correctly, these outdoor workouts including military calisthenics, running and hard nosed discipline have worked to get clients of differing fitness levels into great shape as they offered a change from the normal routine at the gym and a push that many people wouldn't give themselves. Once the participants completed the program, they should have gained some of the tools to stay in great shape on their own through running or returning back to they gym with a renewed sense of fitness.

But many clients are beginning to realize that they don't want to go back to the gym or they can't keep the level of fitness achieved with a group program on their own. As the number of these clients increase the concept of boot camp evolves into more than just push-ups and sit-ups with a drill instructor shouting commands. The true concept of boot camp speaks to not just the discipline, but the team work and accountability of both the person and the group. It also speaks to the desire and determination of the client no matter the fitness level to reach a goal. As trainers we have to experiment with programming that will reach both beginners and intermediate level clients in the same session. The challenge lies in keeping your clients coming back each month, thus providing a constant revenue stream and freeing up more of your time as the trainer to spend with new, untrained clients.

Notice I said, WHEN and not IF you design a boot camp program. Boot Camp has become a way of life in many parts of the country. Instead of going to the gym in the morning, many Americans head to boot camp. There is a boot camp on every corner in my city. And as a trainer you should have a solid boot camp program in your offering. Each month a new group pops up offering "the best" fitness boot camp and as trainers we see the revenue potential right from the get go: \$200-300 a person for a month long session and you can get 10 people easy, right? That's a simple \$2-3K for only 20 workouts or around \$100-150 an hour – Jackpot! But what makes a personal trainer, a former drill sergeant or a former fitness model qualified to lead a GROUP of clients in an outdoor group workout? Only their desire to help as many clients as they can handle at one time reach their health and fitness goals.

The true secret to running a successful outdoor group fitness boot camp program lies in the ability of the leadership (you the trainer/instructor) to inspire greatness in their participants. Group fitness in general has moved beyond just a good

workout. With increased competition, we must differentiate ourselves as personalities, not simply instructors.

One way to do this is through knowing your customer.

- Start by learning their name from day 1.
- Look at their health history and figure out a good way to link their goals and restrictions to their name because you don't just have one client to remember, but 10-20 at one time.
- Convince each member of the group that they are your only client during each and every workout and they will feel like they are receiving a personal training session for the price of a group session. Repeat business is where the future of the boot camp type program lies.

You must design your program around this repeat customer.

There are several ways to keep your clients coming back. The number one way is to **show them results**. So you have to design a program that will allow you to provide the same experience to repeat customers that you do to new clients.

- Constant challenge and variety are keys.
- Variety can be achieved in simple ways such as changing the order of exercises in a work out, or through creative programming that involves equipment such as agility ladders.
- The simple concepts of calisthenics and body weight resistance exercises must be combined in new and innovative ways. As trainers we must begin to look beyond "military" training techniques into sports conditioning activities and functional strength training techniques to provide a constant element of change to our clients' workouts.
- Allowing your imagination to roam and listening to your customers requests can also help in keeping the workouts fresh.

Once you design the program to keep your customers happy, you have to determine how to win new clients over to your programs. In the face of increasing competition, **below are some ways you can differentiate yourself.**

- Show your clients that you are qualified to lead them in a group setting by getting certified as a group instructor in addition to your personal training certification.
- Develop yourself as a leader in the fitness community by following the rules of your local parks departments. Many parks require not just permits, but they require that for-profit companies pay fees to reserve the parks for their programs. If you are using a facility that you are not paying for in some way, you are probably not legal. The fields and green areas that are used for boot camp workouts must be maintained, so do you part to help keep them looking beautiful.
- Create business cards and create a website. There are easy and cost efficient tools to develop web pages. You can also use your web page to list your certifications and note that you carry liability insurance and have a

- valid business license. Most parks departments require that you have both to use their facilities.
- Combine a nutrition program or healthy eating plan with your workout program. This will help increase the likelihood of results in your clients.
 - Study the art of motivation. There are several types of personalities that participate in group fitness programs, learn them and develop ways to motivate them and keep them happy and seeing results.
 - Learn how to stay in control in an unpredictable environment. Outdoor programs often run rain or shine, but what happens when the field you plan to do your circuit workout on is closed? Mentally prepare yourself each day with a plan B.

Finally, as boot camp instructors, **we must also improve on our sales techniques.** We should use every opportunity during the course of the program as a sales opportunity.

- Each time your client reaches a milestone, recognize it and use that milestone to create future milestones that you can help your client reach.
- Don't just wait until the final assessment to show the participant that he or she is making progress. Do little tests throughout the course of the program, such as a midway progress test to show all the participants that your program is working. This will get them fired up about their results and wanting more.
- Results will also start a chain reaction as your clients will begin telling everyone they know about you. There is no better referral than a happy customer!

At the end of the day, designing a program to motivate and inspire your clients to make fitness a part of the life is the goal. Outdoor group fitness provides an excellent setting to help clients start new habits and to reach small goals which in turn gives them a great sense of accomplishment. Coupled with the accountability and discipline of the boot camp type program, these workouts provide an enjoyable experience for your clients to return to month after month.

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