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Whip your career into shape in 2014

You see them around the gym, those toned specimens of fitness who possess fountains of fitness knowledge and endless enthusiasm, not to mention abs and buns of steel. So what does it take to join their ranks?

By Mark Fadden
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Fitness instructors and personal trainers have a tough job. They have to show up day after day to motivate us, the folks who would rather be snuggled in a warm bed at 5 a.m. or can't even think of doing another set of burpees because our quads are beyond being fried, so that we can continue to see results. What we see in the gym – the trainer who is counting repetitions with a watchful eye to make sure proper form is executed, or the fitness instructor who is telling us we can make it to the finish line over the pulsing spin class music – is really only the tip of the iceberg.

Chances are that trainer has thought about that particular routine for that particular client for a while, changing out exercises from the last time they met so his or her client's muscles will be shocked and confused, and therefore keep getting stronger. The spin instructor may have spent hours downloading and editing music so that it perfectly fits the transition points in his or her class. Granted, if you love working out and you want to inspire others, there would be no better job for you than one of these two positions. But, before you suit up in your spandex, let's take a closer look at each one.

Fitness Instructor
“To prepare for teaching a fit-

ness class I spend at least an hour per class putting a music playlist together,” said Amy Redfearn, who teaches numerous classes at Lifetime Fitness in Colleyville including spin and total conditioning. “Additionally, I work two to three hours per class to prepare the routine I am about to teach. So, it is not unusual to work two to four hours outside of the one hour fitness class to prepare. You want walk in and own it. Know your music and the routine so that it is flawless!”

In order to teach group fitness at a reputable gym, one must become certified. Certifications are available through organizations like the American Council on Exercise (ACE), which is the largest nonprofit fitness certification organization in the world.

Redfearn, who is ACE certified, also explained that in addition to being certified, the potential candidate must typically undergo an audition with the particular gym for which they are interested in teaching. Instructors must also typically recertify after a certain length of time, usually every year or every two years, and they need to have obtained a certain number of continuing education credits to qualify for re-certification. But beyond the certification and all the prep work for classes, it all comes back to being a positive force in people's lives for Redfearn.

“[My job] is most rewarding because you are creating a one-on-one relationship with the members. There are unbelievable results that you are a part of as you watch people transform their bodies, attitude and circumstances when they enter a group fitness class.” She also commented that being a fitness instructor could be the start to other jobs in the fitness industry. “You could become a group fitness assistant or department head. You could start your own gym, teach in schools and churches or create a new fitness experience. I believe the health industry is limitless.”

Personal Trainer
While fitness instructors tend to work with groups of people in a class setting, being a personal trainer is more about the one-on-one relationship where you get to help someone transform themselves, which can be a very rewarding experience.

“Having each client reach their goals is the most rewarding thing about my job,” said David Hickman who works for Fit for Life, which has three locations in the greater Fort Worth area. Hickman's day typically begins at 5 -5:30 a.m., when he begins his half-hour or hour-long sessions with clients. Throughout the day, he will typically schedule eight to 12 sessions.

His clients range from those that have been with him for 20 years to those who just want to

have him help them for a few months to get the basics down so they can then go out on their own. But no matter the client, Hickman says that the most challenging part of his job over the 30 years he has been a personal trainer is about trying to keep his clients accountable.

“If we train three times a week, that means that, at maximum, I'm only with them three hours a week. The rest of the time it's up to them to make sure to get their cardio in and to maintain their food plan. Eating right is by far the hardest thing. People are busy and there's so much fast food out there that it's hard to keep on track. That's why a big part of what I work on with my clients is their nutrition. We review their food plan constantly. Working out is important, but if the proper nutrition isn't there, then there's no way they are going to see the results they want,” he said.

Before becoming a certified personal trainer (CPT), Hickman was working in the corporate world when he asked himself one very important question. “What job would I love to do even if I didn't get paid?”

His answer, personal trainer, led him to the doors of the Dallas-based Cooper Institute, where he earned his certification. The Cooper Institute has one of the most recognized CPT programs in the fitness industry. It offers personal training courses monthly at the Dallas

campus and also provides an online learning option as well.

“Our mission to prepare personal trainers for a successful career doesn't end with education and certification. During each Personal Training Education course, we bring in fitness managers from national and local fitness facilities to mentor our students and help them find the facility that best matches their interest and skills. Students also learn business and

customer service skills critical for building and sustaining a personal training business,” said Sue Beckham, PhD, Director of Adult Education.

Many area fitness clubs and training facilities look to The Cooper Institute when seeking knowledgeable trainers. “It is hard to find quality trainers and I know if they are Cooper Certified that is the first step to quality,” said Kyle Graham, owner of Texas Boot Camps, LLC.



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