



Association of Fitness Studios: Finding the Right Talent

Finding, Hiring, and On-Boarding the Right Talent for Your Studio



"At AFS one of our biggest priorities is connecting our members so they can leverage the combined experiences of each other to maximize their growth potential."

– Josh Leve, Founder & CEO, Association of Fitness Studios



ASSOCIATION OF
FITNESS STUDIOS



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In the best-selling book *First, Break All the Rules*, authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman indicate that selecting talent is the first key to success in business. Well before you can hire talent, you have to recruit it – not a top priority for many studio operators. In fact, many operators do not even consider talent recruitment a part of their job.

Yet, AFS members report, one of the greatest challenges that arises on a day-to-day basis is finding and keeping great talent. Business literature consistently hammers this point - which a great business starts with finding the right talent and then getting the right talent in the right roles. As acclaimed author Jim Collins espouses in *Good to Great*, one of the most important principles of organizational greatness is, first who...then what.

"Employees deliver your brand promise, assist clients in achieving their fitness aspirations, build relationships with clients, and ultimately determine whether you will succeed or fail as a business."

– Stephen Tharrett, Co-founder & Partner, ClubIntel



Finding the Right Talent

Everyone wants to find and hire great talent, but the process requires a commitment of time, people and resources that many studio operators are not willing to make. All too often, operators hope top talent will somehow show up at the door and, when it does, they will let it in. Unfortunately, great talent usually does not seek your business; in fact, it probably doesn't even know you exist.

Owners need to provide compelling reasons for top trainers to seek them out. In the daily tussles of studio club management, operators forget that recruiting and selecting employees is much like recruiting members. It takes commitment, focus and discipline.

Here are some steps studio operators can take to ensure their recruitment process results in finding the right talent:

- **Leverage the connections of your existing talent.** It is a well-accepted axiom in business that the best employees are normally those referred by existing employees. Therefore, when it comes to finding great talent, your current employees are your best resource.

One of the best means of getting current employees to help recruit on your behalf is to be sure you've established an employee-friendly work environment. If your trainers love working in your studio, they will be eager to bring in their colleagues. If, on the other hand, the working conditions are not good, there's no chance your team members will want to recommend you.



However, when surveyed, many AFS members found that by leveraging group exercise instructors (either at your studio or through networking with others) that these instructors could be a viable option for the following reasons. 1.) They're already reliable, 2.) They have a built in following, which in turn, could have an impact on traffic generation, 3.) Many times they just need one additional certification to get started. Being able to leverage their 'brand' and adding them to your lineup is great place to start.

- **Establish an internship program.** One of the best sources for finding talent is through an internship program, and a good one should have two primary goals. First, to bring in students who are highly interested in a career within the industry, and second, to obtain raw talent that can be trained and developed.

Some of the best employees are those who began their career as interns. Not sure where to start? Email us at info@afsfitness.com and we'll connect you with other members who have started their own internship programs!

- **Conduct and sponsor workshops for professionals in the community.** Great personal trainers, group exercise instructors, and massage therapists are continually attending workshops and seminars in an effort to advance their knowledge and professionalism. These are the types of people you want as candidates.

Some of the best operators in the industry host workshops and seminars given by organizations such as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), American Council on Exercise (ACE), East Coast Alliance (ECA), National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), Medical Fitness Association (MFA), Stott Pilates, Mad Dog Athletics, etc.

In addition, there are studios and clubs that conduct continuing education workshops conducted by their own staff (e.g., Cooper Aerobic Center, Telos). In most cases these workshops award continuing education credits from one of the many national fitness organizations. The by-product of hosting these workshops is two-fold. First, your studio's staff has the ability to earn continuing education credits and second, the studio is exposed to some of the best talent in the market.



- **Leverage the web; especially professional social media sites.** In today's world the web has become the preferred destination for job seekers and recruiters. Sites such as LinkedIn, as well as sites maintained by many of the professional organizations including ACE, ACSM, IDEA, and IHRSA provide an excellent means of connecting with top-level professionals. In addition to regularly checking these potential recruitment sites, you should also incorporate a recruitment page into your web site.

- **Take advantage of association and peer group networking.** Every leader and manager should utilize association and peer networking groups as part of their recruitment strategy. This is the practice of participating in professional peer groups and associations – a proven strategy of identifying and securing great talent.

- **Additional Insights from AFS Members.**

- Check out USREPS (US Registry of Exercise Professionals). While it doesn't provide a means to contact, if you do some creative Googling you might be able to find what you need.
- Host a CPR recertification class at your studio. The number of fitness professionals that will show up provide a massive opportunity to network, engage and expose people to your studio – WOW them and get their business card.
- Physical therapy centers. Find as many as you can in your neighborhood and ask them for referrals. Many times they are well connected to several organizations that could bolster your efforts.
- Hosting a CEC course. Similar to the CPR recertification, doing so allows you the opportunity to market the course and open your doors to other fitness professionals that live or work around your studio.

Hiring the Right Talent

By incorporating some or all of the above mentioned steps into your recruitment process, you will find that the talent pool available to your studio grows exponentially. Recruiting talent is only the first step; the next step is hiring the best people from the pool of recruits you generate. In that regard, there are a few steps that studio operators can take to insure that the best candidates rise to the top, including:

- **Make sure every candidate completes an application and provides a resume.** No matter the source of the candidate, this must be done.

- **Screen applications and resumes against the responsibilities of the position and the backgrounds of your best talent.** Ideally, you want to create a checklist that incorporates the competency expectations for the open positions and compare that to the applications and resumes you receive. Only interview the top candidates based on their alignment with your checklist. Below is an example of a screening checklist that a studio operator could use.

XYZ Studio Employee Candidate Ranking Checklist (Personal Trainer/Fitness Instructor)		
Candidate name: _____		
Date scored: _____		
Score by: _____		
Attribute	Scoring	Actual Score
Work experience as a personal trainer and/or fitness instructor	0 = no prior experience 1 = internship or less than 6- months experience 2 = less than one year's experience 3 = one to three years' experience 4 = more than three years' experience	
Education	0 = a high school diploma or equivalent 1 = at least two years of college 2 = a college degree 3 = a graduate degree	
Certification	0 = no nationally recognized certification 1 = one nationally recognized certification 2= two or more nationally recognized certifications Add a bonus point if they have a specialty certification listed	
Recognized expert in the field	1 = if they have done public speaking in respective field or had an article published	
References with contact information	0 = no references provided 1 = references provided	
Total points scored		

- **Incorporate a multiple stage interview process that involves a team of employees.** The interview is the single most important element in the selection process, providing prospective employers with an enormous amount of important information that may not be apparent on a resume or job application. Interviews can go a long way in determining if a candidate is the right fit. Some of the information that can be obtained through a well-disciplined interview process includes the following:

- An indication of a candidate's honesty, integrity and overall character
- A measure of a candidate's alignment with your organization's values and overall culture
- A look at how well they may apply their education and work experience
- A strong sense of their communication skills
- An understanding of their ability to deal with challenges and stress
- A measure of their ability to work harmoniously with others
- An indication of their willingness to adapt and also, to deal with the unexpected

The information gleaned through a well-organized and disciplined interview process is the ultimate measure of a candidate's overall alignment with your organization. It should be noted that interviewing also has weaknesses. If the process is not disciplined and well structured, it may be easy for a less talented candidate to float to the top.

The interview process should involve several types of interviews or interview steps, each of which provides information that is valuable to the final selection. These various interview steps include: (i) initial screening, (ii) preliminary cultural fit, (iii) technical fit, (iv) team fit, and (v) final interviews.

Each of these interview steps can be handled in either a structured or a non-structured format, with both having their place within each of the aforementioned interview steps. In all cases, each eligible candidate should be exposed to the same interview process and ranked for suitability based on their performance during each of the phases.

- **Before you announce your choice, do your homework.** Once you have identified your top one or two candidates, or possibly earlier in the selection process, check out their background. Contact references, Google the candidate(s), and talk with others you know in the industry. The key is obtaining the perspective of other, trusted sources before making your final decision.
- **Additional Interviewing Process/Strategies/Questions**
 - Ask them about a good book they've read lately
 - Look them up on Facebook to see how professional their profile is.
 - Ask what they're expecting in compensation. Don't put your offer first.
 - Ask them to tell you a joke. It doesn't matter if it's horrible, you're looking for personality traits and how they react to the question.
 - When interviewing, tell them that you're new to the area and ask what you should do or where you should go. What you're looking for is to see if they deflect and ask what you enjoy doing first.
 - After the interview, walk them to their car – see how clean it is.
 - Have candidate pick up documentation to fill out ahead of time. Schedule a specific time, see if they arrive early or late to pick up.

Bringing Talent on Board the Right Way

No matter how much talent a candidate has, if you don't bring them on board properly it can be a disaster. On-boarding is a term used by human resource professionals to describe the process of integrating new employees into an organization.

The goal of the on-boarding process is three-fold:

- 1 It must initiate the process of immersing new employees, and preferably independent contractors as well, into the cultural fabric of your business.
- 2 It must initiate the bonding process, which is about creating the opportunity for the new hire to begin establishing relationships with the right employees and clients.
- 3 Lastly, it must introduce employees to their responsibilities at the individual, departmental and organizational level.

Remember, there is only one chance to make a favorable first impression, and more importantly, only one chance to get fresh new talent correctly integrated into your culture.

The on-boarding process typically involves three stages; the Orientation Process, the Probationary Period and the Mentoring Phase.

- **The Orientation Process.** The purpose of the orientation process is to immerse the new employee into your organization's culture, as well as to introduce them to the expectations of their job. During the orientation process you should accomplish the following:
 - Introduce the new employee to the other members of the team
 - Present the new employee with tangible learning opportunities. This can involve attending workshops, viewing a video, or even completing an online curriculum.
 - Provide a thorough review of their job responsibilities, both at the individual level and organizational level. As part of the review process you want to make sure they understand how you will measure their performance against those responsibilities.
 - Provide a review of the studio's rules, regulations and standards.
 - Establish a performance plan for their first 90 days on the job (the probationary period).
 - Assign them a mentor to coach them through the Probationary Period.
 - Test them after they complete the Orientation Process to make sure they understand and are comfortable.

- **The Probationary Period** is a time frame in which the new employee is still being integrated into the culture of the organization, while at the same time performing the responsibilities of their assigned job. In most organizations, the Probationary Period lasts 90 days, during which both the studio and the candidate can assess their compatibility with each other.

From the studio's perspective, the probationary period should accomplish the following:

- Provide a period for the new employee to adjust to their new responsibilities, new culture and new teammates
 - Provide time for both the employer and the new employee to determine if the relationship makes sense before either party makes a long-term commitment to work together
 - Provide a review of the studio's rules, regulations and standards.
 - Provide time for intensive coaching and mentoring of the new employee
- **The Mentoring Phase.** Mentoring is defined as providing a caring, sharing and helping relationship that is focused on meeting the needs of the new employee. When beginning their journey with your organization, the new employee will undoubtedly face issues not adequately addressed during the orientation process. In some cases, new employees can become frustrated by situations they have not been trained to handle.

Having another employee to ask questions and lean on in difficult times can be a godsend for the new employee. A mentor is just such a person; someone the new employee can visit with to get answers, talk openly with, and if needed, vent frustrations. Very often the mentor a new employee is assigned becomes a mentor throughout their career with your organization.



Your employees are your greatest asset. Employees deliver your brand promise, assist clients in achieving their fitness aspirations, build relationships with clients, and ultimately determine whether you will succeed or fail as a business. We hope you use this Guide and many others provided by AFS to ensure you take the right steps to have the right talent in the right places to make your business a success.



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