

Ten Fatal Flaws of Fitness Professionals

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Ah, the holidays! The most joyous time of the year, in which time is spent with your family and friends nestled by the fire, enjoying a warm cup of cocoa, while wearing festively colorful sweaters – a picturesque scene that looks like it was cut from a Christmas catalog. While this may accurately depict page 137 in this year’s Sears Holiday catalog, it does not describe the holidays for many of us. The scene for most of us is ever changing and stress inducing! We’re all tying up loose ends at work, perhaps trying to negotiate a deal or meet quotas before the 31st of December, most college students are cramming for finals and/or completing term papers, and many of those same college students are berated by depraved, broke, and probably sex-deprived customers in the retail hell they slave in each night, so they can buy their girlfriend or boyfriend an extravagant gift, or like many of us during college – keep our debts in check and be able to buy enough alcohol to deal with the stress of being a college student and working in retail. The holidays are a time of expanding waists and temporarily living like you can afford to indulge in expensive tastes – buying nice gifts for others and hosting gatherings at your house, which only leaves behind a mountain of credit card debt and blows through your money with the force of a Nor’easter’s wind gust.

We all know what’s next. New Year’s! You know the holiday that you decide to quit living like a slovenly fool - hoping to drop the vices, or the pounds, you’ve picked up in the past oh...over your lifetime! Usually, the New Years “Resolutionists” as I call them, charge the doors of commercial gyms during the first few days of the new year, drawn in by the disgust of their lifestyle and the bargain blowout deals advertised online and during commercials of their favorite primetime TV series, that they’ll end up playing on the 50” plasma TVs in the gym’s cardio area. We all know that many people are planning to embark upon the journey of losing weight and getting results, however, we know that the overwhelming majority of these people will bail out by the time the Super Bowl is over. Until then, every piece of equipment is seemingly occupied in the gym, that is, if you train at a large commercial gym. Personal trainers buzzing about with clipboards in hand, offering assistance – I mean trying to dupe some gullible novice gym-goer into a long term contract that they’ll likely never fulfill. Which brings us to what this article is all about – the mortal sins committed by fitness professionals.

I’ll list my Top-10 annoyances, or as they should be referred to, “Fatal Flaws”. I know there’s more than ten, but for the sake of your time - which I’ve wasted after having you read that long-winded intro - and for the sake of the English language - which I keep butchering, I’ll keep it relatively short.

1. Not knowing “Thy Anatomy”

Have you ever gone to a mechanic who didn’t know where your vehicle’s carburetor was located? Or what the function of the timing chain is? I sure as hell don’t know, but I’m not a mechanic. What’s more dangerous is that unknowledgeable personal trainers, who don’t know where the Iliopsoas is located and don’t know the difference between the biceps brachii and the biceps femoris, now have access to destroying their client’s bodies,

much like they were hired to help them. In addition, how many of you heard your fellow trainers talking about fictional muscles (i.e. inner chest muscles) and not knowing the function of muscles (i.e. “let’s extend the bicep”)? When I jumped into personal training, I hailed from a non-science background, which required me to study muscle groups, their function, and how to target them via resistance training exercises. If you’re a personal trainer or about to embark upon a career in fitness, an anatomy book will be a handy reference, and if you troll online all day, it’ll probably be your best friend. For people who need to brush up on their anatomy, I would suggest taking a class at a local community college, or picking up some of Frank Netter’s material.

2. Giving medical advice

You take the same people who don’t know the difference between a muscle’s origin and insertion and now enable them to dole off medical advice. Personal trainers need to be knowledgeable of medical conditions and familiar with their treatment; however, telling a client to stop taking their Beta-Blockers because it’s interfering with their workouts, is not only stupid, but litigious, harmful, and potentially deadly. Your degree or weekend certification holds no weight to an M.D., so please operate within the confines of your duties of a fitness professional. Remember, you can still prescribe medicine – its called exercise!

3. Offering “post-physical therapy” as a service

I’ve seen this a lot recently – personal trainers stating that they, without qualification, can offer post-physical therapy. I really want to know exactly what “post-physical therapy” is. Is there an accrediting agency? Are there DPPT (Doctorate of Post Physical Therapy) programs out there? And if they exist, are they situated in the Caribbean, along with the dozen or so non-accredited medical schools that are housed there? I believe that a qualified fitness professional, in conjunction with a physical therapist can design a program to effectively transition from a rehabilitation setting to training for fitness and/or performance. One of the duties of my day job – an insurance analyst at a large hospital, entails providing patients and their families an explanation of their medical benefits. Often times, when reviewing their PT benefits with them, they are disappointed to learn that they may only be permitted as few as (6) visits per year. Six visits! That’s it! Knowing that physical therapy benefits are pretty limited and the out-of-pocket costs associated with PT visits are very expensive, some personal trainers prey on this crowd, under the guise that they can provide the same services for a reasonable price. I find this more pathetic than scamming “recruiters” on Craigslist who take people’s money in order to train for a door-to-door sales job.

I think that more fitness professionals, especially those with advanced degrees and certifications, need to partner with physical therapists, to deliver orthopedically safe and physiologically sound programming as one progresses from an injured state to a healthy one, and beyond.

4. Becoming Overnight Internet Experts

Gotta love this one! Today's overnight web experts are synonymous to the clipboard toting, \$55 Nike Dri-Fit polo wearing, stopwatch holding, "fitness coaches" you saw at commercial gyms a decade ago. I'm sorry I've been relentlessly beating up personal trainers at commercial gyms, however, I'd like to point out that I began as one nearly one decade ago, and have gained more knowledge, via education and experience since.

Anyways, you know them quite well. The people that have seemingly burst on the scene with maybe a cert, maybe a degree if we're lucky, and definitely a good WiFi connection and a flip camera. YouTube is littered with them and there is a seemingly endless stream of self-promoting blogs, which tout him or her as an expert. Though I've been fortunate enough to work with a few dozen Division I athletes, a handful of professional athletes and bodybuilders, have a masters degree and enough certifications to have the entire alphabet behind my name, all of those things still do not make me an expert!

Josh Bryant, of joshstrength.com, world recording holding powerlifter and one of the industry's most renowned and accomplished strength coaches had this to say: "The ivory tower of academia will never take precedence over experience gained in the trenches! When we're in the trenches, we can figure out what works now while the guys in the lab coats can come up with a scientific explanation later," added Bryant.

I'm a fitness enthusiast who is transitioning back into the field full-time – just because you, or I have done a couple of things, does not make us experts. Also, if you have a Twitter feed with fewer followers than the number of people you're following, you're definitely not an "expert". Amidst all of the garbage out there, here are a couple of sites worth checking out, which feature two fast-rising professionals in the fitness industry / strength and conditioning world.

Tom Conner, of Snap Fitness in Marlton, NJ, ([YouTube site.](#)) and Ben Bruno, a Columbia-educated strength coach and pull-up machine, ([Blog](#)), will be names we'll be hearing about for a long time to come. Their YouTube channels, Ben's can be found [here](#). They are great references, and somewhat awe-inspiring. I must admit, I'm a little envious of Tom's dead lift numbers, he is roughly the same size as me, yet bests my work sets by 20%!

5. Lack of clientele selectivity

This flaw may come as a surprise, but with trainers who have a full slate of clients; this may be one of their most applicable flaws. As a novice trainer, I pretty much took on whoever wanted to train with me, however I learned throughout the years that some clients aren't worthy of the services you provide. If they're clearly not dedicated, never punctual, and put up a fight every time you try to get them do try something new, they may not be worth your time and resources. Additionally, a lack of selectivity could be a potential cause for burnout amongst fitness professionals. Be sure to use your time wisely and spend your resources and your passion for helping others on people who deserve it!

Flaws six through ten are training-related topics, so I've enlisted the help of some professionals who've been in the trenches.

6. Irrelevant Testing Numbers

The programs our athletes, which can include competitive strength and power athletes, are predicated upon percentages based on testing numbers, specifically 1RM, whether it's real or calculated. Often times, trainers fail to grasp this concept, not taking into account changes that occur due to injury, training status, training history, and body mass and composition. One rep maxes, according to Ryan Fowler, MS, CSCS, Kansas City Royals Minor League Strength Coach, "can skew future prescribed training loads when a significant amount of time has occurred between testing".

"Assigned working weights can change slightly depending on the intended physiological adaptation and what I'm witnessing while taking my athletes through workouts," says Fowler.

"As a strength and conditioning coach it's my job to keep the bigger picture in mind – guiding my athletes performance along a path that will safely meet and exceed my expectations for that particular phase," continues Fowler.

Ryan also mentioned that the weights used need to be adjusted accordingly. "Many variables can affect weight room performance on a daily basis, such as inadequate recovery, acute injuries due to training/competition, or improperly fueling prior to training."

7. Machine Dependence

While there are many great pieces of selectorized and plate loaded machines out there, sometimes trainers become too reliant on them in their programming. No matter how good machines may be nowadays, they still don't mimic the natural strength curve associated via training with free weights.

A personal trainer's job is to educate their clients, instructing them how to perform an exercise that targets different and/or multiple muscle groups, whether with the assistance of a machine, or to be performed with free weights.

Todd Bumgardner, of Beyond Strength Performance, who has helped a number of athletes prepare for the 2010 NFL combine and works with a handful of NFL players, including Josh Hull of the St. Louis Rams, thinks that personal trainers and even strength coaches rely on machines too much.

"The body is meant to move through full ranges of motion while stabilizing itself," says Bumgardner.

"Trainers that constantly have their clients on machines, work to destroy natural joint mobility and stabilization. Our job is to teach people to move efficiently above all else. Machines don't cut it with regards to efficient movement."

8. Fad training

Routinely a new training system or piece of equipment rolls out often times with a corresponding certification that promises to deliver a plethora of benefits, which may include one or more of the following: improved strength, core stability, balance, power, and speed. We've seen a surge in recent years of new products that have hit the market; however, strength coaches like Todd believe that these are merely cards in a magician's deck.

“Everything in the fitness industry must be viewed on a continuum of tools. While all tools may be needed at one point or another, some tools – like barbells and dumbbells are more useful than others, such as Swiss balls, Bosu balls, and elastic bands.”

“There is not now, nor will there ever be an ‘end-all, be-all’ fitness solution. There is only hard work and the use of tried and trusted methods,” says Todd.

Bryant added that “some techniques used by modern day strength coaches resemble a Coney Island side show.”

“Do what works, not what's en vogue!” concludes Bryant.

9. *Incorrect or inappropriate programming*

Do non-injured elite athletes warrant corrective exercise following repeated assessments? On the flipside, is someone who's detrained or just starting a program ready to hit the ground running? Experienced fitness professionals will be able to pick up on cues throughout the execution of certain movements. Likewise, they'll also be able to identify problem areas for the detrained and novices they work with. Both groups warrant proper programming and progression.

10. *WTF???* Why?

Why are you doing the exercise? Does it make sense? Are you doing dumb things like the exercise depicted in this video?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EkgDjyZ5qY&feature=player_embedded