Norm Cates'
CLUB INSIDER
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# Elizabeth Asch and River Valley Club

## *Improving Lives Through Fitness and Self-care*


**JANUARY 2024**

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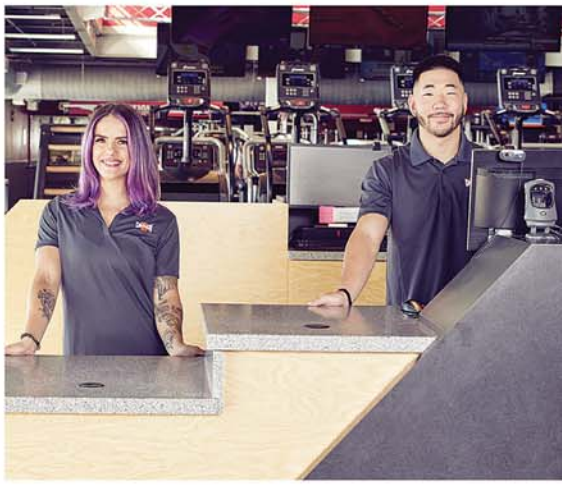


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# Elizabeth Asch and River Valley Club

## *Improving Lives Through Fitness and Self-care*

**By: Justin Cates**

The cornerstone of boxing is the one-two combo. Throughout the chess-match of each round, jabs set up the cross. Over and over. The eventual goal is to set up more complex and damaging combinations, such as a jab, cross then hook or uppercut. To the initiated, multi-punch combos are survivable. Strength, conditioning and defensive strategy makes this so. Eventually, endurance or that one perfect shot wins out. However, if anyone inexperienced in the sport steps in with a pro, they are likely going down on the first punch.

As we live our lives day-to-day, we get used to the usual jabs and crosses thrown into the mix of daily routine. Maybe we overslept or the car has a flat tire or there's a traffic jam on a Sunday morning... We survive these problems without breaking a sweat. In the grand scheme of things, they just aren't that important. But, sometimes, life hits us with the big one, and how we react defines who we become.

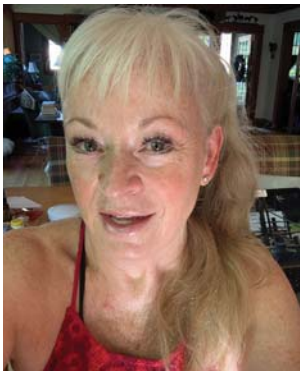
This month's cover story is about someone who, figuratively, experienced a multi-punch combo that would take down most. Her name is **Elizabeth Asch**, *Owner and General Manager of River Valley Club (RVC)*.

In June of 2012, we featured RVC on our cover and learned the company's story through the words of **Joe Asch**, Elizabeth's husband, and RVC's *CEO*. Since that story, several sad events have occurred that changed the trajectory of RVC.

It began in October of 2018, when she lost her husband, Joe. Around the same time, several key team members resigned: *CFO, General Manager* and *Fitness Director*. Following this, in 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic ensued, and RVC faced a four-month shutdown.

I shudder just writing these words. Take a moment to visualize what you would do in an ever-debilitating situation. Would you quit? Would you fight? Elizabeth chose to fight, and today, we share that story with you. I invite you to read on.

*(See **Elizabeth Asch** Page 10)*



Elizabeth Asch

# Rudy Nieto: *Strengthening Fitness Businesses, One Relationship at a Time*

**By: Mary Grace Bonner**

Business titles often convey a specific function, but for **Rudy Nieto**, *Chief Revenue Officer at Daxko*, his role extends beyond numbers and spreadsheets. In his view, the position is more about fostering meaningful relationships, leading him to prefer the title of *Chief Relationship Officer*.

"My role is all about nurturing success, and I believe the key to achieving that is the value of the relationships we're building," explains Rudy.

In late 2022, Rudy's appointment marked a pivotal moment in Daxko's leadership. This shift included strategic additions to the C-Suite, signaling a deliberate effort to fuel growth, innovation and deeper connections within the markets the company serves.

Daxko, a leading software provider in the health, fitness and wellness industry, empowers nearly 40% of fitness facilities across the United States. Their product lineup, featuring industry-leading technology solutions such as *Daxko Operations, Club Automation* and *Zen Planner* has penetrated virtually every niche within the fitness industry. Recent milestones include successful acquisitions, strong performance in the not-for-profit sector, international expansion into India, and substantial investments from Genstar Capital and GI Partners to fuel innovation. The core of the company's Mission, as Rudy elaborates, is to *empower health and wellness throughout the world, with the intent of making fitness businesses and organizations more member native*.

Rudy's journey to becoming Daxko's Chief Relationship Officer was far from conventional. Initially, he set his sights on a career in medicine, driven by a call to help individuals lead healthier lives. However, as he looked to the future, he recognized a shifting landscape within the medical field. Medicine had become

*(See **Rudy Nieto** Page 6)*

Rudy Nieto

## Inside the Insider: Edition #361

# Norm's Notes

■**Hello Everybody** and a **Happy and Healthy New Year to YOU ALL!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with you as we roll into our **31st year of publishing**. Pinch me and tell me it ain't so! Tell me that 30 years have not already passed since *Faust Roundtable #1* dreamed up the bright idea of *Club Insider*. **30+ years, folks!!! WOW! How TIME DOES FLY when you're having FUN!!!**

Over the past 30 years, some of you may have noticed our little ads each month, little ads that simply say: **MAKE IT FUN!** We share that special message every month because, throughout my career as a health, racquet and sports club developer, owner and operator, I taught my staff that **MAKING IT FUN** in our clubs was **one of the keys to success**... right along with **club cleanliness** and **a friendly, polite and very caring staff**.

Before I close this *first Norm's Note of 2024*, **I want to Tip My Black Hat** to the following:

■**JUSTIN CATES**, my fine and extraordinarily talented son, and our highly esteemed *Club Insider Publisher*. **Great job so far, Justin!**

■**Our Advertiser and Author Teams**, because if it were not for you, we would not be able to present our *weekly* and *monthly* editions of *Club Insider*! **Thank you for all that you do for us and our industry!**

■**Our Esteemed Readers**, because if it were not for you, we wouldn't have a reason to do this! **Thank you for giving us our why and all that you do for our industry!**

■Here's an interesting and amazing item from the December 22, 2023 edition of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Get this... **LARRY GUZY**, at **age 75**, responded in an amazing manner to the **COVID-19 Pandemic.** When Larry's local gym was forced to close, he started his streak of running the equivalent of a 10K race every day, and he did that every day for **1,000 straight days!** Guzy, a retired owner of an insurance company commented: "There wasn't anything else to do, so why not run?" Through wind, rain and faraway vacations, Guzy never missed his daily run of 6.2 miles. By mid-December of 2022, he had logged **6,387 miles** and had retired 16 pairs of running shoes! The *United States Running Streak Association/Streak International*, which tracks records set by its members, saw a **60% jump** between 2020 and 2021 in members who ran 365 straight days, said **MARK WASHINGTON**, *the Association's President.*

Guzy was still running his daily 10K in March of 2023 when he twisted his right knee and self-diagnosed his condition as a torn meniscus. He kept pushing through, but on April 18, 2023, his three-year, one-month streak ended. But, his *commitment to daily exercise and fitness stayed*. Running was replaced with a daily workout on the elliptical and strength machines. As of mid-October of 2023 the meniscus had healed. Doctors tried to get him to agree to surgery, but he declined, saying, "Surgery would get in the way of exercise." Guzy added: "It took until mid-September of 2023 for me to seriously not miss the running, like losing a friend. Every day I see a runner, I want to re-start running. But, at age 76 now, a streak seems like it would be hard to start."

Here is Larry Guzy's guide to maintaining motivation to exercise. Remember the saying, **"If I had known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself!"** Think about doing something about it early. **Exercise is "ME TIME..."** It is a great way to escape, and no one will object. Every time you exercise, you have a feeling of personal accomplishment once you are finished. You know you have done something great for your body and mind, whatever form suits you at the moment. Guzy added: "Exercise literally saved my life, all for a few minutes a day. Keep it up."

Norm Cates

**Congratulations to Atlanta's LARRY GUZY who's now age 76 and**

*(See **Norm's Notes** Page 7)*

## About Club Insider

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## Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider,* we are excited to be in our **31st Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love,* and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son,* **Justin**, is still *intriguing* and *amazing* to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 30-year run possible.

Very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to **Rick Caro**, the **late Dr. Gerry Faust** and the **Faust Executive Roundtable #1** for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. *Thanks and Appreciation* to my long-time friends, **Ron Hudspeth** and **Cathy Miller**, formerly of **Atlanta's Hudspeth Report** for the tremendous assistance they provided. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of the folks at **Walton Press** in Monroe, Georgia. They did an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and printed every one of our monthly printed editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers!

Now, as we have gone all digital, *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **READERS**. Sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to our **Club Insider Advertisers**, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **Club Insider Contributing Authors**, past and present. *Thanks and Appreciation* to **IHRSA** for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, our *Publisher*, who is a truly great business partner. You name it and Justin does it each and every month!

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

**Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,**

*Norm Cates, Jr.*

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Photos depict a typical LA Fitness facility; clubs and amenities may vary. 

## ...Rudy Nieto

continued from page 3

more business than passion. Redirecting his career toward sales, Rudy brings over two decades of executive experience, primarily within the automotive industry. He pioneered software sales, marketing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems to diverse car dealerships. His responsibilities evolved to include managing Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) relationships and data partnerships at *Reynolds and Reynolds*.

"It's interesting how similar the automotive and health and wellness sectors are," Rudy observes. "Both hinge on managing consumer experience, people, time and tools that drive revenue. But, in the fitness world, it's even more intricate. It's not as straightforward as, for instance, buying a *General Motors* car, where there might be only one dealership in town. Even if you don't particularly like the dealer, you'll likely still go to them. Here, in the club and YMCA sectors for example, the emphasis is on reputation and standing out."

Rudy's approach to his role centers on the value he places on partnerships and relationships. He emphasizes that business fundamentally revolves around people and firmly believes that a company's success is inherently tied to the strength of its relationships, making Daxko's Mission a personal one for him and his team.

Rudy highlights the importance of fitness clubs investing time in helping the Club Automation team understand their unique operations. Frequently, Rudy observes, businesses attempt to self-diagnose their challenges without seeking external expertise. Rudy champions a more collaborative approach, where his team assumes the role of students, immersing themselves in a club's day-to-day operations, pinpointing pain points and suggesting solutions.

"We aim to cultivate more profound engagement with fitness businesses to genuinely transform their operations. We view this as a valuable investment of our time. This approach not only prevents unnecessary spending on 'shiny' solutions but also brings attention to areas that may require improvement, even if our solutions aren't the answer," Rudy notes.

Rudy Nieto

He highlights that the most perilous phrase in business is, "We've always done it this way." Rudy says that embracing change and innovative strategies is the key to progress for fitness businesses. Notably, he mentions his sales force for Club Automation, with over 50% of its team having hands-on experience in managing and owning fitness clubs. Rudy states that this is a purposeful choice, showcasing their commitment to deeply understanding the intricacies of the business.

Rudy acknowledges the fitness industry's notable challenges, particularly in keeping pace with the evolving demands of its members. With people now affiliating with various clubs, each addressing different needs, Rudy identifies this as an opportunity for fitness businesses.

"The biggest challenge I see is keeping up with member demands. People join different clubs for various reasons, and clubs need to adapt to cater to these diverse needs," Rudy points out.

He further explains this idea by sharing personal experiences. For example, he holds a membership at the *YMCA* because he supports its mission, and he takes advantage of the reciprocity program for his daughter. He's also a member of another fitness club because of their outstanding childcare services. However, when it comes to his running routine, he doesn't use a fitness facility at all. This highlights the trend of people actively participating in various clubs and services, showcasing the intricate nature of the modern fitness landscape.

Rudy envisions Daxko and its product offerings as centered around fulfilling the needs, desires and expectations of the fitness businesses they cater to. The focus is on simplifying the member journey and enhancing various aspects, from payments to on-site experiences. According to Rudy, Daxko is charting a new course for the future with a strong commitment to being the premier partner for fitness businesses. The company aims to achieve this by prioritizing relationships, comprehending the unique needs of fitness businesses and driving impactful change.


Mary Grace Bonner

"I've got this concept in my mind of us having the most member-native experience in the market, and we feel like that is going to be the differentiator that nobody else can really match."

*(Mary Grace Bonner is the Public Relations Manager at Daxko, the leading software and integrated payments solutions provider in the fitness industry. With nearly ten years of experience in journalism, Mary Grace plays an important role in executing the company's comprehensive strategy to serve the global health, fitness, and wellness industries. Her contributions play a vital role in the success of brands like Daxko, Club Automation, Motionsoft, VFP, Zen Planner and more. You can reach Mary by email at* **mary.bonner@daxko.com**.*)*

Mario Bravomalo (L) and Rudy Nieto (R)

Rudy Nieto and the Club Automation Team

## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 3

**continuing to fuel his health with regular exercise!**

■Congratulations to **MIKE BAUGH** as he's been named the new *USPTA Florida Executive Director!* Mike is the *Director of Junior Tennis and Pickleball at Treasure Bay Golf & Tennis in Treasure Island, Florida*. In addition, he serves as the *Strength and Conditioning Coach for the St. Petersburg College Women's Tennis Team*. Baugh brings a wealth of expertise to his roles holding impressive certifications, including *USPTA Elite Professional, USTA High Performance Coach* and *ISSA Master Certified Personal Trainer*. He's also compiled more than 2,300 hours of continuing education. Mike's commitment to tennis extends beyond the court. He currently serves on the *Yonex National Speaker's Team*. And, his involvement in various USPTA committees and numerous local and statewide honors underscore his dedication to advancing the sport. Baugh commented: "I am thrilled to embark on this new journey as Executive Director, continuing my affiliation with the USPTA in Florida. I eagerly anticipate collaborating with the President, Board of Directors and members of the Florida Division, while working alongside USPTA leadership and staff to champion the organization and our sport." Mike took over the role on December 4. **Best of luck, Mike!**

■The following message is from **DR. FERNANDO VIEIRA** of the **ALS Therapy Institute**, and it is directed to everyone involved in the challenges associated with ALS. So, please read on:

"Dear ALS TDI Supporters, as we bid farewell to a remarkable year, a year that showed us the potential impact of more targeted treatments of ALS, I want to express my sincere gratitude for the incredible community that has propelled our ALS research forward in 2023. Your unwavering support has been the driving force behind our achievements, from the launch of the *ALS Research Collaborative*, a program dedicated to identifying the right treatments for the right people, to the continued advancement of promising drugs from our labs. This year, our collective efforts have set a new pace for progress, and it's all thanks to so many of you who are playing a crucial role. Drug discovery is challenging, and at times, the pace may feel slow. However, these hurdles introduce opportunities for breakthroughs. I'm immensely proud of how our team responds to these challenges, and I'm profoundly thankful for your steadfast support that allows us to persevere in our mission. I want you to know that your involvement is catalyzing discoveries and innovations that can, and will, change what it means to be diagnosed with ALS. I look forward to sharing more research updates with you in 2024, and I thank you for all that you have made possible in 2023."

■I would be remiss were I to finish these Norm's Notes without expressing my **VERY SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION** to special people in my life who have made a huge difference in my now 50 years of involvement in our wonderful industry. First, I want to thank my friend, **RICH BOGGS**, because were it not for Rich, along with our now deceased partners, **LYLE RAY IRWIN** and **FRED STRECK**, I would have spent my working life as an *Airline Pilot*, not as a *Club Developer and Owner/Operator*, and later, a *Newspaper Owner and Publisher for 30+ Years*. Next, it's important that I thank and acknowledge **RICK CARO**, for everything he's done for ALL of US in our industry. Without Rick's talented efforts, dedication and hard work for over 50 years in our industry, trust me folks, when I say that *OUR industry would NOT be nearly as excellent and as advanced as it is today*! And, for sure, *Club Insider* would not be in its *31st year of publication* because *"Uncle Rick,"* as my son, **JUSTIN**, and I call him, was one of those who helped dream up *Club Insider* and has hugely contributed effort to it over the past 30+ years! And, even more importantly, along with Justin, Uncle Rick helped save *Club Insider* from going out of business in the Spring of 2020 when I WENT BLIND in BOTH EYES after I had a retinal stroke, which permanently blinded me in my right eye, and I was going blind in my left eye because of cataracts. **GOD** blessed me with the return of my vision in my left eye after a successful cataract surgery a couple of months later.

I also want to **Tip My Black Hat** to our friend, *the one and only* **JOHN McCARTHY**. John is the man who successfully took on the organization called *IRSA (now IHRSA)* that Rick Caro, I and five others had dreamed up. I call him "Big John," because in my eyes, he IS BIG! John directed IRSA/IHRSA and made it successful for over 25 years before he retired! Thank you, Big John! And, I do not want to fail to mention my friend, **JOE MOORE**. Joe stepped into John McCarthy's role after John retired and did a fine job for 15 years. Sticking with IHRSA, I want to recognize and acknowledge **MS. ELIZABETH CLARK**, the Association's current highly esteemed and hard-working Executive Director. Liz is doing a *great job*

*(See **Norm's Notes** Page 8)*

# IHRSA Releases 2023 U.S. Health & Fitness Consumer Report

**BOSTON, MA** - The number of Americans who were members of a fitness facility in 2022 increased by 3.7% to 68.9 million consumers ages six and older, a record number for the industry, and overall facility users (members plus non-member users) climbed 8.1% to 82.7 million people, according to the *2023 U.S. Health & Fitness Consumer Report*, released by *IHRSA, the Health & Fitness Association*, a global community of health and fitness industry leaders. The member number is higher than in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic when the U.S. industry had 64.2 million members.

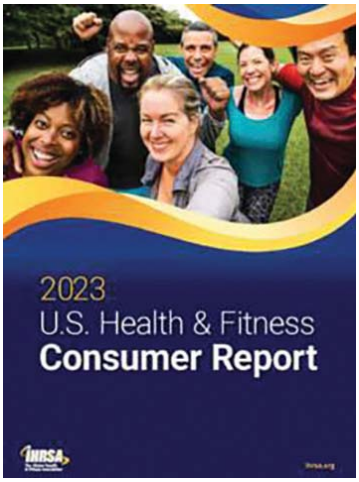
The 2023 U.S. Health & Fitness Consumer Report shares data about active U.S. consumers ages six and older, focusing mostly on their use of fitness facilities. During the past few years, consumers have engaged in new health and wellness behaviors. Insights from the report can help fitness business operators better understand those behaviors and adapt operations.

"A growing number of Americans are joining gyms because they know that science confirms exercise's key role in improving physical and mental health. The data in this report helps operators identify key trends in consumer behavior so they can remain in tune with consumers and better evaluate opportunities that exist today to better serve their communities and be successful," **Liz Clark**, *President & CEO of IHRSA.*

Report highlights include:

- Studio membership growth of 37%;
- More members than ever belong to more than one facility type;
- A drop in the age of the average member from 39 to 37 years old;
- An increase in average membership dues from $58 per month to $59;
- Growth in average attendance from 72 days to 75 days;
- Higher visit rates among older members than younger adults;
- Hispanic membership growth highest of any ethnicity;
- Hispanic member dues highest of any ethnicity;
- Treadmills, free weights (dumbbells/ hand weights) and resistance machines remained the three most popular types of fitness equipment in 2022; and,
- The top three fitness activities were yoga, swimming, and high-intensity interval training.

The report is divided into chapters focused on membership trends, member usage and activity and member demographics. Data for the report, which focuses on people who used a fitness facility within the past 12 months, came from a rolling online survey of 18,000 people ages six and older conducted throughout 2022 by *Sports Marketing Surveys USA*. Global strategy consulting firm *L.E.K. Consulting* analyzed the data and wrote the report.




The 2023 U.S. Health & Fitness Consumer Report is now available to purchase for $199.95. IHRSA members receive a discount. Go to **www.ihrsa.org/publications**.

# Crunch Fitness Invites Members to "Feel Good, Not Bad" in New Creative Campaign

**NEW YORK, N.Y.** - *Crunch Fitness*, one of the fitness industry's leading high-value, low-price gyms, announces the launch of its uplifting *"Feel Good, Not Bad"* campaign. In partnership with creative agency *Familiar Creatures*, this new brand mantra aligns with Crunch's Mission to *make serious fitness fun* through a huge variety of engaging experiences that allow all members to escape life's inevitable bad moments.

Working out at Crunch is where members can feel the good and find that reprieve from the bad. The brand brings this concept to life with 15- and 30-second commercial spots directed by award-winning directors **Ben Hurst** and **Dave Thomas** of *Ben/Dave*. Striking the ideal balance between grounded humor, freshness and unexpectedness, the commercials draw viewers in and solidify how good Crunch makes people feel, in contrast to life's daily challenges, such as smacking one's head on an open drawer, spilling a burrito or even finding an unexpected snake in a sleeping bag.

"The 'Feel Good, Not Bad' mantra is more than a slogan. It encapsulates the very essence of what we create every day at Crunch. It's something that carries you through your workout and after you leave. It's the energy, the community and the joy of crushing it without thinking about it. In a world where things can sometimes feel out of your control, Crunch is a haven where you can turn that all around, helping you to feel your best from the moment you step through our doors," said **Chad Waetzig**, *Chief Marketing Officer at Crunch Fitness*. "Everyone deserves to feel good, and there is no better way to do that than by activating your endorphins in a positive and inspiring space."

The new campaign will be seamlessly integrated into merchandise, in-gym materials, television commercials, social media adaptations, radio live reads and visually appealing billboards, all to resonate with people and inject a moment of humor into the day. Crunch's vision for the campaign is to see the commercial generate memes, gifs and other relatable content while members and fans share personal anecdotes on social media.

"After going through our brand strategy process with Crunch Fitness, we realized they're all about making everyone feel good," said **Justin Bajan**, *Co-Founder of Familiar Creatures*. "We juxtaposed this insight against some of the things that make people feel bad and made Crunch's purpose shine even brighter."

The new commercial began airing nationally on television on December 26, 2023, with billboards and additional materials to follow.

See **Crunch Franchise Ad** on **Page #2**.

## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 7

for IHRSA, and I want to thank her for all of her efforts.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to **HEAP A HUGE AMOUNT OF PRAISE and MY SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION on JUSTIN CATES**, my fine son and *Partner in/Publisher of Club Insider,* for the truly great job he does every week and every month with our *Club Insider Weekly* and *Club Insider Monthly* Editions. **GOOD ON YOU, JUSTIN CATES! And, THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR HARD WORK** on *Club Insider* and all you do for our industry worldwide!

Folks, I thought it was important for me to write this Norm's Note recognizing, acknowledging and praising the special people in my life who've helped me over the course of 50 years in this great industry. Thank you for reading!

**JUSTIN and I want to THANK YOU for reading Club Insider! AND, we both want to WISH YOU ALL a VERY HAPPY and HEALTHY NEW YEAR for YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR MEMBERS!**

**God bless our troops, airmen and sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!**

*(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 31st year of monthly publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. You can reach Norm by phone at* **770-635-7578** *or email at* **Norm@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*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## ...Elizabeth Asch

continued from page 3

**An Interview With Elizabeth Asch, Owner and General Manager of River Valley Club**

**Club Insider (C.I.)** - Where were you born and where did you grow up?
**Elizabeth Asch (EA)** - I was born in Chicago and lived in the Midwest until two years after graduating from college. I lived in Omaha, Nebraska for three years during middle school, and I found that, in the Midwest, once you get outside of a big city like Chicago, to where it's a little more rural, there's much more of an emphasis on sports.

I went to college in Wisconsin, and it's something I've noticed since that time, even now that I live in New Hampshire where both my home and my business are in a smaller town setting. People have to get outside more and do more athletic things in order to stay healthy mentally, as well as physically. That's my philosophy. Granted, I grew up doing ballet and piano lessons when I lived in Chicago. In the family I came from, we didn't have a choice. It was, 'So, what kind of dance do you want to do, and what musical instrument do you want to play?' (laughing) So, that's what I did throughout my childhood.

Then, in college, I started running outdoors and have run for many decades. Not competitively, but I was always competing against myself. A faster time, a more challenging course, etc. Running is perfect for that, and I loved that.

When my late husband, **Joe Asch**, and I married, we ran together. We would travel and run... We ran in East Africa when we traveled there. We ran in New Zealand. We did hilly runs in Tuscany, Italy, where we went each year for about fifteen years. During our summers in Tuscany, we had many great runs through the steep vineyards and the backwoods. Those were our most challenging runs. And, of course, we ran in New Hampshire.

**C.I.** - Where did you go to college, and what did you study?
**EA** - I went to a small liberal arts college called *Lawrence University* in Appleton, Wisconsin where I double majored in *Comparative Religion* and *Studio Arts*. Following college, when I was in my 20s and 30s, I actually earned a living as a studio artist. That was my first big experience being self-employed.

**C.I.** - Oh, wow. That's incredible. Definitely not something you hear every day, and I am sure not easy!
**EA** - To be honest, it's entrepreneurial, you know?

**C.I.** - Oh, I can imagine. You have to market yourself.
**EA** - You have to go out there and get your own thing going. So, in college, I started my own little poster silkscreen printing business. I made posters on campus, as well as t-shirts. So, I've always been kind of entrepreneurial in that way.

**River Valley Club**

**C.I.** - When and how did you and Joe become involved in the health and fitness club industry as well as *River Valley Club (RVC)*?
**EA** - After college, I moved out east; studio space was plentiful and affordable in New England. Joe and I met here at his alma mater, *Dartmouth College*, located in Hanover, New Hampshire, the town where our family home is and where Joe was a drill instructor at a summer language program, the *Rassias Center*. The two of us came across an offering from a fellow who had the great idea of building a fitness club. He was looking for investors. He set it up as a limited partnership, with about 40 community members investing $30,000 each. We became general partners with this guy. Our intention was just to be invisible, but as soon as we saw it, we knew it was going to be a big hit to have a high-end, state-of-the-art facility in the area. The *River Valley Club* opened in March of 1998, but oddly enough, about eight months leading up to opening day, this guy who we all invested with started asking Joe and me for a whole lot more money.

We thought, 'Uh oh...' You see, we had invested more than twenty times what anyone else had invested; there was a lot at stake for us. So, we started to get more involved, and my husband, who was a serious entrepreneur, just started asking questions. To make a long story short, we ended up taking the company through bankruptcy. We actually declared bankruptcy on 9/11.

The original partner had been dishonest, so we parted ways with him. Then, we had to get out from under the poor judgment mistakes that he had made. Joe and I looked at each other and thought, 'Well, how hard can it be?' Then, we found out how hard it really was (laughing). Joe's other successful company was a manufacturing company, which I also now own and run, but that's another story. Joe wasn't in direct customer service with that company, so customer service is where we had a huge learning curve.

**C.I. -** This is actually our second cover story on RVC, with the first being over a decade now. I'm sure a lot has changed! Please tell us all about RVC today (property area, square footage, amenities, services, etc.).
**EA -** We have been very lucky. The building is beautiful, and we have more than doubled the size of what we were. In terms of square feet, we're probably close to triple, and we've got a lot more land.

The club is now close to 100,000 square feet. We have a 10,000 square-foot fitness floor for individual and personal training, featuring stretching stations, free weights, circuit training machines and a large assortment of treadmills, ellipticals, bikes and other low-impact cardio machines. *Styku 3D* scans and other biometric analytics are available, so clients and trainers have accurate data to track and analyze the transformations their hard work makes to their bodies.

We have three group exercise studios, each with its own design and mood. The expansive *Yoga* Studio has large windows, hardwood floors, dimmable lights and hidden stereo speakers. *Studio One* is a higher energy space, with a stage for the instructors, headset, microphone and mirrors so participants can monitor their technique. It has steps, mats and weights for high intensity interval training, ballet barres, hardwood floors and windows. It's a beautiful space to dance. The *Spin Studio* has three tiers of bikes with colored LED lights on the floor. When the music is bumping and people are pedaling hard, the Spin Studio becomes its own world.

The *Member Services Department*

*(See **Elizabeth Asch** Page 12)*

Welcome to River Valley Club

The Spin Studio at River Valley Club

RiverValleyClub

# INCURABLE

# IS

# UNACCEPTABLE

Donate via Credit Card

venmo

## ...Elizabeth Asch

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greets clients as they check in and are available to answer any questions community members have. The *RVC Café* serves grab and go offerings, including special smoothies that change every month. *RVC's FITshop* is a retail space that stocks premium brands like *Lululemon* and *Wilson*, providing everyone with the clothing, accessories and equipment they need to engage with the club's programs.

We also have a *Spa and Salon*, offering 18 types of massage and dozens of aesthetic treatments. There is a large, well-equipped *Personal Training Studio* for clients who value their privacy, and a *KidsClub* classroom, where guardians can drop off their children for up to two hours while they're on campus for their fitness and wellness needs. There's a *Pilates Studio*, which has Cadillacs, ladder barrels and chairs, as well as eight Reformers, all while having the feel of a dance studio.

The *Racquet Sports Facilities* include four indoor *Deco-Turf* Tennis courts, which double as eight indoor Pickleball courts, as well as four Tennis / eight Pickleball outdoor courts with lights for early morning and evening play and a long view into the hills of Vermont.

Our *CrossFit Box* is the size of a basketball gymnasium and supports a thriving community of trainers and athletes who are competitive at the national level. We're proud to train firefighters and other first responders from five surrounding towns in our area. On one wall of the CrossFit Box, there's a 30' simulated New Hampshire granite climbing wall, with routes ranging from 5.5 to 5.11+.

The men's and women's locker rooms have saunas, steam rooms, jacuzzies and showers, along with access to Aquatics. *RVC's Aquatics* features six pools: an outdoor resort style pool, an indoor saltwater therapy pool, three custom programmable infinity pools and a cold plunge.

Next door, in a separate building, our *FitKids Childcare Center* is a 15-classroom facility that provides Upper Valley families with childcare for infants through pre-Kindergarten. The program is licensed to serve 248 children. A new Afterschool program for ages 5 - 10 was launched in December and is co-taught by childcare professionals from FitKids and trainers from RVC, with racquet sports, rock climbing and swimming all part of the curriculum.

Distributed among its multiple departments, the River Valley Club and FitKids employs close to 160 people.

**C.I.** - That is an incredible offering! You recently completed a large renovation project. Please tell us about that.
**EA** - We added the four outdoor Tennis / eight Pickleball courts, resurfaced the four indoor Tennis / eight Pickleball courts and added four new FitKids Classrooms. Our renovated Aquatics center is on schedule to open April 1, 2024.

And, let me add a bit about FitKids' history. The minimum age of membership at RVC is 14 (that age can come in with a parent), but a member has to be 16 to come in on their own. That's pretty much been the case since the beginning. From our opening day in 1998, we offered drop-in babysitting for children, and I brought my infants there. This drop-in room is what grew into a childcare center. Originally, it helped maintain employee longevity. Our employee parents loved the ability to keep their children on campus while they worked. Then, we had members starting to make that request. We're in a business park, so as the companies grew around us, there was an increased need for childcare.

In 2016, we renovated RVC, moving the five classrooms of children from the club to the separate, 12-classroom facility we designed, dedicated and built for childcare. This past year, we added more classrooms, which opened on December 1, so we now have 15 classrooms of New Hampshire licensed and certified childcare. Two classrooms have been combined to launch our new Afterschool program.

Rock Climbing at River Valley Club

**C.I. -** Boiling so much down, what do you consider your key market differentiators? Above all, why do members choose RVC over others?
**EA** - RVC prides itself on several key market differentiators: Our commitment to providing a holistic wellness experience, including fitness, nutrition and mental wellbeing, sets us apart. Personalized training programs, cutting-edge fitness equipment and a diverse range of classes catering to individual needs. Additionally, our strong sense of community and social engagement distinguishes RVC, making it more than just a gym; it's a lifestyle choice. Members choose RVC for the comprehensive wellness approach and our supportive community.

**The Membership**

**C.I. -** Taking all of this into account, what are the membership options/price points you offer?
**EA** - RVC has a **$395 Initiation Fee** when a new member joins with a 12-month contract. The Initiation Fee includes a Welcome Packet with $1,500 worth of certificates to introduce new members to the many opportunities available. The packet includes a Tennis or Pickleball lesson, a Pilates Reformer class, a discount on a Spa and Salon treatment, an hour of personal training, guest passes for friends and family and much more.

Our *Standard Monthly Dues* are **$135** and include access to all the amenities and the expertise of the RVC staff. Monthly dues for students, seniors over 70, active military and veterans, and emergency services workers are **$102**. All contract members receive discounts on specialty classes, clinics and court time.

We also have a *Racquet Sports Only Membership*, which limits one's use of the club to Tennis and Pickleball. The annual fee is **$250** for adults and **$125** for juniors. Racquet Sports Only Memberships pay higher rates for classes and clinics.

**C.I. -** How many membership accounts do you have, and how many members does this equate to?
**EA** - We have 1,700 RVC Members with expectations of growth when the renovation is complete and Aquatics has reopened on April 1, 2024. And, we have 160 FitKids Pupils with expectations of growth as the new classrooms are filled and the Afterschool Program gets discovered.

**C.I.** - Please tell us about your Mission.
**EA** - Over 15 years ago, we had a *General Manager* (still in the industry but who moved on from us in 2019) who wanted to create a Mission Statement. It took more than a

*(See **Elizabeth Asch** Page 13)*

Studio One Yoga at River Valley Club

RiverValleyClub

## ...Elizabeth Asch

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year to complete, but our employees wrote it with the GM. **Our Mission** is to *improve lives through fitness and self-care*. It's very, very simple. If you're a member here, we want your time at the club to be the best part of your day. That's our philosophy, and that has not changed through all the growth, all the changes and all the things we've done over our 26 years in business.

**C.I.** - Please tell us about local area competition. What does that landscape look like?
**EA** - The Upper Valley of the Connecticut River Valley has a number of private golf and tennis clubs, though the geography spreads the population into distinct communities. RVC benefits from its central location, near the intersection of highways 89 and 91, making it accessible to all. *Dartmouth College* and the *Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center* hospital are the two largest anchor businesses in the region, and RVC is very close to them both.

The two closest competitors are nonprofit athletic centers, who benefit from municipal support and waivers on taxes. This allows them to make low-cost memberships available, and they are well-attended community resources. There are also a couple of privately held smaller studios and clubs, including a national franchise. Because RVC is committed to providing premium experiences in every way, it occupies its own space in the market.

I asked **Adam Dutille**, our *Fitness Director*, to also comment: 'The local fitness and wellness landscape is competitive, with several gyms and health clubs in the area. However, RVC stands out due to its comprehensive approach to health, offering a wide range of fitness classes, state-of-the-art facilities, personalized training programs and a focus on holistic wellbeing. We continuously monitor the local market to stay updated on trends and ensure our offerings remain innovative and attractive to our members.'

### The Passing of Joe Asch

**C.I.** - Please tell us about the passing of your husband, Joe, and the incredible story of what happened next.
**EA** - Joe, who was our *CEO*, passed in October of 2018. He never had an office in the club but was a close manager via phone and email, even when we traveled. When in New Hampshire, we would invite employees and others over for lunch or dinner. I would cook. We had our kids at home, so we conducted a lot of business at the kitchen table. I was there for the important conversations, and we were very close with our *General Manager* and *Fitness Director*, a married couple. Within three months of Joe's passing, the CFO, General Manager and Fitness Director all resigned. Those resignations came in 2019, and of course, a year later, COVID hit.

**C.I.** - That is unbelievably brutal.
**EA** - Yes. When Joe died, I had to jump on a moving plane. But, when COVID happened, it gave me an opportunity to really get to know the business well from the ground up, since we reopened after a four-month closure. We reopened very, very slowly. So, that was an opportunity for me to make it on my own. I became the General Manager of the club, which I still am today.


The Late Joe Asch

Most importantly, in the frightening years of 2019 and 2020, I had several super formative discussions with **Eddie Tock**, who had always been very supportive with *REX Roundtables*. I never would have made it through that time period --losing my husband, losing all the managers here and then going through COVID-- were it not for Eddie and the folks he introduced me to. Eddie and the people at REX generously shared their knowledge and experience, and I am ever grateful to them for seeing me through. Now, we're just rocking and rolling here. Things are really great.

When Joe passed, and the other top managers left, people were like, 'Oh, it'll never be the same.' Well, in some ways, it never has been the same, but in other ways, it's exactly the same because it's about the Mission. It's not about the individuals of RVC. Don't get me wrong, we have some really tremendous, fantastic people who we're so lucky to have and who have changed so many lives. But, if and when they move on, which sometimes they do, it's okay because it's about the Mission. As long as we keep that in our heads, we're

*(See **Elizabeth Asch** Page 14)*

## ...Elizabeth Asch

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going to be here for a long time.

**C.I.** - That's well said. Beautiful. And, from your voice, I can tell how much you care and the passion that you have. Anyone who has those things will never let anything stop them. Guaranteed.

**A New Year and Beyond**

**C.I. -** Please tell us about some of your New Year's initiatives to attract new members, and of course, retain them.
**EA** - This January, we are running a *"Get Paid to Work Out at the River Valley Club"* campaign. People who sign up for a new membership in January, and who check in eight times before the 31st, will get their $395 Initiation Fee paid back to celebrate their efforts. The campaign engages new members right off the bat and incentivizes their involvement in the programs that will bring them back, while also making the price point more accessible.

**C.I.** - Along similar lines, what do you do to get out in/give back to your community?
**EA** - RVC's philanthropy supports all ages in our community, with gifts going to early education, high schools and senior centers. Seniors over the age of 90 do not pay any monthly dues. You heard that right; membership over 90 is free at my club. RVC also donates to regional athletics at the youth, high school and semi-professional levels. A highlight community event this fall was sponsoring a showcase for 3,000 people on the *Lebanon Town Green*. In addition, RVC donates to *PBS* and supports the Arts through in-kind and cash donations to a number of theater companies.

We also try to lead by example, making direct donations to certain organizations. During Christmas, we had large boxes in the lobby where members contributed by collecting toys and winter coats for a local family shelter. And, of course, we give any time one of our local organizations has an auction, donating memberships, gift certificates, all that kind of stuff. I also do some significant volunteer activities myself, advocating for children in New Hampshire and in Washington, as well as serving on the *Human Rights Commission for the State of New Hampshire*. I try to set the tone.

Our company supports paid community work time. As long as it is a verified 501(c)(3) company, employees can spend 16 hours a year of paid time working for the charity of their choice. For 160 employees, that's over 2,500 hours a year of community service.

During COVID, we gave free memberships to health workers. People from *New York Presbyterian Hospital* joined as members of the club because we had a digital virtual group exercise program of our own design. We didn't geographically limit the free membership. That thought never occurred to us.

From the very beginning, from the first time Joe and I decided to put a single dollar into this company, we knew we were going to be a cornerstone of the community. We always had that in mind, and I believe we've achieved it.

**C.I.** - That's a great slate of activities to hear about. Great job! Looking 3 - 5 years out, what does the future look like for RVC?
**EA -** With the college, hospital and commerce in the Upper Valley, in the next 3 - 5 years, RVC hopes to become more fully integrated into regional corporate wellness plans. As more and more data is released that supports the financial, physical and psychological benefits companies receive when they provide their employees with club memberships, RVC can be the best solution in our region. We are happy to organize private Pickleball socials, team building events on the climbing wall, or yoga classes to dedicated audiences, all of which benefit the companies and employees.

I asked **Adam Dutille**, our *Fitness Director*, to also comment: 'We emphasize the importance of making wellness a priority in daily life. Whether through exercise, nutrition or mental health practices, taking small steps consistently can lead to significant improvements. Members need to surround themselves with a supportive community, like the one at RVC, and embrace a holistic approach to wellbeing. Remember, health is a lifelong journey, and every positive choice contributes to a better quality of life.'

**C.I. -** Closing this very informative, not to mention inspirational interview, I welcome any closing comments you'd like to make.
**EA** - Over the last few years, our culture has experienced a cycle of loss and growth, loss and growth. These hardships have built resiliency and inner strength in all of us, my children and me included. We are all stronger because we have learned firsthand how important community is. I'm incredibly grateful to the entire River Valley Club community --our members, clients, families, staff and partners-- for their contributions to the success and positive atmosphere at RVC. We are dedicated to evolving with the needs of our community and continuing to be a beacon of health and wellness.

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Thank you to **Elizabeth Asch** for her time sharing this story with our readers. Thank you also to **Adam Dutille** for his comments and **Adam Blue** for assistance with photos and graphics.

*If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts or a crisis, please reach out immediately to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting* **988***. These services are free and confidential.*

*(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 38 years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 15+ years. Justin became Publisher of Club Insider in April of 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin by phone at* **863-999-2677** *or email at* **Justin@clubinsideronline.com***.)*

Sunset Pickleball at River Valley Club


Firefighters Training at River Valley Club

RiverValleyClub

# Three Key Points on Enforcement of Gym Etiquette Expectations

**By: Chris Stevenson**

We've all seen, heard and maybe even smelled them. The flaunters. The grunters. The hoggers. Those with suspect hygiene habits. While a majority of our clients are great, there are times when some need to remember (or be reminded) that they are in a shared space where courtesy and respect should be practiced. Everyone needs to adhere to proper gym etiquette to ensure that all members, from seasoned bodybuilders to fitness beginners, have positive experiences in our gyms.

While different facilities have different standards and guidelines, some common violations of gym etiquette are not re-racking weights, slamming or dropping weights, not sharing equipment, not wiping equipment down after use, invading other members' personal space, wearing inappropriate attire, yelling and grunting, and generally acting inappropriately toward other members.

Social media can add a whole new dimension to this, as well. We see situations where people use their phone cameras in locker rooms, take pictures of others and post negative comments. It is no surprise that getting members to adhere to gym etiquette guidelines can be a challenging situation.

What follows is a breakdown of crucial teaching components regarding gym etiquette: deciding on rules, policies, and member expectations; diversely communicating those to members; and empowering and training staff to handle various situations.

**1. Establish Rules and Expectations:** Every gym should establish clear rules, policies and member expectations to foster a safe and respectful environment. These guidelines should cover appropriate attire, equipment usage, hygiene and behavior toward fellow members and staff. While expectations vary from facility to facility, here are a few examples of standard gym etiquette rules:

**Attire:** Encourage members to wear comfortable and appropriate workout attire, allowing freedom of movement yet maintaining modesty. Discourage clothing that is offensive or overly revealing. Additionally, it should be addressed that members must always be clothed when on the workout floor.

**Hygiene:** Remind members of the importance of personal hygiene. Members should be educated to avoid wearing strong colognes and perfumes. Request that they shower before using wet areas and always bring a towel to wipe down equipment afterward. Address the issue of body odor discreetly but firmly.

**Equipment Usage:** Establish rules for sharing equipment and encourage members to limit their time on machines during peak hours. Set expectations that members use equipment safely and correctly. Implement a system to rotate usage if necessary and ensure members understand the importance of returning equipment to its proper place.

**Respect for Others:** Promote respect and courtesy among members. Remind them to keep their voices down, refrain from hogging equipment and offer to alternate sets if someone is waiting. Discourage intimidating behavior or excessive grunting.

These are just a few examples of rules, standards and guidelines. It is crucial to create a set that fits your model and facility size, and always be ready to create new ones when needed.

**2. Communicate Guidelines:** Once you have established your rules, policies and member expectations, it's crucial to communicate them to all gym members effectively. Utilize various methods to ensure everyone receives the information. Here are some ways to diversely communicate guidelines:

**Signage:** Display clear and concise signs throughout the gym that outline the rules and expectations. Place them in prominent locations, such as near entrances, in locker rooms and by popular equipment.

**Member Handbook:** Create a member handbook with gym guidelines and policies. This can be given and reviewed during the joining process. In addition, make it readily available at the front desk or provide a digital version accessible through the gym's website or mobile app.

**Orientation Sessions:** Before a group exercise class, personal training session or other specialized programming, have the person running the program review aloud the gym's etiquette and policies specifically related to that program (and not necessarily applicable to all gym members). This will help program participants understand expectations from the start.

**Email and Newsletter Updates:** Regularly send emails or newsletters to members with essential updates or reminders regarding gym etiquette. Include positive reinforcement and highlight success stories to encourage adherence.

**Social Media:** Like emails and newsletters, use social media to communicate gym etiquette guidelines. With social, it is okay to keep things lighter. Try posting a funny meme or shooting a cheeky video to drive the info home in a fun and lighthearted manner.

The key to effectively communicating gym etiquette guidelines is consistently doing it in various serious and lighthearted ways. While it won't prevent all violations, it will stop some and provide a reference point when a member violates policy.

**3. Empower Staff:** Equipping your staff with the necessary tools and training to deal with situations is vital in effectively enforcing gym rules and policies. Here's how you can empower your staff:

**Education and Training:** Provide thorough training to staff members on gym etiquette and conflict resolution. Ensure they understand how to address different situations professionally and respectfully. This should include training in body language, luxury language, tone and other communication tools. In addition, develop protocols for handling conflicts or inappropriate behavior. Train staff on conflict resolution techniques and empower them to take appropriate action when necessary, such as issuing warnings or involving management (See my article policy enforcement: **bit.ly/clubinsider152**).

**Leading By Example:** Encourage staff to follow the gym's values and etiquette guidelines. When members see staff adhering to the rules, it sets a positive tone and encourages compliance.

**Clear Communication Channels:** Establish clear communication channels between staff and members. Encourage members to report any concerns or violations to staff, who can address them promptly and appropriately.

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One important thing to mention is that while empowering staff to handle situations is vital, leaders must always be ready to step in if a situation escalates. If a staff member follows the proper steps to handle a situation but still cannot resolve it, it is time for leadership to take over. Even the best staff member will likely have a different level of skill to handle the most challenging situations.

Also, don't forget that it is okay to terminate the membership of anyone who proves too difficult regarding compliance with your club's expectations. It is not only okay but also your responsibility to do so to respect the other members' experience.

Chris Stevenson

Remember, gym etiquette is a shared responsibility. Each club member plays a crucial role in upholding your established standards of behavior and respect, and each club employee shares the oversight role.

Develop meaningful facility etiquette expectations, emphasize and reinforce them regularly and empower your staff to address issues promptly. By implementing those three key points, gym owners and operators can create an environment where members feel respected, comfortable and enjoy their workouts in a pleasant and supportive environment.

*(Chris Stevenson, former Power Ranger stuntman, is the Founder of The Empower Group, a full-service consulting firm with services ranging from staff training, workshops, full facility management and more. Stevenson has over 20 years of experience in many aspects of the health and fitness industry. In addition, he is an international speaker who regularly presents at IHRSA, Athletic Business, Club Industry and many other fitness and business events. From health and wellness to business strategies. Chris can be reached by phone at* **818-519-6038** *or email at* **chris@stevensonempowers.com**.*)*

**Make It Fun!**

# Efficiency Versus an Experience

**By: Jeffrey Pinkerton**

I love time-saving efficiencies. I am always searching for ways to streamline things, automate tasks and be more organized. I fume when businesses have poorly designed systems and unprepared or untrained staff. To these businesses, I don't usually give second chances. I don't check back in a few months to see if they've sorted themselves out. If giving a business my money feels like a chore, or a waste of time, I find an alternative solution. But, if it's an experience that is worth the wait, worth my time... now that's a different story.

**A chore? A bore? Or an experience?**

As much as I love time saving, I'm quick to recognize that it's not the universal measurement of quality, especially for experiences. Can you imagine if it were? I'd search for the fastest haircut in town. Or, a dinner out with my wife that can get us in and out as quickly as possible. Or, the North Georgia winery that boasts of, "no waits, no crowds, and fast pours." Experiences that are worth the time, take time.

However, when something feels like a chore or bore (a waste of time), we often look for ways to expedite the process. When I used to go into a *Walmart*, I'd try to get out of there as quickly as possible. Yet, somehow that never worked, making it both a chore and a bore. Now, I have 25+ items delivered through Amazon's *Subscribe & Save* program. My trips to Walmart in 2023? Zero.

**The importance of an experience.**

I am a fan of *Starbucks* coffee. But, what I really like is the experience of having coffee inside of a Starbucks with other people. In 2023, with the exception of when I was traveling, I went to Starbucks ONE time. (And, yes, I searched my records for Starbucks transactions and counted... I have a system.) What happened? For me, Starbucks turned into a commodity more than an experience. They raised their prices, their service slowed, the quality lessened (or at least became inconsistent), and the drive-through line in Suwanee is embarrassingly long. Bottom line, the wait was no longer worth the reward. It became a chore to get coffee, so I found an

*(See **Jeffrey Pinkerton** Page 18)*

Jeffrey Pinkerton

# From Rookie Rollercoaster to Sales Superstar:
## Avoiding Common Salesperson Blunders

**By: Jim Thomas**

Stepping onto the gym floor as a salesperson can feel like entering a coliseum gladiator match. It's a high-pressure arena, fueled by competition and demanding quick wit, empathy and an understanding of diverse motivations. But, fear not, aspiring fitness warriors! Just like any battle, navigating the world of gym sales requires awareness of your weaknesses and strategic maneuvering to avoid common pitfalls. So, rookie gladiators, heed these warnings and emerge victorious!

**Mistake #1: The Overbearing Oversell** - Picture this: you corner a potential member, bombarding them with gym statistics, membership tiers and promises of sculpted abs in 30 days. Their eyes glaze over, and their fight-or-flight instinct kicks in. Remember, people are not gym memberships waiting to happen. Treat them as individuals, listen to their needs and tailor your approach accordingly. A gentle, consultative style that focuses on genuine connection will win far more battles than a high-pressure sales pitch.

**Mistake #2: The Fitness Fanatic Faux Pas** - You may be a burpee-loving, protein-guzzling fitness fiend, but not everyone shares your enthusiasm for lunges and deadlifts. Don't alienate potential members with jargon and hardcore workout routines. Speak their language, understand their fitness level and offer modifications and alternatives. Remember, your goal is to make them feel empowered, not overwhelmed.

**Mistake #3: The Missing Motivation Maestro** - People join gyms for a multitude of reasons: stress relief, social connection, health goals, or simply, a change of scenery. Your job is to uncover their "why" and become their personal cheerleader. Motivate them, celebrate their small victories and help them set achievable goals. Show them how your gym can be the missing piece in their journey to a healthier, happier self.

**Mistake #4: The Technical Blunderbuss** - Sure, you may know the intricacies of every elliptical model and lat pulldown machine, but bombarding potential members with technical details is a surefire way to lose their interest. Focus on the benefits, not the bells and whistles. Explain how the equipment can help them achieve their goals and keep the technical jargon to a minimum.

**Mistake #5: The Social Media Scrooge** - In today's digital age, social media is your secret weapon. Showcase your gym's vibrant community, inspiring transformations and fun events. Share workout tips, member testimonials and behind-the-scenes glimpses into the gym's culture. Build a virtual bridge between your brick-and-mortar walls and the online world, attracting potential members who resonate with your vibe.

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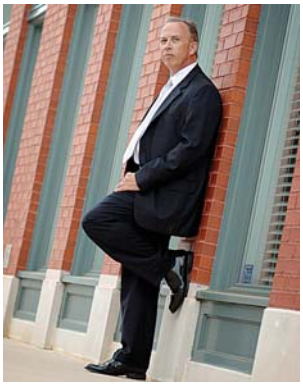
Remember, conquering the gym sales arena is not about brute force but about finesse and strategy. By avoiding these common blunders, you can transform from a nervous rookie into a seasoned sales champion, building genuine connections, igniting motivation and winning the hearts (and memberships) of countless fitness warriors. So, strap on your metaphorical gladiator sandals, hone your skills and let the sales games begin!

*(An Outsourced CEO, Turnaround Expert and Author, Jim Thomas is the Founder and President of FMC USA Inc., a management consulting, turnaround, financing and brokerage firm specializing in the leisure services industry. With more than 25 years of experience owning, operating and managing facilities of all sizes, Thomas lectures and delivers seminars, webinars and workshops across the globe on the practical skills required to successfully overcome obscurity, improve gym sales, build teamwork and market fitness programs and products. Learn more at* **www.fmconsulting.net** *or* **www.youtube.com/gymconsultant**.*)*



Jim Thomas

## ...Jeffrey Pinkerton

continued from page 17

alternative: a *Nespresso* machine, complete with milk frother to make an equivalent and possibly superior grande latte with one raw sugar. My trips to Starbucks in 2024 might be zero.

**There are no shortcuts for exercise.**

Exercising sits in an odd time paradox. For too many people, exercise is seen as a chore that needs to be done. But an expedited workout (less time spent exercising) is often less valuable. More time-efficient is less effective. To meet the CDC's recommendations for exercising each week, a shorter workout --say, 30 minutes-- would require someone to work out more often. With more visits to the gym each week, add up the time it takes to get to the gym and get cleaned up from the gym, and now, the time spent preparing to exercise overshadows the time spent actually exercising. Thirty minutes to get to the gym, 30 minutes exercising and 30 minutes to get showered and back home. If it is simply a chore --a box that needs to be checked or a ring that needs to be closed-- people will search for alternative solutions, like working out at home or at the cheap place nearby.

**What makes a great experience?**

**Chip and Dan Heath**, two of my favorite authors, describe the power of positive experiences in their book *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*. Their theory is that "memorable moments" are usually dominated by four elements: elevation, insight, pride and connection.

*Elevation* involves an experience that is special in some sensory or surprising way.

*Insight* helps us learn something new about our understanding of the world or ourselves.

*Pride* creates a sense of accomplishment through acts of achievement and courage.

*Connection* is the power of social interactions and shared experiences. Great experiences often involve multiple elements from the four.

**Time-efficiency doesn't always win.**

For a great experience, time-efficiency is not the primary influencer. In fact, in the Heath brothers' book, they discuss a phenomenon called "duration neglect" where, "when we assess our experiences, we don't average minute-by-minute sensations. Rather, we tend to remember flagship moments: the peaks, the pits, and the transitions."

In an experiment involving uncomfortably cold water for an unknown length of time, for the first trial, people placed their hand in a bucket of cold water (57 degrees for 60 seconds). In the second trial, they placed their hand in the cold water (57 degrees for 60 seconds) then in 59-degree water for 30 seconds. For trial three, people were given the option of repeating either the first or second trial. Surprisingly, 69% of people chose the longer option! My conclusion and translation for all of us selling fitness - people don't want a shorter experience; they want a better experience!

**Are you selling (and compelling) the experience?**

If you are letting people do their own thing in your facility, tackle chores alone, literally watch the time tick by on a treadmill, they'll want to get in and out as quickly as possible. And, if you're leaving them to "find what works" for them, they may find that what works isn't in your facility at all. Visits in 2024? Maybe zero.

But, if you're selling and compelling people into great group fitness --the kind packed with "meaningful and memorable moments" (to borrow a phrase from the Heath brothers); the sort that includes elevation, insight, pride and connection; the type that makes time fly and makes people want to return-- you'll offer a fit for those seeking both time-efficiency and an experience! How? Great group fitness wastes no time, but delivers a memorable, time-flying experience that will have people visiting early and often in 2024.

■ ■ ■

*MOSSA* develops group fitness workouts that motivate and move more people through a combination of amazing music, welcoming and inclusive coaching, and real results for years and decades. Never a chore nor a bore, MOSSA workouts can be your facility's epicenter for community, connection, and memorable - repeatable - experiences. If you want more visits in 2024, let's talk!

*(Jeffrey Pinkerton is the Business Development Manager for MOSSA. Jeffrey can be reached by phone at* **770-989-4737** *or email at* **jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net**.*)*

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