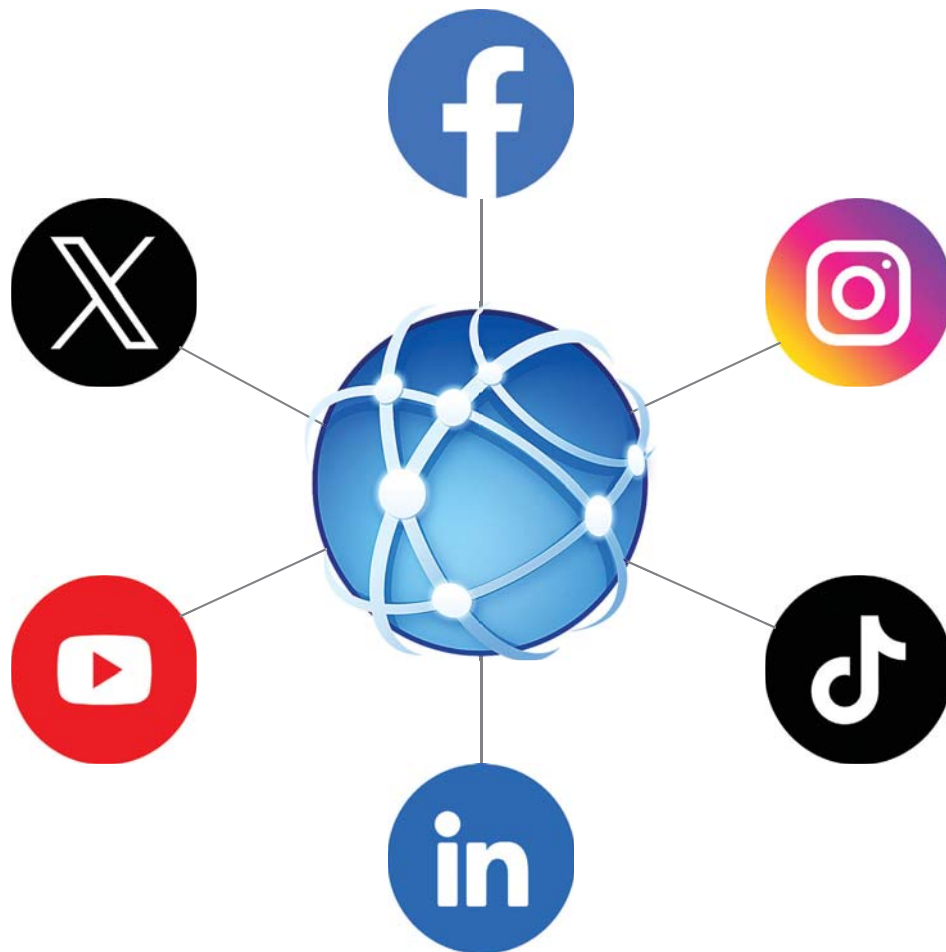


Norm Cates'

# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

## *Cover Story Classics:* ***Club Marketing - Then, Now, Always***



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**AUGUST 2025**

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# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

## Cover Story Classics: Club Marketing - Then, Now, Always

By: **Justin Cates**

**Publisher's Note:** The following *Cover Story Classic* comes to you from *February 2014*. The subject is *Club Marketing*, and it is fascinating to read the words written then, now, in hindsight. It seems like so much has changed, but a lot has stayed the same. Throughout the article, I will provide a few updates. Additionally, the original version of the article featured interviews from an all-star line-up of contributors: **Mike Grondahl, Derek Barton, Casey Conrad Bill McBride, Terry W. Browning, Sherry Robb, Tracey Bourdon and Nancy Trent**. Though not included here because of space constraints, these interviews can be found in the original version of this article. Their insights, combined with what you are

about to read (or re-read), will give you a true arsenal of tools to take your club's marketing to the next level.

■ ■ ■

Marketing... It's the function of business we have all turned a blind eye to at some point. We don't have the time for it. We don't have the budget for it. We will do it next year. If we build it, they will come... At least, that is what we tell ourselves.

At a time when television, radio and print were pretty much the only mediums to consider for a traditional marketing campaign, this mindset was understandable. Those mediums are expensive, and they require a lot of legwork to make the cost worth it. Then, it is still not guaranteed to

provide a return. That was then, though. This is now, and things have changed.

Today, television, radio and print are still there, but the prolific expansion of the Internet has created a new medium with numerous sub-mediums upon which to shine light on an organization's brand at a fraction of the cost. The top resources required are time and creativity, but that has always been the case if an organization cares about how the public perceives their brand.

I'm getting ahead of myself, though... Let's start with the basics.

### What is Marketing?

Let's go to business school for a  
(See *Club Marketing* Page 10)



Justin Cates

## Crunch Franchisees Making Big Moves!!!

**CRUNCH** - *Fitness Ventures and Primetime Fitness* announce large acquisition deals in their respective/expansionary territories. The leaders of the two club companies have hundreds of years of experience. *Crunch* ranked No. 1 in the fitness category for the second year in a row and No. 32 overall in the annual *Entrepreneur Franchise 500*, the world's most comprehensive franchise ranking. *Crunch* continues to expand nationwide and push the bar with innovative offerings for its members.

**Fitness Ventures Acquires Three Locations in Portland, Plans \$75 Million Expansion Across the Market**

**PORTLAND, OR** - *Fitness Ventures*



LLC, one of the fastest-growing franchise operators in the *Crunch Fitness* system, has acquired the three existing *Crunch Fitness* locations in the Portland, Oregon market. As part of the acquisition, the company is planning a \$75 million investment to bring  
(See *Crunch* Page 6)

## Workout Anytime Accelerates Growth in 2025

**ATLANTA, GA** - *Workout Anytime*, the premium 24/7 fitness franchise with more than 200 locations nationwide, is entering the second half of 2025 with strong momentum.

"We've seen incredible progress already this year, both in terms of internal development and external impact," said **Jerry Pugh, CEO of Workout Anytime**. "From onboarding new franchisees to expanding our national footprint, we're laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable growth, and we're just getting started."

The brand has signed three new franchise agreements and finalized eight leases year-to-date. These milestones



follow a major leadership transition that took place in Q2 when Pugh, the brand's largest franchisee, was named CEO. With more than a decade of firsthand experience operating successful clubs, Pugh brings an operator's mindset to the executive suite, a unique advantage as *Workout Anytime* scales its business.

"This brand has always been about access, integrity and simplicity," Pugh  
(See *Workout Anytime* Page 6)

## Inside the Insider: Edition #380

- Developing Tomorrow's Leaders, Today: Inside the REX Leadership Academy - **By:** REX Roundtables
- A Three-Question Interview with ChatGPT - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- Beyond Bright Lights: The Allure of the Darker Gym Trend - **By:** Bruce Carter
- The Fitness Industry's Global Momentum Continued in 2024, New Report Shows
- Recovery Trends Outpacing Fitness in Today's Club Industry - **By:** Nancy Trent
- And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*
- Look in the Mirror: A Leadership Wake-Up Call on Hiring Accountability - **By:** Herb Lipsman

# Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **380th monthly edition of this 30+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of **"Telling-It-Like-It-Is!"** I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

■ **Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT?** Hmm... hmm... hmm! And, as usual, let me start these **Norm's Notes** with my normal monthly salutation to you all: **GOD BLESS AMERICA and GOD BLESS YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR BUSINESS!!!**

■ In a recent edition of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC) newspaper, a very special article entitled: *"You Can Build Muscle as You Age - Here's How."* was published. The piece was very well written by **DANIELLE FRIEDMAN** of the *New York Times* and reprinted in the AJC. The article

featured a place called *Greysteel Strength and Conditioning Gym* in Farmington Hill, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. The photo with the article featured a weightroom with lots of weights, etc. and a photo of an elderly lady named **ANN BUSZARD**, age 84, *deadlifting 225 pounds*. Yes, you read that correctly! The article went on to say, "Older adults enjoy a stronger sense of community at gym. Some are well into their '80s and '90s."

Folks, if the Lord's willing, since my next birthday will be my 80th, this Note is **FUN** for me to share with y'all. **PLUS**, it's making me feel like I better get moving more... that's for sure!

■ The *Health Fitness Association's (HFA) 2025 Global Report* shows record memberships, rising revenues and booming wellness trends, signaling a worldwide industry in peak form and hungry for even more growth!

"The Global Report is one of the most important resources we provide because it brings together market data, consumer trends and policy developments from across the world in one place," said **LIZ CLARK**, *HFA President and CEO*. "It offers a clear picture of where the industry

is going and how stakeholders can help shape its future."

Check out the **Press Release on Page #6**.

■ This item is from London in the United Kingdom: *The Fit Guide (TFG)*, an independent global rating system for boutique fitness clubs and studios, has released its second annual evaluations for London. Widely regarded as the "Michelin Guide for fitness," The Fit Guide offers anonymous and objective assessments of top-tier clubs, scoring each club across five categories and 250 service and experience standards. After a tough year for the city's fitness scene that has seen numerous closures, no London club achieved the coveted *Fit Guide 5-Star Award* in 2025, down from five recipients last year, signaling a significant drop in boutique fitness standards and excellence. "This year's evaluations come off the back of a tough year for London's fitness scene," said **JACK THOMAS**, *Co-Founder of The Fit Guide*. "We've seen clubs improve in some operational areas, but there was a clear drop in front-of-house hospitality and in-class experience, two crucial components of premium service." Despite the overall



Norm Cates

drop at the top, The Fit Guide's evaluations also revealed areas of progress.

## Key London 2025 Findings:

- Zero 5-Star Award winners (down from five in 2024);
- Cycling clubs saw the largest drop in standards and average score, falling from 84% to 77%;

(See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

## About Club Insider

### CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

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## Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **32nd 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 the **Health & Fitness Association** 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. ©2024 Fitness International, LLC. All rights reserved.

## The Fitness Industry's Global Momentum Continued in 2024, New Report Shows

**BOSTON, MA** - The *Health & Fitness Association (HFA)* releases the *2025 HFA Global Report*, the comprehensive annual resource on the state of the global health and fitness industry. The report captures strong consumer demand, record membership levels in key markets and increasing alignment between fitness, healthcare and public policy. This year's edition features insights from nearly 30 countries and includes a robust increase in partner contributions and survey participation from 2024, reflecting the growing influence and engagement of the global fitness community.

Among countries with comparable year-over-year data, the report finds that fitness industry revenue grew by an average of 8% between 2023 and 2024. The number of fitness facilities was on average up by nearly 4%, while total membership rose by

6%, highlighting the sector's continued growth and resilience across diverse markets.

"More people than ever are viewing fitness as essential, not optional," said *HFA President and CEO, Liz Clark*. "This year's report highlights not just where the industry is going but also how operators, advocates and consumers are shaping that future together. We're proud to work alongside so many international partners to tell this story."

In addition to market performance, the report explores consumer trends, operator growth strategies and global rankings of commercial fitness brands by revenue and location count. It also spotlights policy developments from countries such as Australia, Brazil and the United States, markets where fitness continues to gain recognition as a vital contributor to public

health, tax reform and healthcare integration.

Looking ahead, several macro-economic tailwinds are expected to support industry growth in 2025, from easing inflation to stronger public investment in physical activity. The HFA global survey results included in the report reflect this optimism: 91% of operators expect revenue to grow, over 83% anticipate improved profitability and a majority project continued membership gains, reinforcing broad confidence in the sector's trajectory.

"The Global Report is one of the most important resources we provide because it brings together market data, consumer trends, and policy developments from across the world in one place," said Clark. "It offers a clear picture of where the industry is going and how stakeholders can help shape its future."

The 2025 edition guides readers from



a global industry overview through detailed regional and country-level analysis. It includes expanded proprietary research from HFA, including studies on Latin American consumers, gym membership price sensitivity and American attitudes toward the fitness industry, as well as updated operator rankings and a new directory of leading global fitness brands.

The 2025 HFA Global Report is now available for download in PDF format. Premium and Standard HFA members and industry partner members can access the report for free via their HFA profile. The report is available to non-members for \$299. Visit [www.healthandfitness.org/publications](http://www.healthandfitness.org/publications).

### ...Crunch

continued from page 3

15 brand new Crunch locations to the region over the next several years.

**Brian Hibbard, CEO of Fitness Ventures**, shared his vision for the Portland expansion. "The Portland market has been underserved for years when it comes to high quality fitness centers. We are excited to bring Portland a series of brand new 40,000 to 50,000 square foot Crunch 3.0 locations."

The three existing Crunch locations in Portland were originally built under the smaller 1.0 model, which is significantly different from the larger-scale Crunch 3.0 gyms Fitness Ventures has been rolling out nationwide. The company is currently evaluating its options for these facilities and will either expand and remodel them or relocate them into larger spaces. In either scenario, the goal is to bring all three clubs up to current Crunch 3.0 standards that have been raising the bar for fitness centers across the country.

The Portland acquisition is part of a broader growth strategy for Fitness Ventures, which has rapidly expanded its footprint across the U.S. In the past two years alone, the company has opened

dozens of new clubs and entered multiple new states.

#### Primetime Fitness Expands Presence in New York Metro Area with the Acquisition of 13 Crunch Gym Locations

**NEW FAIRFIELD, CT** - *Primetime Fitness*, an experienced Crunch Fitness developer and franchisee, announces the acquisition of 13 new Crunch locations across New York and New Jersey. The gyms were purchased from franchisees **Chris Pacifico's Carey Ave Development LLC** and **Assaf Gal's AD Fitness LLC**. This marks a major milestone in Primetime's growth strategy and expands the franchisee's total footprint to 36 locations nationwide.

The newly acquired gyms span key communities in the New York metropolitan area. This expansion strengthens Crunch Fitness' presence in one of the country's most active fitness markets.

"We're proud to be growing our footprint in this iconic and diverse region of the country," said **Kevin Laferriere, Primetime Fitness CEO and President**. "These clubs have strong existing member communities, and we're excited to bring Primetime's expertise and investment to continue improving the experience for every

member who walks through the door."

Each club will continue to operate under the Crunch Fitness brand and receive a series of upgrades designed to enhance the member experience. Planned renovations include updated equipment, refreshed branding and signage, enhanced Relax & Recover zones and streamlined check-in experiences.

"Joining forces with Primetime Fitness at this moment felt like the right move at the right time for our team, our members, and our business," said **Chris Pacifico, Managing Partner, PacFit**. "I'm excited to continue as an operating partner and to grow with Primetime as we expand our footprint across our collective markets. I'm grateful to my partners and our incredible team for the success we've achieved together."

"This latest acquisition highlights the strength of Primetime Fitness as a franchise partner," said **John D'Anna, Chief Development Officer, Crunch Fitness**. "Kevin and his team are building an impressive network that's helping Crunch reach more members, maintain operational excellence and continue growing with integrity in competitive markets. We're excited to support their expansion throughout New York and New Jersey."

"Primetime Fitness' continued growth reflects our shared vision of building a premier, high-quality fitness platform," said **Wade Daniel, Partner at CapitalSpring**. "We have tremendous confidence in the leadership team's ability to scale with excellence, and as the brand expands, we're more energized than ever about what lies ahead." The new locations include:

#### From PacFit Group:

Crunch East Windsor - East Windsor, NJ;  
Crunch Garwood - Garwood, NJ;  
Crunch Staten Island - Staten Island, NY;  
Crunch Green Brook - Green Brook, NJ;  
Crunch Staten Island South - Staten Island, NY;  
Crunch Bensonhurst - Brooklyn, NY;  
Crunch Springfield - Springfield, NJ.

#### From AD Fitness LLC:

Crunch Crown Heights - Brooklyn, NY;  
Crunch Flatbush - Brooklyn, NY;  
Crunch Greenpoint - Brooklyn, NY;  
Crunch Norwood - Bronx, NY;  
Crunch Richmond Hill - Queens, NY;  
Crunch Rochdale - Queens, NY.

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

### ...Workout Anytime

continued from page 3

said. "We're doubling down on that mission by investing in leadership, marketing and franchisee support to elevate our member experience and accelerate unit-level success."

In tandem with Pugh's appointment, Workout Anytime also announced the addition of **Larry Brayman** as *Chief Marketing Officer* in Q2. Brayman brings more than 30 years of marketing and franchise expertise to the table, having held key leadership roles with *Ray-Ban, Oakley, LensCrafters, Gold's Gym* and

#### CKE Restaurants.

"Larry brings the energy, insights and strategic vision that will help us build an even stronger brand," Pugh said. "His leadership is already making a difference in how we engage members, support franchisees and communicate our value."

Another defining moment in the first half of 2025 was Workout Anytime's sponsorship of an NIL (Name, Image and Likeness) panel during the *NCAA Women's Final Four* in Tampa. The event, "Leveling the Playing Field: The Future of Women's NIL," brought together athletes, business leaders and brand partners to discuss how companies can support

female athletes both on and off the field.

Representing the brand was **Lynsay Flynt, Director of Marketing and former Division I Athlete**, who reinforced Workout Anytime's commitment to equity and empowerment.

"Being part of this conversation is a natural extension of what we stand for at Workout Anytime," Flynt said. "Women are a vital part of our member base, and we're committed to investing in their success, both on and off the field. NIL is more than just marketing; it's a movement toward equity, empowerment and long-term visibility for women in sports."

As the second half of 2025 begins,

Workout Anytime is focused on continuing its upward trajectory. The brand is targeting additional signings and leases, deepening community engagement and expanding its leadership infrastructure to support the next generation of franchisees.

"Our momentum is strong, our vision is clear and our team is all-in," Pugh said. "Whether you're a member looking for accessible fitness or an entrepreneur looking for a powerful franchise opportunity, there's never been a better time to join Workout Anytime."

See the **Workout Anytime Ad** on **Page #20**.



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## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 4

- Before and after class service scores fell significantly, from 75% to 69%;
- Sales and retention, the lowest scoring area globally, dipped further from 43.9% to 43.2%.

### Improvements and Bright Spots:

- Staff showing genuine interest in clients increased from 21.4% to 30.6%;
- Front desk name usage rose from 29.3% to 45.7%;
- Post-class departure service rose from 46.2% to 54.5%;
- Public Areas, Digital & Technology and Equipment & Studio categories all saw modest improvements.

**MATT LAVENDER**, Co-Founder of *The Fit Guide*, noted, "We remain committed to raising the standard of fitness experiences globally. While London didn't reach the same level as last year, these evaluations are a reminder of the importance of experience and hospitality and an important step toward long-term progress."

The Fit Guide continues to expand globally, providing data-driven insights that empower clubs to improve and guide fitness enthusiasts toward the world's

leading gyms and experiences. Their weekly podcast and YouTube show, *Five-Star Fitness*, provides tips and hospitality guidance for club owners and managers. Check out [www.thefitguide.com](http://www.thefitguide.com).

■ Folks, in our *January 2024* edition of *Club Insider*, I wrote the following **Norm's Note** expressing my sincere THANKS and APPRECIATION to seven people in my life who have made a HUGE DIFFERENCE. One day, while reviewing some of my past comments, I came across this Note, and right then, I decided I just had to share it again! Especially for those of you who may not have previously read it. It read and has been updated to read:

I would be remiss were I to finish these Norm's Notes this month without expressing my **VERY SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION** to seven people in my life who've 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 him, along with our now deceased former partners, **LYLE RAY IRWIN** and **FRED STRECK**, I would have spent my working life as a commercial 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 all he's done for me, **JUSTIN** and for **ALL of US** in the entire industry worldwide. Without "**UNCLE RICK's**" talented efforts, dedication and hard work for over 55 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 32nd year of publication because he was one of those who helped me dream up *Club Insider*. And, he has hugely contributed to our efforts over the past 30+ years! And, even more importantly along with Justin, Uncle Rick was one of the two people who saved *Club Insider* from going out of business, when in the Spring of 2020, I went blind in both eyes after I had a Retinal Stroke, which permanently blinded me in my right eye and then 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* that Rick, I and five others had dreamed up... The *International Racquet Sports Association*, a/k/a *IRSA* in the beginning (then *IHRSA*, and now,

*HFA*). 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 as *IHRSA Executive Director* after John retired and Joe did a fine job for *IHRSA*.

Last, but for sure, not least, I also want to **HEAP A HUGE AMOUNT OF PRAISE and MY VERY SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION on JUSTIN CATES**, my fine Son and Partner in *Club Insider*. For 20+ years, Justin has done a truly great job every week and every month with our *Club Insider WEEKLY* and our *Club Insider MONTHLY* Editions. **GOOD ON YOU, JUSTIN CATES!** And, **JUSTIN, THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR HARD WORK on Club Insider and ALL you do for our industry worldwide!**

And, last, but certainly not least, I want to recognize and acknowledge **MS. ELIZABETH CLARK**, *HFA's* highly esteemed and hardworking *President and CEO* since mid-2021. *LIZ* is doing a great job for the Association, and I want to thank *Liz* for ALL of her efforts!

Folks, I thought it was important for me to write this special Norm's Note recognizing, acknowledging and praising  
(See *Norm's Notes* Page 8)

# Developing Tomorrow's Leaders, Today: Inside the REX Leadership Academy

By: **REX Roundtables**

At a time when the fitness industry is evolving faster than ever, one thing remains true: the strength of a club lies in the strength of its people. That's the driving force behind the *REX Leadership Academy*, the one-of-a-kind program created to turn great managers into exceptional leaders.

The 2025 REX Leadership Academy brought together high-potential team members from clubs and studios across North America for a transformative, three-day experience filled with practical learning, leadership development and personal growth. Designed specifically for rising stars in the fitness business, the Academy equips attendees with tools to take greater ownership in their roles, contribute at a higher level, and eventually lead teams or facilities of their own.

## Not Just Training... Transformation

Led by veteran club owners, expert facilitators, and REX Roundtables Chairs, the Academy goes beyond traditional training. Sessions were facilitated by an all-star cast of REX leaders including **Eddie Tock**, **Brent Darden**, **Allison Flatley**, **Dan Duran**, **Mary Laudati**, **Justin Tamsett** and **Mark Miller**, each bringing a unique lens on leadership, culture and business strategy.

Attendees also gained insights

from industry experts like **Mark Harrington Jr.** and **Lesley Carr**, who presented on the "Ideal Team Player" framework, and **Danielle Krischik**, who led a standout session on human-centered storytelling. **Frank Lawrence** guided participants through financial fundamentals in a clear, club-specific way, turning what's often an intimidating topic into a practical skillset.

The content spanned a wide range of leadership essentials, including:

- Building a member-focused club culture;
- Financial literacy and key business metrics;
- Coaching and developing a high-performance team;
- Strategic planning ("rifle shots and cannonballs");
- Customer experience design and accountability systems;
- Creating a thriving personal training department.

REX's thoughtful structure and intentional culture also earned praise from **Rick Caro**, *Co-Founder*, with **Norm Cates**, of *IHRSA (now HFA)*, who called the experience: "A great return of the old IHRSA Institute."

He went on to commend the Academy's blend of familiar traditions and fresh energy:

"You created an excellent team of presenters and topics. You brought back

ingredients like the logo swap items and introduced powerful new ones like the fire pit intros. Very impressive."

But, what truly sets the REX Leadership Academy apart is its community-based approach. Participants learn alongside peers from across the country, gaining not only new ideas but also new perspectives and relationships. There's an energy in the room that can't be replicated, and according to attendees, it's a game-changer.

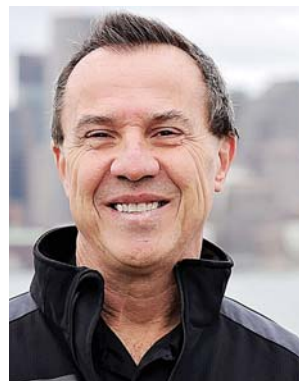
## The Feedback? Overwhelmingly Positive.

Attendees raved about the experience, not just for the content, but for the sense of purpose and clarity they took home with them. Owners and GMs who sent team members have already reported improved initiative, communication and accountability back at the club.

Whether you're preparing someone to step into a leadership role or want to invest in the long-term culture of your team, the REX Leadership Academy delivers.

## Looking Ahead to 2026

As the Academy continues to grow, so does its impact. The 2026



Eddie Tock

REX Leadership Academy is already generating buzz, and many club owners are planning to reserve spots for their next wave of future leaders.

If you're ready to invest in the people who represent your culture every day – the ones who lead the floor, run the playbook, and shape member experience – this is the program to watch.

Want to Learn More or Reserve a Spot? Register today! We expect to sell out! Email us at [joe@rexroundtables.com](mailto:joe@rexroundtables.com) to be the first to hear when 2026 dates and locations are announced.

## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 7

the special people in my life. **THANK YOU ALL!**

■ Here's a good one for y'all! Not long ago, you may have read about 68-year-old college football **COACH BILL BELICHICK**, getting married to a young woman who's only 28 years old! Well, now, this same man has made more news as he has hired his son, **STEVE**, as the *Defensive Coordinator at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill*. He circumvented the *University's Board of Trustees*, signing his son for a \$1.3 million base salary, making him the highest paid Assistant Coach in UNC history! With the addition of Steve Belichick to the Tarheels' coaching staff, UNC is now paying nearly \$12 million in salaries each year for Belichick's handpicked staff!

Folks, as you may know, I went to and played football for the rival *N.C. State Wolfpack*, so I look forward to seeing where this story goes... It's all in good **FUN**.

■ **JUSTIN** and I want to **THANK YOU** for reading *Club Insider*! We appreciate you being with us. And, in particular, **WE VERY SINCERELY APPRECIATE ANY**

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■ 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 32nd 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](mailto:Norm@clubinsideronline.com).)







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## ...Club Marketing

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moment. If you Google "Marketing," you will get a plethora of different definitions. Some are complete; others not so much, but they all vary in clarity. So, instead of providing a precise definition of the word, let's discuss the inherent knowledge we all have about the subject of business:

1. We have a product or service to sell.
2. We need a customer to whom to sell the product or service.

Marketing is essentially the linkage between these two definitive statements. It is the process of making someone aware of a product or service he can buy. Going further, though, successful marketing should not just make someone aware of a product or service he can buy, but it should make him want to buy it. As **Steve Jobs** said in 1998, "A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

The reason marketing is hard to truly define is because it is more than just a process to be followed. Marketing, at its core, is actually infused into the DNA of a product or service. Enter the marketing mix, the *Four Ps of Marketing*:

**Product:** This is what is actually being sold to the customer. It can be a tangible good or an intangible service. In health and fitness club facilities, the primary product is technically an intangible service. However, this can be comprised of numerous components (tangible and intangible) that create the final value proposition for the customer, so the product mix (not to be confused with marketing mix) should be considered. For example: What is included in a membership? Are there membership levels? What add-ons are available? Are tangible products sold in various departments, such as at a café, pro shop, juice bar, spa, etc.?

**Price:** This is the amount the customer must pay for the product. Pricing will affect the product itself, and vice versa. For example: Think about Planet Fitness vs. Equinox and what is offered to the customer. Also, given a price, think about the expectation of the product by the customer. In cases of elastic demand, price will also greatly affect the demographics of the target consumer.

**Place (Distribution):** This is where the customer will actually consume the product. The obvious answer for health and fitness club facilities is that the customer comes to your facility to consume the product inside your four walls. However, is this always the case? What about outreach to the consumer (such as an off-site boot camp) to boost a brand's visibility in a specific community?

**Promotion:** This is the method of

communication to the consumer, and it is what most people think about when they hear the term *Marketing*. Most don't really think about the three Ps already discussed as a part of marketing, though they are equally as important as all three will affect the method of communication and the message being communicated.

In marketing, especially at the academic level, there is always talk of a fifth P. I won't get into the dissenting opinions on this one; however, I do have one additional P to add to this discussion, but it's not to the four Ps. This **P is Perception**, and it is the sum of Product, Price, Place and Promotion. When all four Ps are taken into account, a potential customer will have an opinion of your organization. Simply put, they will have a perception of whether or not your club is for them.

### Traditional Promotional Tools

Now that we have the business school stuff out of the way, let's go more in-depth about the fourth P of marketing: **Promotion**. I am not forgetting about the other three. The assumption for the rest of this article is that the previous three Ps are set. Your organization has a fully developed product, it has a price for that product and distribution of that product (place) is set. Assuming this, the crux then becomes promotion, and that is something that should never be set in stone. It should always change and adapt (technically, the other Ps should always adapt to changing conditions as well because there are always numerous business factors to take into consideration, but that is outside the scope of this article).

Delving into Promotion, we must of course begin with the traditional mediums: television, radio and print. Even with the rise of the Internet, for the foreseeable future, all three will remain relevant and should be part of a promotional mix (promotional mix should not be confused with marketing mix, as it is a subset of Promotion and includes a mix of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and public relations).

One of the key factors that will affect your traditional media buys will be your target audience. Is your organization comprised of one local club, several local clubs or multiple clubs in multiple locations nationally or worldwide? Obviously, if your organization is buying television, radio or print for one local club, your organization will go with local sources for that medium. If your organization has more than one club locally, local sources would still be used, but now, your organization will be able to buy more media in aggregate because those costs can be spread across facilities, providing economies of scale. Finally, if your organization is going national or worldwide, it is an entirely different ballgame given the power of syndication and an exponentially larger audience.

Once this is determined, selecting the right sources then becomes the next task. These selections will be based on their audiences and whether or not they are within the demographics your organization hopes to target. This is where those first three Ps really come into play. They will help determine what those demographics are, and therefore, who those potential customers will be.

Then, of course, comes the process of developing the campaign itself. Within this area, there is the actual development of the message (slogans, taglines, storyboards, jingle lyrics, copy, etc.) and then the development of the content itself (television commercials, radio spots, print ads or offers, etc.). For the most part, there are standard formats and regulations to follow; however, the task can be daunting if they are in addition to daily club duties. To create a great campaign, having a marketing department or outsourcing to an agency can easily be justified. Creating and disseminating inferior media would simply be a waste of money, so the additional expense of a separate department or agency commission is a worthy insurance policy to have in place.

### Modern Promotional Tools

This author understands that many reading this are seasoned veterans, and this process is nothing new. Been there, done that, so let's talk about modern promotion. Namely, let's talk about the Internet and its great power when properly utilized.

Originally, a product of government and academia, the Internet has now come of age, and in doing so, it has quite literally changed the world. For a while, email was the Internet's key capability. Really, communicating by text was the Internet's original goal. Then, came all the websites we now use by habit. Then, of course, came social media. All along, where there are people, there is going to be promotion by business, and that's where we will begin the real meat of this article.

### Gain and Retain

What follows will be a synopsis of several of the major Internet tools your organization should now be using (at a minimum) to utilize the power of the Internet. Where pertinent, the tool described will then be further broken down into ideas and strategies to *Gain* and *Retain* members. New members have always been a club organization's lifeblood, but the old thought that your best customer is your current customer still holds true; even more so when competition is tight or the economy is weak.

### Club Website

Everyone knows what a website is, and your organization should absolutely have one by now. If it does not, make

this a top priority because it is simply a necessity in the modern business world. On your website, there should be content for members and non-members alike. Many club companies split this content up by asking the website visitor on the home screen if they are a member or not. This is okay, but always consider that this is an extra step between a website user and the information they seek from your company. Online attention spans are at an all-time low, so anything to ease the possibility of a bounce (i.e. click away) is worthy of consideration.

**Gain Members:** One of the tried and true methods of gaining potential members via your organization's website is by utilizing a system to issue Free Trial passes to those who sign up. The key here is to keep it simple! When developing the form for the potential customer to fill out, ask for two pieces of information: Name and Email Address. *That is it.* There is an indirect correlation between the number of fields a website visitors must fill out in a form and the completion rate of that form. More fields, less completions; it's really as simple as that.

So, what happens with the information the potential member submitted? It goes into a database and they are *automatically* sent an email thanking them for their interest in the club, and the email provides them with the pass to print out and bring into the club (an electronic pass sent to their smartphone can also be used). When they come into the club with the pass, you now have a hot lead to take through your general sales process, but that process should not inundate them because all they really want to do is try out the facility. It is acceptable to keep a dialogue running with them as they progress through their trial and after the trial, should they choose not to join at that time. You want to walk with them through the buying process, not push them.

**Retain Members:** A current member will revisit your website for several reasons. He may want to double-check your club's hours, he may want to download this month's group exercise schedule, or he may want to know more about your staff, etc. These are all things that are expected and can be anticipated. However, if provided with something of value he does not expect, he may have new reasons to continue returning to your website, and hopefully, your facility. These could be things such as *basic* workout plans developed by your personal training staff (this will not cannibalize your PT revenue but can enhance retention), diet plans and recipes, forums for members to talk to and support each other, member success stories, non-commercial messages from the owner or general manager, or a blog with all the above and some, etc. This is only limited by creative imagination.

(See *Club Marketing* Page 12)



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## ...Club Marketing

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### Email Blasts

Email blasts can be used to disseminate information to members and non-members. Very importantly, though, make sure you have their permission to email them. This is done by disclosure when signing up on your website or on a new member contract. If you do not know how to design an email, which is a pain from a technical perspective because of varying standards in that realm, there are plenty of templates to choose from with the two companies I recommend for your mass email needs. Those companies are *Constant Contact* ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)) and *MailChimp* ([www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)). One of the key factors in having an email opened and read is having it sent through a reputable third-party company, such as those mentioned. And, of course, you must have pertinent content to share. If you would like to have an email template more customized to your club's website branding, which I highly recommend because of consistency across mediums, talk to your web developer and see if you can add this to the service they provide. If they cannot assist you here, it may be time to look elsewhere for your web development needs because this is a basic task for a professional web developer or firm. (UPDATE: Since the original version of this article, SMS capability has been added into the services listed above. Add this to your eblast schedule for anyone you have a phone number for.)

**Gain Members:** In the previous Club Website section, a system to deliver Free Trial passes to potential members was discussed, but for non-members, it does not have to be limited to just that. Since these leads are now in your system, and have given you permission to email them, they may be receptive to pertinent content. This does not mean to barrage them with emails that read like an ad to come back into the club to be sold. However, periodic, personally written check-up emails from a new member advocate (i.e. salesperson) are acceptable. So too are inspirational pieces that can help a potential member through the buying process. Some people who sign up simply may not be ready to buy, but when they are, you want your club to be top-of-mind, right? Well, being knowledgeable and showing you care about them, even as a non-member, will go a long way toward accomplishing this.

**Retain Members:** As just discussed, having your club remain top-of-mind to current members is important. Sure, you will have the typical email blasts to advertise club events or new programs, announce schedule changes, etc. But, providing content that is more personally useful is even more critical to accomplishing the goal

of staying top-of-mind. Guess what, that content already exists or is being produced regularly... On your website! So, you can also email it. Or, with help from your web developer, you can mix the two and allow the member to select what information he would like to receive by email to keep connected to your club.

One of the keys with both the website and email blasts is the *Google strategy*. Start with a minimum viable product (MVP) and constantly add to it. So, for example, if you are starting from scratch, make sure a simple, but useful and usable, website is in place. Then, implement the Free Trial email system. After those two key tasks are accomplished, add to it from there. It should be a constant process. Analyze, modify and evolve.

### Facebook



First, there were websites.

Then came more personal and easily updatable websites able to be followed by other web users. These were called blogs. Then, entered micro-blogs, which is what *Facebook* is, and it is the king of the mountain. You likely have a personal Facebook account. This is different than a business page. If your club does not yet have a business page, it is very easy to get one. Go to [www.facebook.com/pages/create](http://www.facebook.com/pages/create), and it is very intuitive from there. If you are logged into your personal Facebook account, that account will be tied to the business page you create. If you are not logged into, or do not have, a personal Facebook account, you can still create a page for your business. Once you have created a page for your business and you have some followers, you want to procure a username for the page so that is easy to access. To do this, go to [www.facebook.com/username](http://www.facebook.com/username). A great place to start when searching for available usernames is to use the prefix of your website address. So, if your website address is [xyzclub.com](http://xyzclub.com), search for [xyzclub](http://xyzclub.com) as the username. If it is available, get it! Later, I will discuss why this is very important.

**Gain Members:** Business pages on Facebook are public to the world, meaning, even if someone does not have a Facebook account or is not logged in, they can still see the content your business page is

posting. This means that members and non-members will see what your business posts, should they decide to look. That being said, a member of your club is more likely to follow your club on Facebook, so the content should be more tailored to him. There are still opportunities to gain club members via Facebook, though, and that is through the use of referrals. When a club member follows your page, they are essentially giving your page permission to have your content appear in their News Feed (not all content will appear because of Facebook's business model). This is very similar to opting in for regular email blasts. So, carrying this further, club members who follow your page are also Facebook friends with non-members. Bingo; it came to you before you read the next sentence. Periodically, target your club member Facebook followers with some sort of referral offer. The details will depend on how your club handles referrals, but the idea itself is what is important here. This can all be done through a plethora of advertising products/formats that Facebook offers.

**Retain Members:** To have posted content read by club members, you first need club members to follow your Facebook page. Before they can do that, they must be told your club has a Facebook page. So, first and foremost, make sure there is a Facebook button on your website. Or, you can even embed your Facebook page's feed into your website using widgets Facebook provides (talk to your web developer about this one). Then, of course, add it to your traditional marketing mediums. Don't just add the Facebook logo. Provide the full address to your business page, something like [www.facebook.com/xyzclub](http://www.facebook.com/xyzclub). Okay, so your club members know you have a Facebook page; why should they follow it? Remember the content you provide on your website and through email blasts? Well, this content is prime for Facebook posting! You should now be seeing a pattern here, and why a good website is so crucial to your club. Next, to ensure some following occurs, sweeten the deal and offer something to your club members as an incentive to follow your club's page. Maybe it's a free sandwich in the café, a free smoothie at the snack bar, or even a free, and limited, small group personal training session with other Facebook followers so they can interact. Once again, the details are up to your club, but the idea is what is important, and especially, the *why* behind it. The goal is to stay on top of the member's mind. **Website:** Check. **Email:** Check. **Facebook:** Check. You are now even more in the club member's daily consciousness.

### X (formerly Twitter)

A few years after Facebook came out and took over the Internet, *Twitter* (now *X*) offered something different. The key to Twitter's differentiation was simplicity. A user of Twitter had 140 characters to create

a message to share with the network. That small quantity of characters forces concise, albeit not always coherent, thought. Twitter has since become more complex with the addition of photos and video, but it is still much simpler to use than Facebook. If you do not already have a X account for your club, you can go to [www.x.com](http://www.x.com) to sign up. (UPDATE: The character limit for X posts is now 280, and premium users can post up to 25,000 characters.)

**Note:** If the identical username you use for Facebook is available for X, get it. Your goal should be to have the same username across all services: Website, Facebook, X, YouTube, Tik Tok, etc. Everything you use. For example, if your website address is [www.xyzclub.com](http://www.xyzclub.com), your goal should be to have:

[www.facebook.com/xyzclub](http://www.facebook.com/xyzclub),  
[www.x.com/xyzclub](http://www.x.com/xyzclub),  
[www.youtube.com/xyzclub](http://www.youtube.com/xyzclub), etc.

When this is accomplished, only one username must be remembered by a potential visitor to any of your pages or services. If they can remember [xyzclub.com](http://xyzclub.com), they can find you on any of the social networks. Don't take my word for it, though. Search for a large company across the different social networks without using Google, and you will see the same pattern.

For the **Gain Members** and **Retain Members** sections of this tool, I actually refer you to what was written for Facebook. Many of the same things apply here; however, there are two options for the actual posting of content to X. Facebook actually allows you to connect an X account to your business page, so whatever you post to Facebook is posted to X automatically. When time or technicality is limited, this is a good option, as you are guaranteed that the post will take place. However, many organizations do craft specific content for X because there are some differences in the X user base and how content is displayed. There are pros and cons to both strategies, but the key takeaway here is that your club should use both Facebook and X, and they should be used accordingly to gain and retain members.

(See *Club Marketing* Page 13)





## ...Club Marketing

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YouTube, Instagram, and now, Tik Tok



Once again, the ongoing theme continues. If your club does not yet have a *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Tik Tok* or all three, sign up. When you sign up, if the username you use for your Facebook and X is available, get it.

**Gain Members:** The primary use of video and photo services to potentially gain members is to provide some sort of video tour of your facility. This should then be embedded on your club's website using the embed codes that these services provide (your web developer will come to the rescue again). Member testimonials are always a tried and true content feature, as would be a Thank You videos from the Club Manager or Department Heads thanking a potential member for signing up for a free trial. A link to this could be embedded in the Free Trial email that is automatically sent upon signup.

**Retain Members:** Where the written form of things such as workout plans, recipes and other content described in the Club Website section might not be read, videos can go a long way in helping that content be consumed. For example: Personal trainers could provide videos of proper exercise techniques, recipes could be cooked on video (think Food Network here), etc. The possibilities are endless, and once again, only limited by creative imagination.

**Note:** One thing that must be mentioned is production value. Though your videos won't be Hollywood productions, reasonable time and effort needs to be put in to ensure that the product is presentable. If it views like a wobbly home video with bad lighting and sound, it's better not to publicize it.

**UPDATE:** As has been seen since the original version of this article, the true value in video now is guests and members of clubs sharing their experiences there! Whether it is video or live streams of their workouts, viral movements that are duplicated in the gym, etc., make sure the ingredients for good videos and photos are

there. Good lighting, maybe even a social media wall with full club branding! It will get used.

### Google Plus and Pinterest

*This section has been removed.*

### LinkedIn

I will mention *LinkedIn* briefly because it is more of a backend business service and not business-to-consumer. Like Facebook, LinkedIn has company page capability, so your club should create one and enable employees to add your company to their LinkedIn Profiles (remember to be consistent with your username if it's available). Don't make it a requirement for employees, as it is more of an enhancer for an employee should he choose to include it on his profile. It is also good for employee search. This is also important for consistency and completeness. If a potential or current member does happen to come across your company page on LinkedIn, it will just be one more avenue where he will be impressed at your company's thoroughness and professionalism.



### Tying it All Together

There has been a lot covered in this article, but believe it or not, the list of tools discussed is not exhaustive, as many other tools were not covered. In fact, it would be better to think of this list as a minimum for your organization. If these tools have not been implemented, your organization is behind. But, luckily, playing catch-up is not difficult because these tools are so easy to use, and they are *free*. The only resources required are time and creativity. Yes, paid options (such as ads, featured posts, etc.) do exist for most of these tools but those were not discussed in this article. They are worth research on your own, though, because they are very affordable and can provide measurable results.

Let me close with this. The modern promotional tools discussed *are not* a replacement for the traditional promotional tools club businesses have always used. Think of this time in technology as a melding of two eras. All these tools must be used in concert with all the others to create optimum results. The job is never done.

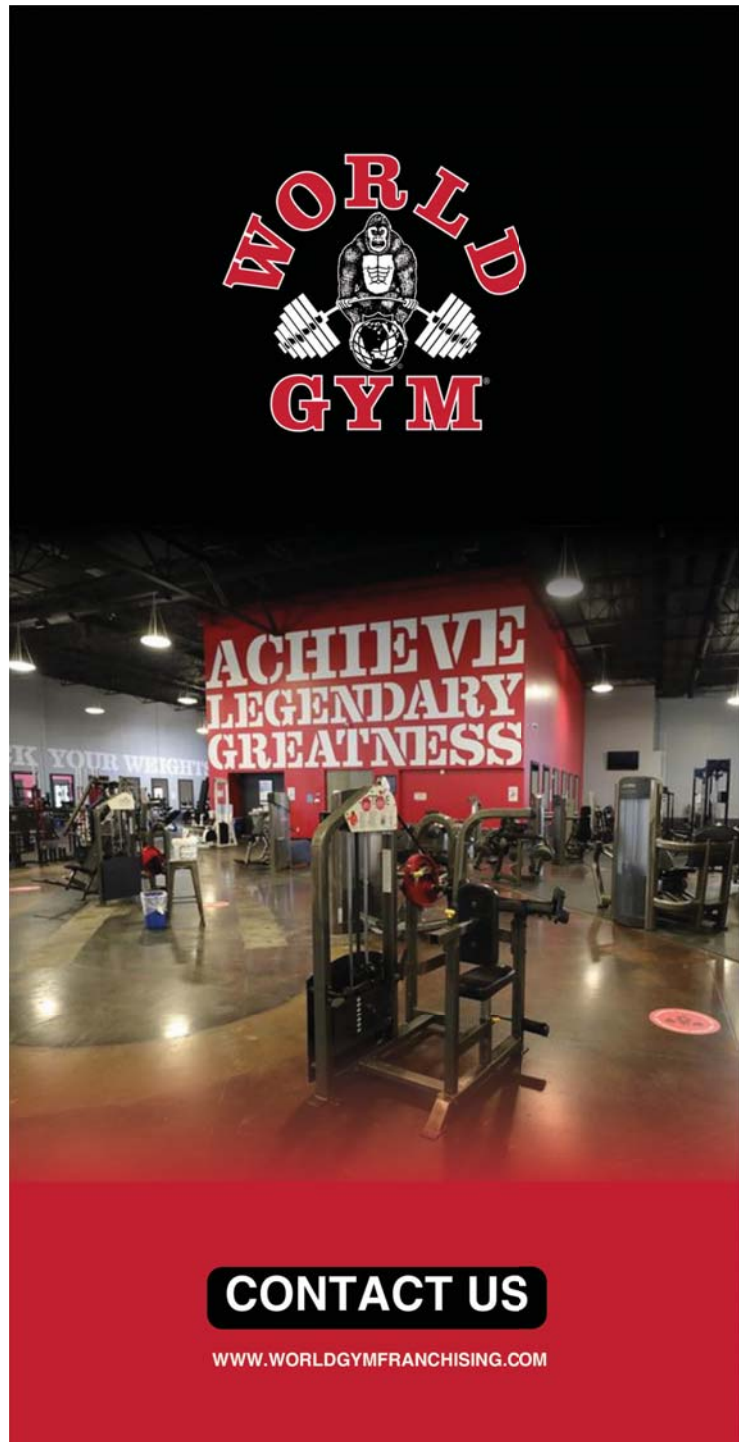
Analyze, modify and evolve.



Thank you for your time reading this article, which was a labor of love. Marketing is one of my favorite subjects, so it was a great honor to be tasked with this article's authorship. I hope it helps your club organization further succeed in the future.

*(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 40 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.)*



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# Beyond Bright Lights: The Allure of the Darker Gym Trend

By: **Bruce Carter**

Health club interiors have come a long way, from basic, utilitarian rooms filled with equipment to immersive, experience-driven environments. One of the most notable recent shifts is the rise of dark gym design: fitness spaces with moody, atmospheric lighting and dramatic visual elements.

This trend often accompanies the growing popularity of free weights and "power" zones, positioning these spaces as more motivating, liberating and immersive than traditional, brightly lit gyms. Visually, the dark gym aesthetic is defined by blacked-out interiors, dimmable LED lighting, neon lighting and nightclub-style audio-visual effects. The goal is to create a high-energy, theatrical atmosphere that particularly appeals to *Millennials* and *Gen Z* (ages 18 - 45).

A major driver of this trend is social media. Influencer culture thrives on bold, photogenic backdrops and the dark gym delivers exactly that... spaces that look impressive both in person and online.

## Why Darkness Appeals

Many members say darker gyms help reduce self-consciousness, spark creativity and create a sense of freedom. The dim lighting can make workouts feel less intimidating and more enjoyable, while the music and lighting effects add an element of entertainment.

There's also a social element. As more gyms position themselves as "third places" (social hubs beyond home and work), the nightclub vibe provides a lively, shared experience, something many people craved after the isolation of the pandemic years.

## Core Design Features

The dark gym aesthetic centers on a few key elements:

**1. Color Scheme** - Black is usually dominant, covering walls, ceilings, and often, floors. Other deep colors can be incorporated but typically serve as accents to the main black backdrop.

**2. Lighting** - Low ambient lighting increases contrast. RGBW (red, green, blue, white) lighting is popular, often used in spotlights, theatrical fixtures or LED strips for drama and focus. Neon signs with motivational words or imagery are common focal points.

**3. Music and Sound** - Club-level volume and high-energy playlists reintroduce

ambient music as a major part of the gym environment, countering the trend toward personal earbuds.

**4. Technology Integration** - Large digital displays show branded content, dynamic nature scenes or exercise guidance, enhancing the immersive quality.

While some gyms adopt the look throughout their entire space, others apply it selectively, such as in group class studios or specialty workout areas.

## Psychological Benefits and Drawbacks

The dark gym isn't just about aesthetics; research suggests darker environments can reduce self-consciousness by obscuring mirrors and lowering visibility. Such environments also enhance focus and motivation through sensory immersion while also encouraging social interaction by creating a shared, club-like energy.

However, the effect isn't universally loved. Some find these environments overwhelming, unwelcoming, or even disorienting, especially during quieter hours. Keep in mind, this trend is primarily geared to 18 - 45-year-old members and older demographics, or those preferring open, well-lit spaces may not connect with the vibe.

From a market penetration point of view, it is important to note, if you are in a small-population market, there may not be enough people in that age group to support such a dark design environment.

## Balancing Atmosphere and Accessibility

For many clubs, the best approach is blending interior environment styles. Clubs can use dark, moody "zones" for high-energy classes alongside brighter, naturally lit areas for general workouts. In addition, combining dark elements with natural wood, pops of color, green walls, or large graphics can add variety and "warmth" to spaces.

It is recommended to invest in flexible lighting systems that can shift from dark to brighter at different times of day. This also allows for a change in the color of the lighting. For example, a group exercise room can provide soft blue lighting for yoga and brighter red and white lighting for energy classes such as boot camp or Zumba. Often, when a club has windows, either to the outdoors or to other spaces in the club, adding blackout shades can provide flexibility and the desired lighting effects for a variety of classes and member appreciation. This versatility helps appeal

to a broader membership base and ensures the space can evolve with future trends.

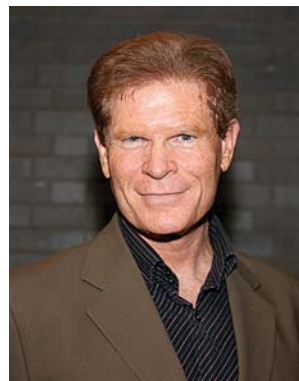
## Longevity of the Trend

The fitness industry is highly dynamic, with trends often evolving in response to shifting consumer preferences, technological advances and broader cultural movements. The dark gym look is especially strong in urban, boutique fitness environments and is likely to remain popular in the near term. Its staying power comes from its resonance with younger audiences and amplification through influencer culture.

That said, design alone is not a long-term differentiator. For the concept to last, clubs need to pair the dark aesthetic with distinctive programming, community-building strategies and personalized experiences. If too many facilities offer the same look without innovation, the style risks becoming commoditized... and eventually fading.

## In Summary

The dark gym trend is more than an aesthetic; it's part of a larger shift toward experiential fitness environments that blend exercise, entertainment and social connection. While it resonates strongly with certain demographics, it's not a one-size-



Bruce Carter

fits-all solution. Keep in mind, many people prefer a lighter environment, so obviously, there is room for a wide variety of club environments in any marketplace. The key is to understand that club environments can make a substantial difference in the success of any type of club catering to any type of market. The most successful clubs will be those that adapt the look to their market, offer variety and design spaces that can flex between moods and uses.

(Bruce Carter is the owner of Optimal Design Systems, International. Bruce can be reached at [bruce@optimaldsi.com](mailto:bruce@optimaldsi.com).)

# Club Insider Seeks Contributing Authors

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## Recovery Trends Outpacing Fitness in Today's Club Industry

By: **Nancy Trent**

For years, the health club industry focused on "no pain, no gain" with intense workouts and ever-evolving equipment to push the body further. But, in 2025, recovery is redefining what it means to be fit, and clubs, retailers and brands are racing to meet the demand. From magnesium lotions to adaptive rollers, recovery tools are fast outpacing traditional fitness gear in consumer buzz, sales growth and club integration.

### The Rise of Recovery Culture

Recovery has become the secret weapon for improved performance, injury prevention, and overall, wellbeing. Where post-workout recovery once meant a quick stretch, now it's an entire product and service ecosystem addressing inflammation, muscle tightness, nerve discomfort and mental stress.

According to industry analysts, clubs are increasingly dedicating entire zones to stretching, mobility, percussion therapy, cold plunges and massage chairs... because recovery tools aren't an accessory to workouts anymore; they ARE the workout.

### Magnesium Lotion Goes Mainstream

One of the most striking examples is *Epsom-It's Concentrated Magnesium Lotions*, which keeps going viral on TikTok for their fast-absorbing, non-greasy relief for muscles and nerves. These lotions transform the centuries-old concept of Epsom Salt baths into quick, targeted recovery solutions that fit today's busy lifestyles.

Chosen by Walmart to headline its new analgesics aisles nationwide, Epsom-It products are positioning magnesium as the next must-have ingredient in recovery. Customers rave about reduced swelling and pain relief for legs, feet, backs and shoulders after long days or strenuous workouts. With formulas containing up to 25% Magnesium Sulfate along with Arnica, Capsaicin and Aloe Vera, Epsom-It is replacing traditional menthol-based creams with a natural alternative that calms without the overpowering scent or residue.

### Rolling Out Advanced Myofascial Release with GoFit's Revolve Roller

Another innovation underscoring recovery's dominance is *GoFit's Revolve Roller*, a patent-pending foam roller with

nine interchangeable massage rings for completely customized myofascial release. It took center stage at *Tony Horton's Paragon Experience* this spring, where trainer Steve Holmsen led immersive clinics on how the Revolve Roller's targeted pressure promotes mobility, prevents injuries and accelerates muscle recovery post-workout.

Unlike traditional foam rollers, the Revolve Roller allows athletes to tailor their massage intensity and configuration to their specific needs, making it an ideal tool for clubs, trainers and home users who demand precision recovery solutions. Its portability and intuitive design support the growing consumer desire for effective recovery anywhere, anytime.

### Pelvic Recovery: The Hidden Key to Strength and Wellbeing

Another innovative recovery technology making its way into gyms is *PelviX*, a Functional Magnetic Stimulation (FMS) system designed to strengthen the pelvic floor and surrounding core muscles for a vital yet often overlooked part of health and performance. As more people spend long hours sitting and experience chronic stress, pelvic health issues such



Nancy Trent

as poor posture, lower back pain, reduced stability and even urinary incontinence are becoming increasingly common among both men and women.

*PelviX* delivers up to 25,000 muscle contractions in a 22-minute session while users remain fully clothed and seated, making it the easiest way to restore pelvic and core function without strain. By enhancing balance, stability and deep muscle activation, (See **Nancy Trent** Page 16)

# Look in the Mirror:

## A Leadership Wake-Up Call on Hiring Accountability

By: Herb Lipsman

Be honest. We have all heard the complaints: *"This employee is a nightmare. They are dragging the team down. They cannot get the job done. They have a bad attitude. They keep making the same mistakes..."* And, yet, here's the uncomfortable truth:

- Weren't you the one who recruited this person?
- Weren't you the one who hired them?
- Weren't you the one who onboarded and trained them?
- Weren't you the one who provided them the tools to successfully achieve their goals and objectives?
- Weren't you the one responsible for coaching them and making corrections?

### So, who exactly is accountable here?

After more than 40 years leading thousands of employees in the club and hospitality space, I am still amazed how often managers distance themselves from responsibility when a hire goes south. Even more surprising? Many of them once enthusiastically pushed for that same person to join the team.

Bad hires happen, but recurring hiring failures often point to one common problem, a lack of leadership ownership. If you are serious about building a high-performing team, it is time to stop blaming and start leading. Here is a practical recipe for dramatically improving your hiring batting average:

**Adopt an Ownership Mindset:** Assume full accountability for every person hired under your watch, whether directly or

through your direct reports. No exceptions. Culture flows from the top.

**Clarify What Matters Most:** Define the critical success factors for the role, skills, goals, values and culture fit. Create a job description that communicates not just tasks, but expectations, behaviors and boundaries for success.

**Build a Multi-Step Selection Process:** Do not rush. Use structured methods to assess technical skills and cultural alignment. Include multiple interviews, diverse perspectives, and where possible, trial work or assessments. Surround yourself with people who will challenge your perspective, not echo it.

**Ask Better Questions:** Ditch the check-the-box interviews. Use open-ended questions that reveal how a candidate sees the world. Pay close attention to how they communicate, their authenticity and what motivates them.

**Deliver a World-Class Onboarding Experience:** Onboarding sets the tone. Don't dump a new hire into chaos and expect greatness. Set them up for success from day one with clarity, support and cultural immersion.

**Create a Win-Win Agreement:** Collaboratively establish clear, achievable objectives. Ask the new hire to summarize these in a one-page agreement, including the tools and support they'll need. This builds ownership, alignment and early accountability.

**Maintain Regular, Intentional Check-Ins:** Set a cadence for brief but meaningful

progress reviews. Be available. Early course corrections are far more effective than emergency interventions.

**Lead with Radical Candor:** Create a culture where honest, respectful dialogue is encouraged. Address issues early, directly and with care. The goal is growth, not blame.

**Manage By Wandering Around (MBWA):** Get out of your office. Observe your team in action. Ask questions. Offer encouragement publicly. Provide coaching privately. Understand what is really going on before you are blindsided.

**Be Present and Approachable:** Make time daily for informal conversations with your team and their teams. These touchpoints foster trust, reveal obstacles and invite feedback on how your leadership is truly landing.

**And here is the final, most difficult step:** If someone is not working out, even after your best efforts, it's time to act. Find them a better seat if one exists. If not, help them exit with dignity and respect. Keeping a poor performer too long hurts everyone.

■ ■ ■

Leaders don't get to shrug off bad hires. Our job is to attract, develop and support great people, as well as to intervene decisively when that is not happening. So, the next time you are tempted to complain about someone on your team, do yourself a favor. Start by looking in the mirror.

For more recommendations like this, order *Caring (The Sequel): Valuable Insights into Effective Club and*



Herb Lipsman

*Hospitality Management.* Send orders to [herbnlipsman@gmail.com](mailto:herbnlipsman@gmail.com).

(Herb Lipsman is a veteran of the club industry, having managed some of the most prestigious athletic clubs and golf/country clubs in the Houston, Texas market over the past 30 years, most notably The Houstonian Hotel, Club and Spa. Lipsman has served on the Board of Directors for IHRSA. He was appointed by Mayor Bill White to serve as Chairman of the Mayor's Wellness Council for the City of Houston. Lipsman has also been invited to speak at numerous industry conferences and conventions around the world, including the U.S., UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, Russia and Mexico. Most recently, Lipsman authored and published his book, *Caring (The Sequel): Valuable Insights into Effective Club and Hospitality Management*. Learn more about Herb and order his book at [bit.ly/herb-lipsman-caring](http://bit.ly/herb-lipsman-caring).)

## ...Nancy Trent

continued from page 15

PelviX supports recovery, improves athletic performance and reduces injury risk. For gyms, integrating PelviX creates a premium recovery and wellness offering that appeals to anyone looking to feel stronger, move better and build confidence from the inside out, while also creating a lucrative new profit center through session packages and memberships.

### Body Glide: Performance Protection That Supports Recovery

Another aspect of recovery gaining traction is skin protection, preventing irritation before it compromises workouts or daily movement. *Body Glide Original*

*Anti-Chafe Balm*, recently awarded *Best Overall Anti-Chafe Stick* by *Men's Journal*, is a staple for athletes, hikers and anyone active. Its plant-based formula creates an invisible barrier that prevents friction-induced damage, meaning faster recovery from long runs, treks or gym sessions. This reflects a broader trend: products that enable comfortable movement and reduce downtime are as essential to fitness success as the workouts themselves.

### Recovery Tech Bringing Gym-Level Solutions Home

Recovery isn't just staying in the gym anymore. Advanced wellness systems from *LifeTrend* by SCS are bringing professional-grade recovery experiences into people's homes, bridging the gap

between club-level services and daily routines. Their near zero EMF saunas provide detoxification and relaxation, while the *LifeTrend Dual Core* premium massage chairs deliver customizable muscle therapy usually reserved for high-end spas. The multi-function cold plunge and hot soak tubs offer effective contrast therapy without the logistical challenges of commercial setups.

These innovative products fit modern lifestyles, offering recovery tools once exclusive to elite training facilities to anyone seeking faster muscle repair, pain relief and overall wellbeing, without leaving their living room.

### Recovery Becomes the Main Event

Recovery is no longer what

happens after fitness. It's a proactive strategy to feel better, perform better and age better. From magnesium lotions relieving nerve discomfort, to adaptive rollers targeting muscle fascia with precision and skin protection balms preventing friction damage, today's fitness culture prioritizes products and practices that make working out sustainable.

Clubs and consumers alike are recognizing that recovery is no longer a supporting act but the headliner of modern fitness.

(Nancy Trent is the Founder and President of Trent & Company, a leading wellness PR firm. Learn more at [www.trentandcompany.com](http://www.trentandcompany.com) or contact Nancy at [nancy@trentandcompany.com](mailto:nancy@trentandcompany.com).)





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## A Three-Question Interview with ChatGPT

**By: Jeffrey Pinkerton**

The other day, I had the chance to sit down (create a free account) with ChatGPT. The topic of exercise, group fitness, habit building, exercise adherence – and, as fate would have it, writing this article – came up. What follows is a shockingly accurate and in-brand discussion of the benefits of group exercise, the power of community and connection, and proof that the challenge of getting more people moving at your facility has more to do with inspiration and motivation, versus education and information. In other words, it's not just what you know, it's what you do with that information.

**Jeffrey Pinkerton (JP)** - Why is group fitness a great way to stay motivated to work out?

**ChatGPT (CB)** - Group fitness is a motivation booster because it blends **accountability, social connection and energy** into every workout. Here's why it works so well:

**1. Built-in Accountability** - When people

expect to see you in class, you're more likely to show up. It's harder to skip when others notice your absence.

**2. Community and Camaraderie** - You're not just working out; you're sharing the effort, struggles and wins with others. This sense of belonging can make exercise something you look forward to.

**3. Instructor Guidance** - A skilled instructor keeps the pace up, encourages proper form and motivates you to push a little harder than you would alone.

**4. Energy and Atmosphere** - Music, synchronized movements and the buzz of the group create a high-energy environment that's tough to replicate in solo workouts.

**5. Structure and Variety** - Classes are pre-planned, so you don't have to think about what to do next. Plus, the variety keeps things fresh, preventing boredom.

**6. Positive Peer Pressure** - Seeing others give their best effort inspires you to do the same, without feeling competitive in a

negative way.

It's a mix of **emotional connection, external motivation and fun**, which makes consistency far easier than going it alone.

**JP** - Why would someone choose group fitness over the treadmill?

**CB** - If you want your workouts to feel less like a chore and more like an event, group fitness is your ticket. In a class, you're surrounded by music, energy and people who inspire you to push just a little harder. You get expert guidance, fresh routines every time and the motivation that comes from moving together. On a treadmill, it's easy to zone out, or worse, give up early. In group fitness, the minutes fly by, you feel connected, and you leave with a smile and a sweat. This isn't just exercise; it's an experience you'll actually look forward to.

**JP** - Should health clubs invest in group exercise?

**CB** - Absolutely, for most health clubs, **investing in group exercise is one of the smartest ways to drive member**



Jeffrey Pinkerton

**engagement, retention and referrals.** Here's why it pays off:

**1. Retention Powerhouse** - Members who participate in group fitness come more often and stay longer. Industry data consistently shows they have *double* the retention rate of those who only use the gym floor.

(See Jeffrey Pinkerton Page 18)

## ...Jeffrey Pinkerton

continued from page 17

### 2. Differentiation in a Competitive Market

- Any club can buy treadmills. Not every club can offer high-energy, instructor-led classes that create a true community.

### 3. Built-in Marketing

- Group classes generate word-of-mouth and social media buzz. Members bring friends, post about their workouts and create organic promotion.

### 4. Value Perception

- Even if members join for the equipment, seeing a robust group program makes them feel they're getting more for their money.

### 5. Community Anchor

- Classes foster friendships, loyalty and a sense of belonging, things that are hard to replicate in a solo workout environment.

### 6. Scalable Across Demographics

- With the right programming, you can serve everyone from active older adults to hardcore athletes to total beginners.

**Bottom Line:** Group exercise isn't just an amenity; it's a **strategic retention and**

**revenue tool** that strengthens your brand and keeps members engaged.

■ ■ ■

I continued to ask more questions, around the benefits of working out in groups, MOSSA programs, *who is Jeffrey Pinkerton* (ha!), and others. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised at how easily ChatGPT formulated the value and benefits of group exercise. Maybe most owners and operators know. And, maybe, the knowing isn't the hard part!

After all, most people know they should exercise. They know it can help improve their physical health, their mental health and even their brain health. They have the information, but they are missing the motivation. Maybe they've tried in the past and failed. Maybe there are just too many options and choices to be made. And, maybe they're just overwhelmed with where to start.

Similarly, most owners and operators like you know they should invest more in group exercise. They know it can improve customer acquisition, retention and even their community reputation. Maybe you have the information, but you're missing the motivation. Maybe you've tried



# ChatGPT

■ ■ ■

in the past and failed. Maybe there are just too many options and choices to be made. And, maybe, you're just overwhelmed with where to start or restart.

Let us help. You and I know the information, and honestly, I couldn't have said it better myself (Thanks, ChatGPT). But, as I quickly discovered with a one-way computer "conversation," all the information in the world (at our fingertips!) is nothing without people and personal connection.

**My interview question for you is:** Do you offer great, magnetic, consistent, high-quality group fitness? Or, is it time for some upgrades to your programs, your team, your schedule and your group fitness partner? *ChatGPT* says (and I agree) your investments will pay off in member engagement, retention and referrals. And, I'll add this: **A great partner will be with you every step of the way.**

What do you want to know? Are you overwhelmed with where to start? Let's have a real, two-person conversation if you're ready to put information into action, to invest at least time and real dollars into group fitness, to transform your facility, your retention rates and connections among members and staff. Start (or restart) by sending me a quick email at [jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net](mailto:jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net).

(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](mailto:jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net).)

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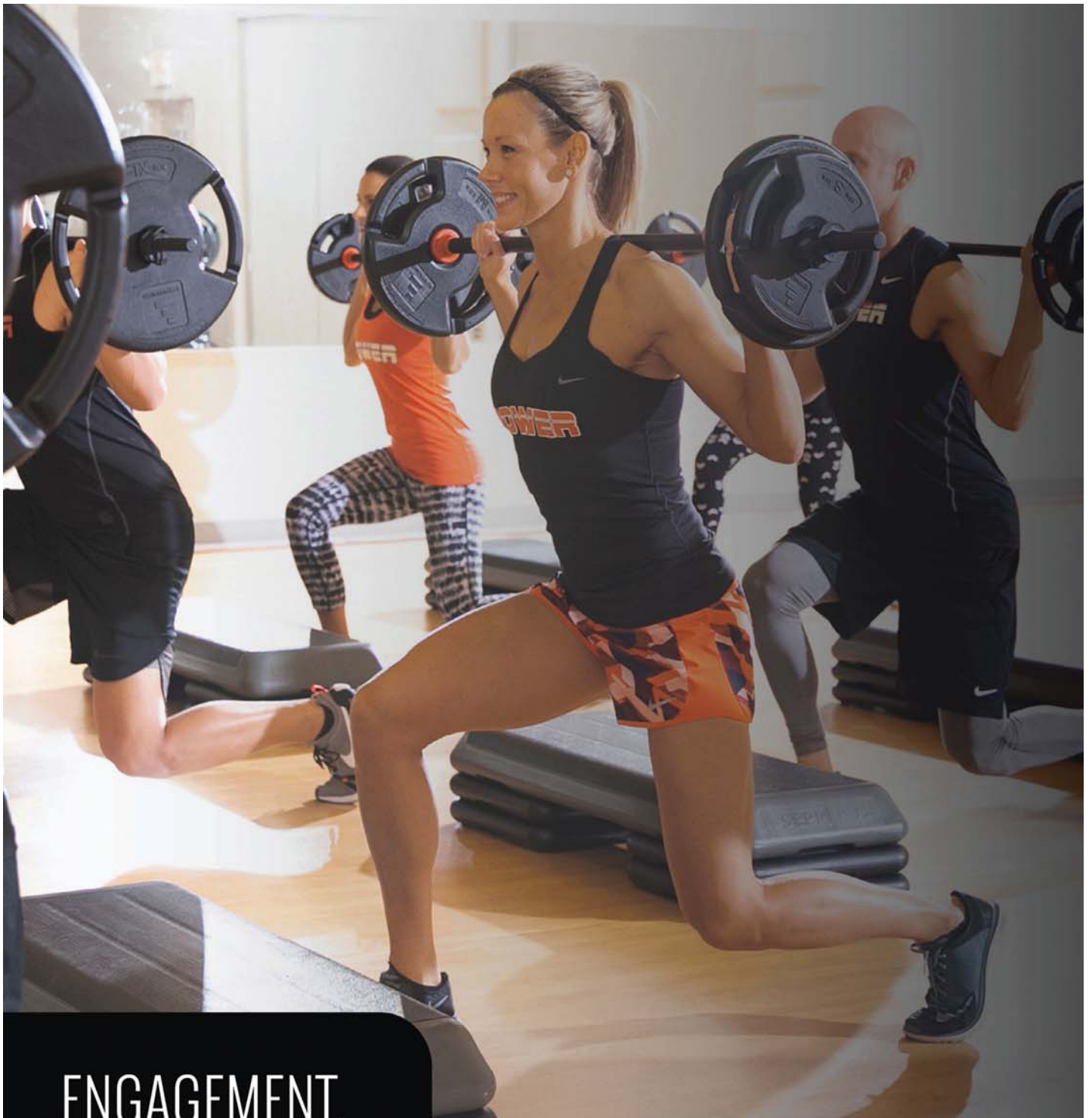


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