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THE BUSINESS OF PERSONAL TRAINING

*Why Working On Your
Business Is Just As
Important As Working
Out Your Clients*

Welcome to our new series - *The Business Of Personal Training*. In each issue Brad Sheppard will present some very candid, honest and sometimes controversial insights into what it takes to actually make it as a personal trainer in Australia. Full of statistics, figures, stories, and opinions, Brad has a no holds barred approach. If you are already a personal trainer, studying to become a personal trainer or even considering becoming a personal trainer, then this series is a must-read for you.

Can I Make a Living as a Personal Trainer?

If we wind back the clock 25 years, the idea of having a personal trainer was almost an elitist luxury for either a corporate high flyer, someone with plenty of disposable income (perhaps a bored “trophy” wife) or as something that only “movie and rock stars did in Hollywood”.

Wow, things sure have changed and personal training has now evolved to become a main stream activity for most people, whether it is a personal one-on-one session or a bootcamp. In addition, personal training has become a highly sought after profession - many fitness enthusiasts get to pursue a career in something that they love and are passionate about, *and* get paid for it – how good is that! And personal trainers get to make a real difference by impacting people’s lives in a positive way.

Australia’s Personal Trainers

In Australia, we currently have (an estimated) 40,000 personal trainers in operation, with more than 25,000 of these personal trainers formally registered with Fitness Australia the governing body of Australia’s fitness industry. An additional 5,000 fitness professionals are registered with Physical Activity Australia. Incredibly, there are up to 15,000 new individuals undertaking study each year to become qualified as personal trainers. The current number of personal trainers within Australia is set to double by the year 2020.

With the popularity of personal training as a career path set to increase, (of course the rates of overweight individuals and obese people are on the rise too) the real question for anyone embarking on their journey to become a personal trainer is...

With Thousands Of Personal Trainers In Australia, Can You Make a Living as a Personal Trainer?

Before we answer this question, let’s look at some stats:

Although there will be an overall 7.2% growth in the number of fitness professionals this year, this includes the fact that 10.4% of them will actually leave the industry. That is **over 4,000** personal trainers dropping out of doing the job they most love and are most passionate about.

If we explore why such passionate people are leaving the industry, the place most people start pointing the finger at is the 187 fitness colleges across Australia that are certifying large numbers of personal trainer graduates each year – they assume they must be doing something wrong. I can’t however agree with this finger pointing because the fitness colleges and Registered Training Organisations (RTO’s) are simply delivering a curriculum that needs to be adhered to for compliance. They are doing there best with the available resources and time that they have.

When I became certified as a fitness professional 20 years ago, it was only a 10 day course. Most of the learning occurred after you had become certified.

Problem Number 1

This is the situation where a personal trainer becomes qualified and embarks on a career in an industry that they love so much, yet after 6 or even 12 months, are unable to build or sustain a steady client base and satisfactory income. This leads to frustration and to them potentially quitting the industry they are so passionate about to go back to a job that they hate.

Therefore some might argue that the attention needs to be focused more towards the fitness businesses that make up the fitness industry, rather than the individual trainers. These businesses employ personal trainers as staff but also enable them to run their own self-employed personal training business from their facilities. But, even so, is there the necessary on the job training and development to further enhance the skills of a newly qualified personal trainer to enable them to become “job ready”?

The short answer is - rarely.

It would be fair to say that fresh graduates still need ongoing training, education and experience. We are dealing with peoples bodies here after all. Full credit goes to those gyms, employers and personal training business owners who have implemented a formal training program to induct and progress a newly certified PT!

Back in the days when I became certified as a fitness professional, there existed a job named the “Gym Instructor”, you will still see this role occasionally, however largely the role of the gym instructor has become

extinct! Instead, we have seen the growth of the self-employed personal trainer.

Problem Number 2

There has been huge growth in the popularity of personal training as a career path, and increasingly larger numbers of individuals becoming qualified fitness professionals. However these newly graduated PT’s have only a minimum level of skill and training and there appears to be a shortage or lack of on the job training and skill development. In addition to this, there are a lack of actual “jobs” for newly qualified PT’s. Really, for most graduating personal trainers, the most appealing option in this scenario is to become self-employed - in fact over 65% of Australia’s personal trainers are just that - self-employed, solo, independent operator’s largely swapping time for money.

Unfortunately for many self-employed personal trainers there is little time swapped and therefore hardly any money coming in!

So what’s the Solution, What Can I Do If I am Considering Becoming a PT?

Well, if you have read some of these statistics, then it would be fair enough to have some concerns. The reality is that currently there are great people exiting the fitness industry because they were unable to earn the income they so desired or expected. There are personal training studios that shut their doors, outdoor bootcamps that cease to exist and personal trainers who drop out of gyms that have thousands of members (potential clients) because they were unable to sustain a client base.

However, for each of these scenarios I have seen plenty of people make the transition to becoming successful personal trainers. I have also witnessed dozens of examples of personal trainers who have been able to achieve a six-figure income within the first 12 months and also those

that go on to create multi-six figure businesses within their first 5 years.

What Separates “Those That Make It” from “Those That Don’t”?

It all boils down to a few simple principles; Your Education Never Stops
Simply becoming certified is only step number one. There are thousands of personal trainers that become qualified, however are not yet competent to train a wide variety of clients, with a wide array of conditions in various settings. Technical skills are essential to becoming a great personal trainer, and your education should never stop. The most successful personal trainers are the ones that invest in ongoing education and raise their level of professionalism and that of the fitness industry.

Technical Training Skills Plus Business Skills

Over 65% of Australia’s personal trainers operate in a self-employed capacity, which means that they are (themselves) business owners. This means that learning the skills on how to run a successful business, how to market yourself and how to sell what you do to people is just as important as becoming a skilled fitness technician.

I always say be both an awesome personal trainer and a great business person at the same time. You could be the most highly skilled personal trainer with more degrees than a thermometer, yet if you don’t know how to market and sell yourself, then you might end up broke!

The Mindset and Ability To “Do Whatever It Takes”

As a newly qualified personal trainer, you could either sit back and complain about the fact that you are possibly under skilled, that there are no available jobs and limited on the job training, and the fact that you don’t have a clue about how to find your first paying client. Alternatively, you could



get on with making it happen with a proactive approach to make yourself a more highly skilled professional and seek to raise the standard of this great industry. Get yourself around people that can guide and assist you, show you the way and take every available opportunity to make the most of your circumstances.

Conclusion

The issues discussed in this article including lack of thorough training at the certification level, limited opportunities for on the job training, less available jobs, self-employed personal trainers who have no business knowledge and the death of the gym instructor role - these are all part of the problem. Collectively, as personal trainers, gym owners, facility managers and educators we all need to play a part in making the employment and career

opportunities in the fitness industry more secure and prosperous for our future generations of personal trainers.

After being a personal trainer now for 18 years, running my own personal training business, building great teams of PT’s, providing employment and training for personal trainers and mentoring and coaching thousands of personal training business owners world-wide on how to run a more successful business, I can honestly say that we are part of an amazing industry and I feel blessed and honoured to be a part of it.

Final Note

If you are considering becoming a personal trainer, then I say “go for it” and follow your dreams by pursuing your passion, however always be open to the learning, growth and challenging that may present themselves to you on your journey to becoming a successful fitness professional.

Invest (and continue to invest) time, energy and money into your professional skill development, business development and personal development and your desired opportunities and income will follow. **UF**

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