

Your Role as Motivator

Personal trainer, group fitness instructor, dance instructor, whatever your title, one problem faced by all of us is keeping our students/clients motivated.

According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE), over 50 percent of those who begin a new fitness program will quit in the first six months. Other studies list the number as higher still. That leaves us as instructors with a dilemma: You can be the best teacher in the world, but if your students don't come to class consistently then you're not going to be of much help to them. Granted, as bellydance instructors you have a distinct advantage over other forms of fitness. Students often take your classes for the joy of the dance itself, and the fitness benefits are merely a perk. Still, we live in a complex world with myriad distractions and other obligations. What strategies can you use to motivate your students/clients to adhere to the game plan, a goal that is clearly in their best interest, as well as your own?

We need to look at both what motivates people and the flip side, what causes them to avoid something that's clearly good for them. Here are some of the pitfalls we'll encounter as well as some strategies to get us over each hurdle.

Bellydance classes mix fun with fitness

PROBLEM: Other Responsibilities

Let's face it: We live in a busy world, especially for the busiest of us all, the working mother. There are numerous obstacles we face each day that make it quite easy to put off our intended workout.

STRATEGY: Plan for It. Reminders are handy tools. Have your students write their classes on a calendar located in a place they see every day. Also, have them get in the habit of laying out their exercise wear the night before in a visible place.

STRATEGY: Avoid Feelings of Guilt. A key to this problem is enlisting family support. A little encouragement from

home helps calm guilt about not being around for a while to go exercise.

PROBLEM: Procrastination

Why put off until tomorrow what you can just as easily put off today? We've all found ourselves in the grip of this enemy of productivity.

STRATEGY: Make It Fun. It is obvious that we're less likely to put off things that we enjoy. I always think of the example of kids on a basketball team who will run up and down the court all day playing game after game but will groan when their coach asks them to run a few laps. Talk to your students. Find out what part of the class they like most and do more of what they enjoy. Be friendly and warm, and **always** make sure you know everyone's name. When someone new comes to class, ask them their name and write it down afterwards.

STRATEGY: Don't Let Them Off So Easy. Remember

to call them after a missed session. This not only shows them that you care but also lets them know they'll have to deal with the call the next time they do the same.

PROBLEM: Post-Workout Soreness

Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS) occurs 24–48 hours after exercise to which we're unaccustomed. This phenomenon is believed to be related to microscopic tears in muscle fibers that take place during exercise, most likely in the eccentric, or negative, phase.

STRATEGY: Educate Them. Educate your clients, especially those new to exercise, that what they're feeling is normal and will soon pass. Inform them that the discomfort is the result of progress and that they should be proud rather than discouraged. A word of caution: Keep your eyes open for signs of injury, which unlike DOMS is neither normal, nor welcome.

PHOTO: WWW.LENAREGNA.COM



PROBLEM: Unrealistic Expectations

Many exercisers, especially new ones, have unrealistic fitness goals. These goals, often bolstered by unscrupulous claims in the media, can lead to discouragement when more realistic progress is made.

STRATEGY: Set Realistic Goals. Both short- and long-term goal setting can help. It not only replaces those unrealistic goals but is a great motivational tool. The key here is to make the goals challenging but clearly attainable. Setting the bar too high can often do more harm than good. Examples might be mastering a particular movement (short term) or an entire choreography (long term). Offering token rewards for meeting predetermined goals can also work wonders; after all, everybody loves a free t-shirt. A shirt with your school's or business's name on it is also a good source of free advertising.

PROBLEM: Plateauing/Boredom

We've all been there. You've spent a considerable amount of time mastering something and then, all of a sudden, you hit the wall. You're not progressing, and you don't know why. Before long you get frustrated. This is a problem that leads some to slack off or even give up. There's a better approach.

STRATEGY: Change. Everyone needs variety and dance/exercise is no exception. If you do the same thing for long enough, your body adapts. We all know it, but sometimes we get in a rut. Make sure to keep this in mind and change

things when the time is right. A word of caution: Sometimes teachers/trainers in an attempt to keep things fresh vary them too much or too often. Just remember that more is not always better.

STRATEGY: Refer Them. Referring your students to other instructors may not be something you see as a good business decision, but sometimes it's the smart and ethical thing to do. It could give them a different perspective or train them in a specific area in which you're not as accomplished. Many students will respect you for it and keep studying with you, or at the very least speak well of you to others (more free advertising).

STRATEGY: Challenge Them. For those of you who teach a fitness-oriented class, encourage your students to take a performance class. It might not only broaden their horizons but also challenge them in a new and exciting way.

For those who teach a performance-oriented class, consider planning a student showcase in the near future. This gives them a goal to work toward. Also, for those who are so inclined, entering a competition can do the trick. It too can give them the motivation to take their game to the next level.

In conclusion, your role as an instructor is a complex one with a wide variety of responsibilities. Teaching technique is, of course, important. Still you must not neglect one of the most powerful tools in your toolbox, the ability to motivate your students to be the best they can be. 