

**W**hether we directors want to admit it or not, group exercise is instructor driven. Solid programming can fall flat if the right instructor is not teaching it. We need talented, experienced, motivating and captivating instructors who can teach several class types. Finding this type of talent is the day in, day out mission of the group fitness or program director.

successful presenters and instructors were once members of the “front row.”

**Develop Other Staff.** Are there people who work for other departments who would make outstanding instructors? You may want to train gym floor trainers to become body sculpting instructors. Other staffers may also surprise you. A front desk staffer once began attending classes where I worked and loved them. She was a high school cheerleader, swimmer and dancer. She took classes for about a year and expressed interest in teaching. After obtaining her first certification and showing up for three consecutive meetings and my in-house instructor workshops, she was almost ready. Then a last minute no-show proved to be an opportunity for her. The members were thrilled. They got to exercise, and her first experience was a good one. (Don't throw your new instructors into the most difficult time slot as members may be cruel and unforgiving of anyone but their favorite instructors.)

Another way to use your resources is to question your staff about their favorite instructors in the area. Also,

### **Align With a Training School**

One way to find new instructors is to align yourself with a training school. Perhaps you can accept a training school's graduates as interns (who you can hire later if they do well) or directly hire the instructors who have the greatest potential. Newcomers are diamonds in the rough. They have no bad habits and can prove to be valuable, loyal employees. Try them first at slow spots until they gain experience and confidence.

# A Quest for Talent

Discover proven strategies for finding the group exercise instructors you need for a winning program.

By Carol Scott

## **Recruiting Talented Instructors at a Glance**

- 1. Start inside your own facility. Develop enthusiastic members and staff from other departments.**
- 2. Hold events that inspire your existing talent pool and attract new talent.**
- 3. Look for instructors in other fitness specialty studios.**

Where can you locate potential instructors? This will depend on your location and the number of fitness facilities in your area. If you are in a competitive market such as New York City or Los Angeles, you will find plenty of talent. Typically, many large urban centers have abundant access to actors, dancers, entertainers and athletes—as well as experienced instructors—to draw from for their talent pool. Smaller suburban or rural communities will need to be more creative to find instructors. Here are some ideas you can use to recruit the best talent available in your area.

### **Look Within Your Facility**

Sometimes the best talent can be right under your nose. Consider these two sources at your own facility.

**Recruit Your Front Row.** With the right choice and a little prompting and training, you can turn enthusiastic students into instructors. Some of the most

you can ask facility members what local instructors they'd like to see teach at your facility.

## Host Events

If you host educational and/or networking events at your facility, you develop your location as "the" place for cutting-edge programming and education. The events will benefit you two-fold. First, you will expose yourself to local talent, so you know who the cream of the crop is. Second, you will provide an incentive to your own instructors. Most continuing education organizations provide the hosting club with one to three complimentary registrations. You can then offer your instructors free continuing education opportunities as an additional compensation benefit.

## Check Out Studios

If your area is not richly steeped in talent, you will need to look for it. Studios are one resource.

At dance studios you'll find dance instructors who already have a sense of working with music, body awareness, and the personality to teach. They can grow into excellent fitness instructors with some education and training. The same philosophy applies to instructors you find at studios that specialize in one form of fitness such as yoga, Pilates, martial arts, boxing, gymnastics and indoor cycling. Before they will be ready to teach at your club, you will most likely have to invest time and effort in certification preparation, a mentor program, training, and interning them as instructors. However, you will be investing in your club's future and individuality and building a relationship that

## Host an Open Audition

The open call audition is a tried-and-true resource for finding instructors. Here are some tips for holding a successful audition.

**Setting Up the Audition.** Make sure you set a time and date in the not-too-distant future that you know most people can attend, such as a weekend within three weeks of notice. Secure a space for several hours, and use personnel who can accurately and objectively judge the instructors.

**Marketing the Audition.** The greater the turnout, the higher the likelihood that you will have enough talent to choose from. Put up flyers in your area, contact instructors who you already know and ask them to spread the word, or rent a mailing list of local instructors from organizations such as ACE and mail the information. Also, e-mail any leads you have collected through any of your other outreach efforts. If you want to be thorough and see all the talent in the area, using all of these methods will yield the greatest results.

**Conducting the Audition.** Auditions can be set up in many ways. This is the way we run auditions at Equinox Fitness Clubs. First, instructors fill out a questionnaire including their contact information, certifications, CPR, experience, types of class they teach and three references.

We ask that instructors audition with what they feel is their strongest class. Every instructor gets 20 minutes to teach a mini class, including warm-up and cool-down. The auditioning instructors teach to each other so they can accurately demonstrate cueing and show how they generate enthusiasm. To evaluate them, we use a version of the IDEA evaluation sheet.

If instructors pass the audition, they do a final interview where we review club policies and procedures. They may first be hired as subs without permanent placement so we can double check their teaching skills before we permanently place them.

should breed a significant amount of employee loyalty.

## Contact Fitness Organizations

Another area to explore is regional /and national fitness organizations. They may offer access to their databases of area instructors, or they may offer web postings or ads on their Web sites or in their magazines. For example, you can place a classified ad in *IDEA Health & Fitness Source* magazine, rent ACE's mailing list or locate instructors through Yoga Alliance's Web site. You may also want to purchase a recruitment table at industry events. All these venues will open up your club to the industry at large.

Attending national conventions and local workshops is another way to see the quality of instructors and assess how your club's talent stacks up against the overall talent within the industry.

## Get Creative

With a little perseverance and determination you can find talent in all sorts of places. Then what you make of that talent depends on training, mentorship programs and education.

In my next column I will focus on how to take your stars, team players, interns and diamonds in the rough and develop them into a winning team.

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