

# More Than Luck

---

Use these basic guidelines to make the transition from terrific teacher to paid presenter.

**By Petra Kolber**

**T**he number one question I get from convention participants is “How do I become a presenter?” Oprah Winfrey said it best: “Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.” Although I was lucky to partner with Reebok early in my career, I had paid my dues long before this relationship began. When I worked in Manhattan, I woke up at 4:30 AM every morning to open a gym. I taught 18 to 22 classes a week for several years and trained a press agent four times a week at 6:00 AM in exchange for free representation. I also bounced a rent check once so that I could have a press event catered (I don’t recommend this).

Sometimes I look back and wonder how I was able to manage the constant early hours and compromises. In the end it all came down to one thing: passion. If you are truly passionate about what you do and “walk the talk,” there is no reason why you can’t become a presenter. Beyond the need for passion and integrity, certain steps can’t be overlooked.

### **Self-Inventory**

Start by doing nothing. Take some time out for yourself. Close the door, turn off the phone, have your spouse take the kids out to dinner and be alone for a while. Then write down your answers to the following questions:

#### **Am I prepared to leave my family and travel on the weekends?**

If not, then you will probably want to reconsider becoming a presenter, because most conventions and workshops are booked on weekends. Think about it. When was the last time you attended a convention mid-week? Even if you decide you want to present only locally, the bookings will more than likely be on Saturdays or Sundays.

#### **Do I know my strengths?**

Perhaps cuing is one of your strong points. Maybe another is developing creative, logical combinations. Or maybe you are known for your communication skills or motivation techniques. You need to establish your strong points, because they are going to be integral to the first two workshops you offer. You already have the material for those workshops in your mind and body and have been doing it naturally for years. Now it’s just a matter of putting it on paper.

#### **Do I understand the CEC/CEU process?**

You may have noticed I referred to your “first two workshops” in the above para-

graph. Apply for continuing education credits and units (CECs and CEUs) for more than one workshop because the first application is the most expensive, ranging from \$125 to \$150. Any application after that costs about \$25. In addition, the more workshops you are able to present, the more valuable you will be as a presenter. AFAA requires CEU providers to be AFAA-certified. ACE prefers its CEC providers to be ACE-certified but also accepts a graduate degree in physical education or other fitness-related discipline. (For more information, go to [www.afa.com](http://www.afa.com) and [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org).)

#### **Am I a businessperson?**

Think of yourself as a business. The more you can offer, the more opportu-

nities will come your way. Administrative details are probably the one area that keeps most great teachers from moving to the next level, because we tend to be more right brain than left. We can create the most amazing workshops, but paperwork often overwhelms us. To have a lasting career in this industry, you need to stay current and creative. It takes research, effort and time to keep reinventing yourself, your workshops and your ideas. Take a moment and look at your daily organizer. Is there time for you to devote to this new phase of your career?

#### **Do I have an elephant hide?**

If you join the presenters’ circle, attendees will evaluate you. I believe this is the hardest part of our industry. Every

## **Tips From Successful Presenters**

“Treat each event like it is your last, meet every person with a sincere look in the eye, and dance like everyone is watching.”  
—Jon Giswold

“Be prepared . . . prepared . . . prepared . . . and then be prepared for the unexpected!”  
—Joy Prouty

“Present only what you are passionate about. By trusting your heart, your gut and your feelings, you will stay in the present moment of your creativity. There is no fear or rejection when you are passionately speaking your truth.”  
—Scott Cole

“The most important thing for a new presenter is to not try to be like someone else. Be true to yourself, what you do, and let ‘you’ shine through. Just be you and be the best you can be—that will surely make you a successful presenter.”  
—Franny Benedetto

“If you really want an audience to understand and learn from what you are saying, the first step is believing it yourself. People listen to and are motivated by those who speak from the heart. The information must be credible, relevant and interesting, but it must also be heartfelt. You can captivate any audience if you feel what you communicate and are present in your delivery.”  
—Jay Blahnik

“Donate your time and talents wherever and whenever you can. Be prepared to work for the exposure alone initially. The reward will outweigh the effort, but the monetary gains upfront will be few.”  
—Mindy Mylrea

“Find the passion, follow your heart, and your message will always be well received.”  
—Rob Glick

## **NEVER read your evaluations during a convention.**

**Always wait until the end. Nothing is worse than reading a negative comment right before you teach.**

time you step on that stage, your peers are judging you. You can gain a lot of insight into how to improve your presentation, but some comments will offend you. Leigh Crews, Reebok program developer and master trainer from Rome, Georgia, says this best: “Develop an elephant hide. People write evaluations for many different reasons, not just to evaluate. Only apply the constructive, acknowledging that we all have room for improvement. Discard the destructive, knowing that it will only drain you of your energy and take time away from doing the things that count.”

*Note:* NEVER read your evaluations during a convention. Always wait until the end. Nothing is worse than reading a negative comment right before you teach.

### **The Product: Packaging and Potential**

If you answered yes to the questions above, it is time to move on to packaging yourself. Being able to present yourself professionally is very important. Start by organizing your game plan.

- Create a mission statement for both your work and your personal life.
- List objectives you want participants to learn.
- Create goals for the next week, month, 6 months and year. Include measurable goals, a plan of action, a timeline and a daily action list.
- Review and evaluate your mission periodically. Cross-check to ensure your goals are in harmony with other aspects of your life, including family and finances.

The next step is to put your package together in an organized press kit, which should include the following:

**A RESUME.** Include your complete educational background, your certifications and your industry-related experience, plus a head or full-body shot. When you have photos taken for this purpose, wear clothing that portrays a professional image and will stand the test of time in fashion terms. You want these shots to last.

**A LIST OF YOUR WORKSHOPS OR LECTURES.** Under each title provide a *brief* (approximately 35-word) description and say how many ACE CECs and AFAA CEUs the event provides.

#### **AN EQUIPMENT LIST.**

**A COMPLETE DETAILED OUTLINE OF YOUR WORKSHOP.** You will already have this from your CEC/CEU application.

**A VIDEOTAPE OF YOUR PRESENTATION.** If you're doing movement, remember to present the workout in mirror image. When you face the camera, cue right when you're doing left, and vice versa.

Include your name and contact number on every single piece of written material, and label your videotape. Companies receive endless applications, and your package may get separated from your video.

### **Create Opportunities**

Once you have done your inventory and self-packaging, the work is only just beginning. Don't sit around and wait for something to happen. Get out there and pound the pavement, shake hands and kiss babies. Here are some tips on how to create a buzz:

**GET THE WORD OUT.** Your press kit is already working to your advantage; now tell everyone you meet that you are presenting workshops. After your e-mail signature, add a blurb that details your presentation (date, time, how to sign up).

**VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME.** Offer your services for free at local events and fund-raisers. Not only will you feel good about helping others, but you'll also get to network with other professionals. Another good volunteer job is assisting at conventions. Take your press kit and make an appointment with the convention program director, putting a face to your name. Always follow up that meeting with a phone call or e-mail.

**BUDDY UP.** Find an instructor with similar career aspirations and help each other—perhaps even copresent a workshop. Divide the paperwork and motivate each other. It helps to partner with someone whose strengths complement yours.

**START LOCALLY.** Offer your first workshops at a discount. One option is to teach a free master class. Just be aware that this will probably be your toughest audience.

**MINGLE, MINGLE, MINGLE.** Network with other presenters—*after* their workshops. Ask them if they need assistance with any of their presentations. At the convention welcome party, don't stay with one small crowd the entire night; walk around and introduce yourself to other people, including the organizers. This will help you establish a contact base.

**DEVELOP STRONG RELATIONSHIPS.**

**Feel the fear and give your presentation anyway.  
Turn your fear into energy, and when you get those  
butterflies, instead of trying to squelch them use their  
wings to help you soar to new heights.**

Remember the people you meet on the way up are ultimately the same people you meet on the way down, so be impeccable with your word. Unless you have something positive to say, don't say anything at all.

### **Feel the Fear**

So now it comes down to the final hurdle: fear, which is the only difference between wanting and doing. Every time you feel afraid, remember that every single presenter has felt the same way. When broken down, fear stands for "False Expectations Appearing Real." Even after 10 years on stage, I still have moments when I want to chuck a bucket. Feel the fear and give your presentation anyway. Turn your fear into energy, and when you get those butterflies, instead of trying to squelch them use their wings to help you soar to new heights. When I feel particularly afraid, I focus on my breathing. This brings

me into the present moment and keeps me from obsessing on what may or may not happen during my presentation.

Making the transition from teacher to paid presenter takes time, patience and hard work. Remember that goals are dreams with a timeline. Set your goals, live your dreams—and I look forward to coming to one of your presentations very soon.

*Petra Kolber, 2001 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year, is a Reebok University master trainer and member of the Reebok University Development Team. Petra has choreographed and starred in more than 13 award-winning fitness videos and numerous television segments. She is a contributing editor for Health Magazine and the group fitness manager for the Equinox Health Club in West Hollywood, California.*

© 2003 by IDEA Health & Fitness Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.

## **Presentation Pointers**

- Be prepared for anything. Here is a checklist of things to bring to every presentation:
  - extra copies of your music, precued
  - change of clothes, shoes, socks
  - water, "power" foods
  - hair brush, head band, hair ties
  - extra copies of your outline
  - batteries
- Arrive early and leave late. Get a good feel for your venue before you begin. Check stage height, room layout and flooring. Locate the bathroom, light switch and water station.
- Know how many participants there are. Make sure you have enough room to accommodate everyone safely.
- Check your equipment. Is it readily available to students? A convention assistant will help you, but have a backup plan if the equipment isn't there. I have presented a step workout with no steps.
- Rehearse the entire presentation beforehand. Know everything inside and out. Practice in the clothes you plan to wear, so you know whether they fit correctly or not.
- If there is a session in the next room, try to find out what type of music they are playing and if it is going to interfere with your class. If so, try to compromise on the volume level.
- Relax and have a good sense of humor.