

By Patricia Ryan, MS

IDEA Fitness Industry Salary Survey 2004

Benchmarks for choosing and compensating productive and loyal fitness staff.

AS FITNESS BUSINESSES HIRE QUALIFIED STAFF to handle current customers and new exercisers, the good news is that 81% of fitness staff stay with the same business for 1 year or longer, according to the newest IDEA Fitness Industry Salary Survey. Such loyalty benefits businesses, but, more important, allows staff members time to build relationships with the exercisers who seek their guidance and inspiration.

For the teacher who loves exercise and wants to Inspire the World to Fitness™, the employment outlook is likewise positive. Employment in the fitness sector is expected to grow, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), because of increasing interest in fitness activities. “Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors” are among the fastest-growing occupations in the United States and are expected to grow “faster than average” through 2012 (U.S. Department of Labor 2005).

What are employers looking for? How is compensation in fitness determined? These questions are answered in IDEA’s bi-annual compensation survey, which collects salary and wage information, along with hiring and pay criteria, from IDEA member businesses. Owners and managers report on how they compensate the people who work for them. The businesses represent the growth and diversity of the industry, from health clubs to yoga studios, from personal training gyms to parks and recreation.

New this year is the addition of a “Pilates or yoga instructor” position, as well as clearer identification of the number of yoga or Pilates studios and personal training businesses represented.

“Stable” is the watchword of this year’s survey. The criteria for hiring and for determining pay are similar to those used in prior years. Some salaries have risen, while most hourly wages have stayed the same or increased \$1–\$4; hours worked are about the same as in prior years. Salaries have kept pace with inflation compared to 2000 figures, although most hourly wages have not.

Benefits have stayed the same or increased a bit from 2002, a year when benefits dropped compared to 2000. About half of the staff positions can expect a pay raise in 2005, with the likely candidates being directors and fitness floor staff.

Detailed comparisons of compensation in years 2000, 2002 and 2004 are in the “IDEA Fitness Industry Salary Survey 2004” report, available through IDEA Educational Development, www.ideafit.com.

Overview of Positions

Fitness/Program and Personal Training Directors work full-time, about 40 hours a week, and are employees paid by salary (78%). Directors tend to be eligible for benefits and incentives, probably because of their full-time employee status, which indicates that their effective earnings are higher than their salaries.

Most directors also conduct training sessions or teach classes in addition to having management responsibilities. Those paid separately for teaching (52%) can augment their earnings that way.

Trend 2002–2004: For directors paid by salary, hours stayed stable and salaries increased. For those paid hourly or per class/session, wages were stable and hours worked increased.

Group Exercise Coordinator is a transitional position divided between management and staff duties. Although still primarily employees, coordinators are as likely to be paid hourly or per class/session as they are to be paid by salary. Those paid by

salary work about twice as many hours a week (31 hours on average) as coordinators paid per hour or per class (16 hours on average). Hourly wages for coordinators are about the same as for group fitness instructors.

Trend 2002–2004: Coordinators paid by salary had a small drop in pay, but they also worked fewer hours than in 2002.

Employment in the fitness sector is expected to grow, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), because of increasing interest in fitness activities.

Coordinators paid hourly worked more hours, while their wages decreased slightly (\$2 per hour).

Personal Trainers are split between employee and independent-contractor status, but virtually all are paid a wage. They work an average of 18 hours a week and are more likely to be eligible for cash incentives (38%) than for benefits. About half (54%) of trainers are paid a percentage of each client's fee, with 60% typically going to the trainer. Personal trainers have a real opportunity to adjust their income based on the number of clients they can competently train.

Trend 2002–2004: Trainers worked 1 more hour per week and earned \$1 more per hour in wages.

Fitness Floor Staff positions are often entry-level. Some personal trainers and instructors are required to work on the fitness floor, helping facility members, in addition to teaching sessions or classes. Fitness floor staff are hourly workers with a 15- to 18-hour workweek. Almost all (90%) are employees, although a few are eligible for benefits.

Trend 2002–2004: Hours stayed steady, as did wages.

methodology

IDEA business, program director and personal trainer members who gave IDEA permission to e-mail them were sent three e-mails in October 2004 linking them to a Web-based survey. The survey was designed and tabulated by an independent research firm. Respondents included 40% owners, 14% fitness directors and 12% personal fitness trainers, among other titles. There were 517 completed questionnaires representing the United States and Canada, for a 13% response rate.

At a 95% confidence level, the margin of error is $\pm 3.9\%$. Canadian dollars have been converted to U.S. dollars. Additional surveys received from members outside the United States and Canada are not included because of the inconsistency in currencies.

Salaries are not shown for staff positions because there were too few respondents. Percentages of 0.5 and higher have been rounded up. Hours per week have been rounded to the nearest half-hour. Hourly wages have been rounded to the nearest quarter percent. When percentages do not add up to 100, it is because some respondents did not answer the question, the percentages have been rounded up or respondents gave multiple answers.

how inflation affects earnings

Inflation is the "overall general upward price movement of goods and services in an economy," according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Among other measurements of the economy, the BLS reports the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which measures inflation as experienced by consumers in their day-to-day living expenses.

If you are curious about how inflation affects your earnings, the Bureau has an online inflation calculator that uses the average CPI for a given year. You can put in a dollar amount and choose the year to compare it to at www.bls.gov/cpi/home.htm#data.

More calculators for inflation, housing costs and comparisons among cities are available from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) at www.jsc.nasa.gov/bu2/inflate.html.

Group Fitness Instructors teach classes such as step and mixed-impact, whereas **Specialty Instructors** teach classes requiring specialized training (e.g., indoor cycling or martial arts). Specialty instructors teach 1 more hour per week than group fitness instructors, although both earn about the same amount of money per hour. Employee status is slightly more prevalent for group fitness instructors (55%) than for specialty instructors (49%), but this may be because instructors for specialties like karate are hired from outside the company.

Trend 2002–2004: Hours and wages for group fitness instructors remained the same, but wages for specialty instructors decreased. This decrease may be a function of removing Pilates and yoga instructors from this category in 2004, since these instructors have higher-than-average earnings.

Fitness Instructors work in both the one-to-one and group environments. This title is seen in wellness or recreation programs in corporations, colleges and hospitals. Fitness instructors work over twice as many hours as other group instructors (10–13 hours per week versus 4–5 hours) at about the same rate of pay. While group fitness and specialty instructors are more likely to be paid per class (64%), fitness instructors are more likely to be paid per hour (58%).

Trend 2002–2004: Fitness instructors are seeing a steady increase in hourly wages and in hours worked, although they are still firmly part-time.

Pilates and Yoga Instructors are evenly split between employee and independent-contractor status. Paid per class, they earn the highest wages reported in this survey, even higher than most personal trainers. The workweek of 4–6 classes is comparable to that of specialty instructors.

Trend 2002–2004: Unavailable. This job title is new for 2004 survey.

Hiring and Promotion

What are the top three traits employers look for when hiring or considering a promotion? The percentage of agreement in this category indicates that most managers are looking for similar traits.

For all the job titles, the number-one criterion for hiring or promotion is "skills and abilities." Next is "certification." "Years' experience" is the third criterion for management positions and

to a lesser degree for Pilates and yoga instructors. For group fitness instructors, personal trainers, specialty instructors and floor staff, personality is important.

The criteria used to determine pay are less consistent across job titles, implying that businesses base pay to some extent on factors independent of workers' skills. Although less unanimous than the criteria for hiring and promotion, "skills and abilities," "certification" and "years' experience" once again top the list, however.

Learn More About Compensation

On the following pages you'll find the details of compensation for each job position. More data are available in *IDEA Fitness Manager* and *IDEA Trainer Success*.

The complete results of this survey, including a breakdown of all the results by type of business and region, are available through IDEA Professional Education.

Patricia Ryan, MS, developed publications and surveys at IDEA for 19 years. This is the eighth industry compensation survey she has conducted.

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what the terms mean

A **salary** is a fixed amount of money paid to an employee. The salary does not vary according to the number of hours worked.

A **wage** is paid to hourly workers, who may be employees or independent contractors. In the fitness industry, wages are also paid for sessions/classes. A wage goes up or down depending on the number of hours worked.

For **employees**, owners are required by U.S. federal and state laws to contribute to Social Security, Medicare and other funds and to withhold income tax. **Independent contractors** pay their own taxes and contributions to Social Security, Medicare and other funds. For more information on each status, visit www.irs.gov.

The **n** is the number of people who answered a question. Of the people who answered, the **percent (%)** shows how many answered yes.

The **mean**, or **average**, is found by adding all the answers together and then dividing them by the number of respondents. Because of this, a mean can include extremely high and extremely low numbers.

The **median** is the midpoint, where half of the respondents answered above and half answered below. The median number is useful because it is not influenced by the extremes of high and low.

The **mode** is the most frequently given response. This tells you what the highest number (although it can be a very small number) of respondents answered.

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Fitness/Program Director

Fitness/Program director hires and supervises staff; manages equipment; schedules or oversees scheduling of classes, lectures/clinics and training; prepares budgets.

Employment Status

employee	81%
independent contractor	10
both	9

Payment Methods

salary	78%
per hour	17
per class/session	21
per participant	4

- 79% of directors/coordinators teach classes/sessions in addition to having management responsibilities.
- 52% of directors/coordinators are paid separately for classes/sessions taught.

Position Perks

benefits	70%
cash incentives	36

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	98%	85%
type of class/session	67	57
degree	80	75
certification	94	82
continuing education	82	68
years' experience	93	85
years in organization	69	72
personality	86	46

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 82)	Hourly Rate (n = 81)
mean	22	\$ 27.75
median	20	\$ 22
mode	40	\$ 20
minimum	1	\$ 8.50
maximum	80	\$ 150

Pay by Salary

	Hours per Week (n = 193)	Salary (n = 187)
mean	39	\$ 35,233
median	40	\$ 35,000
mode	40	\$ 35,000
minimum	2	\$ 540
maximum	65	\$ 100,000

Personal Training Director

Personal training director hires, supervises and schedules trainers; plans department services; prepares budgets.

Employment Status

employee	75%
independent contractor	14
both	11

Payment Methods

salary	59%
per hour	24
per class/session	25
per client	13

- 79% of directors/coordinators teach classes/sessions in addition to having management responsibilities.
- 52% of directors/coordinators are paid separately for classes/sessions taught.

Position Perks

benefits	68%
cash incentives	52

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	97%	79%
type of class/session	71	57
degree	86	76
certification	97	85
continuing education	83	66
years' experience	93	83
years in organization	75	66
personality	85	39

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 52)	Hourly Rate (n = 51)
mean	26	\$ 26.75
median	30	\$ 25
mode	30	\$ 25
minimum	4	\$ 7
maximum	51	\$ 100

Pay by Salary

	Hours per Week (n = 56)	Salary (n = 53)
mean	36	\$ 30,956
median	40	\$ 32,000
mode	40	\$ 35,000
minimum	7	\$ 5,400
maximum	60	\$ 60,000

Group Exercise Coordinator

Group exercise coordinator hires, trains, supervises group exercise instructors; schedules classes and teachers; may teach classes; follows budget.

Employment Status

employee	78%
independent contractor	12
both	10

Payment Methods

salary	52%
per hour	41
per class/session	33
per participant	2

- 79% of directors/coordinators teach classes/sessions in addition to having management responsibilities.
- 52% of directors/coordinators are paid separately for classes/sessions taught.

Position Perks

benefits	49%
cash incentives	27

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	98%	84%
type of class/session	76	59
degree	60	64
certification	95	84
continuing education	81	69
years' experience	91	79
years in organization	69	67
personality	83	46

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 87)	Hourly Rate (n = 87)
mean	16	\$ 21.25
median	12	\$ 18
mode	10	\$ 15
minimum	2	\$ 8
maximum	41	\$ 60

Pay by Salary

	Hours per Week (n = 72)	Salary (n = 73)
mean	31	\$ 23,176
median	31	\$ 24,000
mode	40	\$ 30,000
minimum	3	\$ 250
maximum	60	\$ 65,000

Personal Trainer

Personal trainer instructs individual clients; monitors and records progress; enrolls new clients; collects fees.

Employment Status

employee	45%
independent contractor	43
both	12

Payment Methods

salary	6%
per hour	39
per class/session	48
per client	17

Position Perks

benefits	29%
cash incentives	38

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	96%	79%
type of class/session	68	53
degree	75	66
certification	96	81
continuing education	84	66
years' experience	87	74
years in organization	57	54
personality	87	40

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 344)	Hourly Rate (n = 347)
mean	18	\$ 31.25
median	18	\$ 26
mode	20	\$ 25
minimum	1	\$ 0
maximum	50	\$ 100

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Fitness Floor Staff

Fitness floor staff monitors equipment, supplies and people in the fitness center.

Employment Status

employee	90%
independent contractor	5
both	5

Payment Methods

salary	5%
per hour	93
per class/session	4
per participant	0

Position Perks

benefits	24%
cash incentives	22

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	87%	64%
type of class/session	27	19
degree	42	45
certification	60	55
continuing education	50	42
years' experience	66	64
years in organization	49	50
personality	88	34

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 120)	Hourly Rate (n = 129)
mean	18.50	\$ 9.25
median	15	\$ 8
mode	10	\$ 10
minimum	3	\$ 4.50
maximum	100	\$ 22.50

Group Fitness Instructor

Group fitness instructor teaches general classes set to music, such as step and mixed impact.

Employment Status

employee	55%
independent contractor	35
both	10

Payment Methods

salary	4%
per hour	35
per class/session	64
per participant	4

Position Perks

benefits	12%
cash incentives	19

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	97%	79%
type of class/session	86	69
degree	37	42
certification	94	81
continuing education	74	66
years' experience	83	76
years in organization	56	57
personality	89	44

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 233)	Hourly Rate (n = 252)
mean	6	\$ 21.75
median	4	\$ 20
mode	3	\$ 25
minimum	1	\$ 2
maximum	60	\$ 60

Survey Demographics

Type of Facility

multipurpose health club	23%
personal training gym	14
personal training client's home	10
fitness-only health club	9
Pilates or yoga studio	8
YMCA/YWCA/JCC	5
college/university	5
corporate fitness center	4
parks and recreation	4
no facility, satellite classes	4
group exercise studio	3
hospital fitness center	2
other	9

Organization's Tax Status

for profit	78%
not-for-profit	22

Geographic Region

west	37%
north central	16
northeast	22
south	20
Canada	5

Location of Business

small city or town	32%
suburb	32
large city	28
rural area	6

Number of Members/Clients

mean	2,869
median	300
mode	200
minimum	3
maximum	280,000

Specialty Instructor

Specialty instructor teaches classes requiring specialized training, such as indoor cycling or martial arts.

Employment Status

employee	49%
independent contractor	40
company hires both	12

Payment Methods

salary	3%
per hour	30
per class/session	64
per participant	8

Position Perks

benefits	10%
cash incentives	14

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	96%	81%
type of class/session	88	70
degree	42	42
certification	95	80
continuing education	78	66
years' experience	86	74
years in organization	58	60
personality	85	46

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 159)	Hourly Rate (n = 159)
mean	4	\$ 25.50
median	3	\$ 21
mode	2	\$ 20
minimum	1	\$ 1
maximum	32.5	\$ 100

Resources

"IDEA Fitness Industry Salary Survey 2004." The complete results, including multiyear comparisons and breakdowns by geographic region and type of business, are available through IDEA Professional Education (www.idealife.com or 800-999-4332, ext. 7).

Fitness Instructor

Fitness instructor may conduct fitness assessments, teach classes and give personal training sessions.

Employment Status

employee	59%
independent contractor	31
company hires both	10

Payment Methods

salary	8%
per hour	58
per class/session	38
per participant	7

Position Perks

benefits	24%
cash incentives	23

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	94%	77%
type of class/session	70	54
degree	62	62
certification	90	80
continuing education	75	65
years' experience	81	70
years in organization	60	58
personality	86	47

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 184)	Hourly Rate (n = 183)
mean	13	\$ 21.50
median	10	\$ 18
mode	2	\$ 30
minimum	1	\$ 6
maximum	50	\$ 100

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Pilates or Yoga Instructor

Pilates or yoga instructor teaches classes and has specialized training in yoga or Pilates.

Employment Status

employee	45%
independent contractor	44
both	11

Payment Methods

salary	2%
per hour	32
per class/session	62
per participant	11

Position Perks

benefits	12%
cash incentives	18

Criteria Used

	For Hiring or Promotion	To Determine Pay
skills and abilities	96%	81%
type of class/session	86	69
degree	43	44
certification	95	82
continuing education	81	70
years' experience	88	79
years in organization	52	56
personality	86	48

Pay by Hour, Class or Session

	Hours per Week (n = 287)	Hourly Rate (n = 268)
mean	6.5	\$ 29
median	4	\$ 28.50
mode	2	\$ 30
minimum	1	\$ 1
maximum	40	\$ 80

benefits and discounts

	Full-Time Employee	Part-Time Employee	Independent Contractor
commissions or incentives	49%	37%	27%
discounts	68	64	47
free or discounted childcare	47	44	26
disability insurance	56	22	4
health insurance	70	12	2
liability insurance	70	45	23
paid sick time	63	12	1
paid vacation time	71	17	2
profit sharing	20	4	4
retirement plan	51	14	2

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