

Opportunities for Aquatic Personal Trainers

By June M. Chewning MA, BS

Information sent in a newsletter by the IDEA Health and Fitness Association (IDEA) in February of 2009 gave the following good news about the fitness industry: ⁽¹⁾ "Despite the economic downturn, the US Department of Labor reports that the fitness industry is still growing and job opportunities are solid. Employment in the industry is expected to increase by 27% through 2016, a figure that is greater than the average for all professions, according to the US Department of Labor. The department attributes this projected expansion of the industry to public concern for staying healthy and becoming physically fit, as well as people's willingness to spend more money and time on personal and family fitness."

For the past several years, personal training opportunities have continued to expand, and the demand for qualified and skilled personal trainers continues to grow. With new legislature on health care and the need for preventive medicine, this trend will likely continue beyond 2016. One of the leading growth potentials in the industry is personal training in the aquatic environment. There is a shortage of trained professionals to fill the personal training niche on land, and a more acute shortage for qualified aquatic personal trainers.

According to Innovative Aquatics' "Personal Pool Programming" workshop and the American College of Sports Medicine, personal training and small group personal training are defined as follows. ⁽²⁾

What is a Personal Trainer?

American College of Sports Medicine offers the following definition for a Personal Trainer: "A personal trainer is a fitness professional involved in developing and implementing an individualized approach to exercise leadership in healthy populations and/or those individuals with medical clearance to exercise."

What is Personal Training?

Personal training is individualized and customized fitness programs designed to meet the needs and goals of a specific client. Sessions are designed specifically to enhance overall health and fitness based on the individual objective and goals of any given client.

What is a Small Group Fitness Trainer?

A small group fitness trainer is a fitness professional that develops and implements training for 2-5 individuals based on the overall objectives of the group and or customized training based on the individual's goals and objectives blended into a format that is suitable for all and or customized in "stations or portions" as needed for each individual in the group. Careful screening and assessment is still required for each participant.

What is Small Group Personal Training?

Small group fitness is defined as 2-5 individuals working under the guidance of a fitness professional to achieve optimal health and fitness benefits through a more intimate and personal setting than group exercise. Under the guidance of the fitness professional, optimal results can be achieved and exercise plateaus lessened through this type of training format. This allows for more economical training opportunities than one-on-one personal training, while creating a more intimate atmosphere and more individual attention than group fitness classes.

FACILITY OPPORTUNITIES

There are numerous opportunities to personal train for aquatic fitness professionals including: ⁽²⁾

- **In Home**

With 2.2 million people exercising in their own home pools and over 8 million home pools in the United States alone, there is a lot of opportunity to market your services. Many individuals enjoy the privacy and convenience of in-home training. If you plan to train in this environment, be sure to have adequate professional liability insurance and to properly record and track your income and taxes, unless you are employed by a facility that pays you as an employee to do in-home training.

- **Clubs/Fitness Centers/Aquatic Centers**

Many personal trainers will seek employment initially in fitness centers, clubs and or aquatic centers as these facilities provide an established market of exercisers or fitness enthusiasts to target. Pools in private clubs vary in size and usage. Although some aquatic fitness classes may be offered, the pool is predominantly used for member recreation and relaxation. Down time in the pools can be potential income for trainers and club owners alike. Aquatic personal training or small group fitness sessions take up little space and can increase income at almost any time during the day.

- **Adult Only/ Senior Communities**

The increased popularity of senior/adult only communities has opened a new target market. Most of these communities are self-contained and have easily accessible pools to provide recreation and enjoyment for residents. In many of these communities, personal training services are welcomed as subcontracted or employee paid opportunities.

- **Country Club/Private Pool**

Most country clubs have pool facilities for their members who tend to have a higher percentage of disposable income. Small group and specific aquatic personal training options can provide additional member services and benefits.

- **Hotels**

Many hotel chains have indoor or outdoor pools for guest use that are unused several hours each day. Some of the larger and more exclusive hotel/spa type settings already provide personal training but possibly not aquatic specific. The potential for renting pool space and/or exchanging/bartering local client training is available and often welcomed by hotel proprietors.

MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

There are two general paths personal trainers pursue in a fitness professional career. One option is to remain mainstream in targeting potential clients. This PT usually stays within the largest population demographic consisting of generally unfit and fit adults with no serious chronic disease.

Other PTs may choose to receive additional education and to specialize within a particular sub group. There are many education programs available to train you to work with these specialty groups. Specialty Groups include: ⁽²⁾

- **Seniors**

This is one of the fastest growing populations. Current research has this group at an estimated 35 million in the U.S. The number is expected to reach near 70 million by the year 2020.

Increased longevity will mean increased medical needs and therefore increased health care costs. Exercise is one of the most beneficial ways to boost health and productive longevity to help decrease government and private spending on health care.

- **De-Conditioned**

The majority of the US population does not exercise on a regular basis. In addition, many are minimally physically active. Being thin does not necessarily indicate health or fitness. The de-conditioned/ physically inactive market remains substantial and the potential to help these individuals prevent, manage, or mitigate chronic disease and increase overall health is inviting.

- **Obese**

The obesity epidemic in industrialized nations is global. Recent reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that at least 34% of adults over 20 are obese. Physical fitness is an essential key in the battle against obesity, as well as proper nutrition and rest. The aquatic environment offers safe and effective opportunities to work with this population, many of whom are too overweight to exercise safely on land.

- **Chronic Disease**

Poor diet, lack of physical activity, packaged foods, an aging population with longer life expectancy, and environmental concerns all contribute to the growing rate of chronic diseases. Cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and cancer cause altered quality of life and higher medical costs. Chronic disease can be prevented and better managed if present with regular physical activity. Lifestyle coaching is becoming popular in the personal training community, with an emphasis on helping clients prevent and manage chronic disease.

- **Pre and Post Natal**

The aquatic environment is very beneficial to the pregnant woman during and after pregnancy. The many benefits of aquatic exercise for the pregnant mother continue to be reinforced through research.

- **Children**

Childhood obesity also manifests as an epidemic in many industrialized nations. With reduced opportunity for physical activity at school (reduced physical education requirements) and the tendency toward reduced physical activity at home (video games, reduced safe outdoor play opportunities) many parents turn toward organized classes and personal trainers to promote health and activity for their children.

- **Professional and Recreational Athletes**

Aquatic fitness is growing in popularity in the professional sports arena. It is now recognized as a viable training alternative and not just sought for rehabilitation purposes. Athletes are discovering that water provides resistance for plyometric activities, endurance training, and sport specific training without the impact stress often felt in high volume training on land. Many athletes also head to the water for aid with recovery after a big event.

GENERATIONAL MARKETING TRENDS

Although birth dates may vary somewhat depending on your source, the characteristics of the three primary generations seem to be agreed upon. Knowing generational characteristics and preferences can help you with marketing, training techniques, as well as with motivators for behavioral change and adherence strategies. In addition to these three generations, many

older adults in the Traditionalists (born before 1945) remain active, although most are found in group exercise due to the desire for social interaction. Many traditionalists are exercising well into their 70s, 80s, and 90s, and many facilities providing older adult programs have a need for strong personal trainers who can set up safe and effective exercise programs for this population.

- **Baby Boomers (Born 1946 through 1964)**

Baby Boomers are driven and want to feel good, look younger and stay active. They are moving towards the "less is more attitude" with more focus on gentler ways to exercise and stay active. They are also starting to rethink the wisdom of high impact aerobics and a "no pain-no gain" mentality. This generation is a viable target market group as they are established, disciplined, and have years of desired productive life ahead of them according to most demographic and age studies.

- **Generation X (Born 1965 through 1982)**

This powerful "Baby Buster" group is approximately 46 million strong. They tend to be independent and strong-willed, working hard to balance professional and personal lives while continuously feeling the weight of the world is on their shoulders. They feel stuck in the middle of Baby Boomers and Generation Y. This group will sacrifice fitness and health for a number of reasons including work, money, family and friends. Generation X tends to put low priority on physical fitness and physical activity, just not giving it the time, as there is always something more important to do. This group went from anorexia to obesity, and now they make up an alarming number of the obese population.

- **Generation Y: Millennials (Born 1983-1994)**

Wikipedia defines this generation as the children of the Baby Boomer generation. Generation Y, like other generations, are considered to be molded by the events, leaders, developments and trends of its time. With fast growing instant communication technologies, this generation is developing a reputation for being peer oriented and for seeking instant gratification. It is yet to be seen, as this generation enters the work force, what importance they will place on overall health, and what attitude and preferences they will develop toward exercise and physical activity.

With so many options open to aquatic personal trainers, how do you choose the best avenue to enter the industry? Ask yourself the following three questions to help you find a good and productive fit.

1. Where does your passion lie? What kinds of people are you inspired to work with? Choose a target market or niche based on your strong client preferences and you will offset boredom and burn out.
2. What additional education do you need? Will boosting your qualifications to work with this target group boost your earning potential? A little time and effort spent on boosting your working knowledge will help establish you as an authority. Knowledge is power.
3. How can you successfully position yourself in the industry? Consider the demographics where you live, the types of facilities located near you, and resources available. Are you better suited as an employee or are you ok with subcontracting or running your own business?

With a little fore thought and proper planning, you can find the perfect way to launch a career in aquatic personal training.

REFERENCES

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This information is taken from the AEA sponsored course "Introduction to Aquatic Personal Training" produced by Fitness Learning Systems. This course is available with AEA CECs on the AEA eLearning platform. For more information, go to www.aeawave.com, click on Education / CEC Providers / eLearning. Fitness Learning Systems is proud to be an IACET accredited continuing education provider.



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