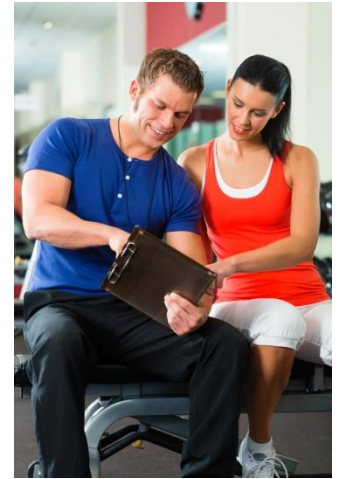


## Guide to Hiring Professional Fitness Staff (Navigating the Fitness Industry to Find the Best Staff)

Professional staff is the cornerstone of fitness and aquatic facility services. Services delivered by properly credentialed and trained staff perpetuates the following benefits to the facility:

- Draws and retains new members
- Facilitates members reaching and maintaining safe and effective fitness goals
- Promotes current member satisfaction and retention
- Contributes to the facility's professional image
- Reduces facility liability exposure



For therapy, massage, and other health-related staff, professionals are typically governed by and receive credentialing from state and national organizations. The fitness industry is currently self-regulated (not regulated by state or national entities) and it is difficult to navigate the maze of certifications offered and continuing education required by the fitness industry. There are 3 elements that facility managers want to track for their fitness professionals to ensure that their staff remain current in their credentials and aware of industry standard changes and advances.

These elements are:

- Certification
- Continuing Education
- Accountability

### Certification

There are two credentials used to establish professionalism in the fitness industry: college/university degrees or certification. If staff is college educated, be sure that the degree program is relevant to the services they are providing for your facility. Applicable degrees may include physical education, exercise science, exercise physiology, kinesiology, personal training, and others. There are also acceptable 2 year degree programs as well. You can typically see course work taken and affirm a degree by asking for a course transcript and a copy of the diploma. Higher education is typically recognized over certification.

Certification as a credential becomes more difficult to manage. It is estimated that there are over 200 fitness related certifications ranging from accredited certifications to false certifications that can be easily obtained online. As a facility manager, it is important to understand current recommendations for proper certification credentialing in the fitness industry to avoid hiring staff with sub-standard qualifications.

In 2002, the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA) was the first industry organization to make a stand recommending accreditation of personal training certifications by 2006. Educational accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of an educational institution or program are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the agency. (Wikipedia) IHRSA recommended that organizations have their certifications accredited by:

- NOCA: ICE (Institute for Credentialing Excellence/ National Commission for Certifying Agencies NCCA) is the NOCA accrediting body.
- DETC: Distance Education Training Council
- Other Certifying Agencies recognized by the industry include: Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and those recognized by the US Department of Education. These

may typically be certification programs offered through colleges and higher education institutions.

There are about 20 certification programs that are acceptably accredited. Although accreditation by some organizations only reviews the examination process and not the certification learning material content, choosing an accredited certification is the best alternative in the fitness industry at this time. You can go to a certification organization's website to see if the certification is accredited. You can review more information about accreditation on the IHRSA website. [www.IHRSA.org](http://www.IHRSA.org). The ICE website offers a list of NCCA accredited organizations. [www.credentialingexcellence.org](http://www.credentialingexcellence.org)

### **Continuing Education**

If a fitness professional has a higher education degree, they often are not in a CE tracking program, but they still need to show evidence of acquiring consistent continuing education. You can periodically require your degreed professionals to provide evidence of continuing education by providing you with continuing education certificates of completion.

Many college degree programs are recommending certification to their graduates so that they are put into a continuing education "tracking process." Certification organizations require that fitness professionals show proof of ongoing continuing education in order to maintain certification. Typically 15 to 20 hours of continuing education are required in order to renew your certification every 2-3 years. Your certified professionals should be required to provide a new copy of their certification every time they complete the renewal process.



Unfortunately continuing education is not regulated in the fitness industry and you can receive credit for something as simple as reading a short article to completing a comprehensive specialist certificate program. Specialist Certificates are concentrated study in an area of practice such as older adults, the obese, chronic disease, Kettlebell training, etc, and should not be confused with Certifications. Specialist Certificates show that you have taken several hours of continuing education to implement a specific program, work with a particular sub population, or deliver a specific type of service. Specialist Certificates do not take the place of certification, but indicate concentrated study. Specialization is desirable in fitness professionals, indicates a higher level of education in a specialization, and can often dictate a higher level of professionalism and higher compensation.

There is a movement in the fitness industry to improve the quality and consistency of continuing education. Currently it can be costly and time consuming for certified professionals to maintain multiple certifications because many continuing education credits or units will only provide CE credit for specific certifications. A call for "accredited" continuing education by the fitness industry ([www.yourfitnessindustry.org](http://www.yourfitnessindustry.org)) is hoped to assure quality in continuing education material and make it easier for fitness professionals to navigate the CE maze by creating a widely accepted credential across certification organizations. The International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) is recommended for this standard. Look for IACET (ANSI Standards) accreditation and acceptance of IACET CEUs to become more prevalent in the future.

Help with achieving continuing education to remain certified is a great employee benefit and can work as a staff retention tool. Many facilities will enroll their professional staff in continuing education programs that provide a discount ([www.FitnessLearningSystems.com](http://www.FitnessLearningSystems.com)) or bring continuing education programs to the facility for staff to attend.

## Accountability

The third element for professional fitness staff is accountability. At this time there are no national or state registries or accountability standards for the fitness industry, although it is coming in the near future.

It is important for facility managers to understand how fitness industry certification and continuing education works so that you can effectively manage your staff's credentials. Hold your staff accountable for providing and updating as needed the following documentation:

- Proof of current certification and timely renewal.
- Proof of continuing education for degreed staff.
- Proof of continued CPR certification and if required, First Aid.
- Proof of professional liability insurance if they are not covered under the facility's plan.



## Appendix A

This list includes several Certifying Organizations that have achieved Accreditation with acceptable standards.

- AAPTE: Academy of Applied Personal Training Education (NCCA Accredited)
- ACTION Certification (NCCA Accredited)
- AFAA: Aerobics & Fitness Association of America (Accredited by the Distance Education Training Council "DETC")
- ACE: American Council on Exercise (NCCA Accredited)
- ACSM: American College of Sports Medicine (NCCA Accredited)
- Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches association (CSCCa) (NCCA Accredited)
- Cooper Institute (NCCA Accredited)
- IFPA: International Fitness Professionals Association (NCCA Accredited)
- ISSA: International Sports Sciences Association (ACE Accredited)
- NAFC National Association for Fitness Certification (IACET Accredited)
- NASM: National Academy of Sports Medicine (NCCA Accredited)
- NCCPT: National Council for Certified Personal Trainers (NCCA Accredited)
- NCSF: National Council of Strength and Fitness (NCCA Accredited)
- NESTA: National Exercise and Sports Trainers Association (NCCA Accredited)
- NETA: National Exercise Trainers Association (NCCA Accredited)
- NFPT: National Federation of Personal Trainers (NCCA Accredited)
- NSCA: National Strength and Conditioning Association (NCCA Accredited)
- Pilates Method Alliance (PMA)
- Training and Wellness Certification Commission (NCCA Accredited)
- United States Career Institute (DETC Accredited)
- W.I.T.S. World Instructor Training Schools (NCCA, CHEA recognized college accreditation)

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