

# How to Train and Maintain Your Fitness Staff



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Instructors are the face of your studio and the force behind your services. They handle a variety of business functions, from customer service to R&D initiatives to facilities management. You won't simply stumble upon these versatile professionals – you have to put in time and effort to train and maintain your staff. We've laid out the key factors of staffing your studio, so you can build a team of hardworking and high-value fitness pros.

# 1

# On-boarding

Get new hires started on the right foot.

Every manager wants the perfect staff of highly skilled, punctual and passionate professionals. But these individuals are hard to come by, and even harder to get on your team. Instead of looking for perfection, focus on potential. Know your must-haves, like certifications or time management skills, and qualities you can be more flexible about, like teaching style. With a thorough onboarding process and consistent support through training, your employees can grow into the perfect fit for your studio.

## Welcoming New Hires

First impressions are important. You'll want to manage new instructors' introduction to the workplace, as well as their introduction to your clients, especially class regulars.

To introduce new instructors to your workplace, create a welcoming and supportive environment. Don't throw them into a regular schedule right away – they need time to learn about the clients and the studio, and you need time to learn about their teaching style. Let them sub in for a few classes and make sure you're there to observe. You'll want to take notes, but don't forget to offer encouragement. A simple, "Great class!" at the beginning of their tenure can go a long way for a new instructor.

To introduce a new instructor to your clients, send an email blast, post on social or write up an interview on your blog to spread the word before they teach a class. Your regulars will warm up to the new face, and they'll be more comfortable with the instructor subbing in for their routine sessions. Your new instructor might be on a light schedule at first, but make sure they have ample time to interact with students to learn about the general clientele and get to know a few individuals on a first-name basis.

For more tips on welcoming new hires, read [How to Introduce a New Instructor at Your Fitness Studio](#).

# Deliver expectations that empower your staff.

## Setting Expectations

Communication is the key to any good relationship — especially working relationships. When you're transparent about expectations for your employees, you're giving them clear guidelines to succeed. Therefore, adopt a code of conduct to share with your new employees. This shouldn't be a list of rules meant to stifle your staff, rather a set of values and standards that maintain the right environment for your staff and clients.

Address some key issues, such as:

- Scheduling and time management
- Customer service
- Facilities management

Of course there's a line between managing and micromanaging. Some standards are non-negotiable, but recognize that every instructor will have a different style that is worth nurturing as different clients might gravitate to different teaching methods and class environments. Deliver expectations that empower your staff instead of overpowering them.

## Developing a Training Plan

Career growth isn't just great for instructors — it also gives back to your studio, empowering your best and brightest to offer better services. Be transparent about your evaluation criteria and time lines so that new hires know what success looks like and can begin working towards it.

Typically, owners advance instructors based on an internal ranking system and/or external certifications. Different fitness genres require different types of training, and while some follow a stricter and more formal set of requirements, all of it is based on experience. Create a basic tier-based system that you can share with new staff. Once the required hours are met or trainings are completed, you'll hold an evaluation to determine if instructors are ready to move higher on the pay scale and into a more demanding class-load.

# 2

## Quality Control

Empower your staff to grow their careers – and the business.

Both new and established instructors need professional support to grow their careers and continue to offer great services. When you prioritize your staff's growth, you also prioritize your business's growth; after all, your instructors' ability to attract new and returning clients will grow with their skill level. These are they keys to effectively manage the quality of your instructors.

## Evaluation Techniques

A concrete way to foster a supportive and growth-oriented environment is to build a solid evaluation process. Evaluations help you gauge overall instructor performance and also identify areas where they need additional support.

When you're developing an evaluation process, keep these three principles in mind:

**Objectivity** - Evaluate each instructor against the same set of criteria. Stick to a rating scale, though a bit of note-taking can help you remember specific instances or ideas in the feedback process.

**Frequency** - Perform evaluations routinely throughout the

year and always communicate to your instructors when to expect them.

**Application** - Be feedback-oriented throughout the process. Develop evaluation forms that focus on concrete areas of performance, and when you offer feedback, make sure instructors know how to apply it to their teaching methods.

For more detailed evaluation techniques, read our [Guide to Instructor Evaluations](#).



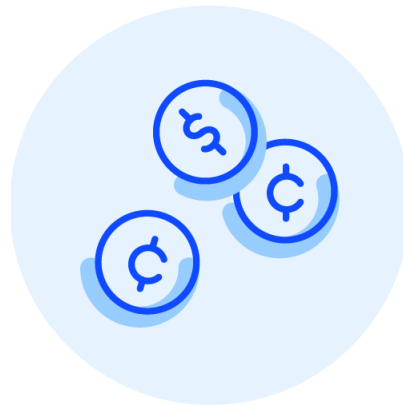
## Continuing Education

Formal evaluations offer a systematic approach to professional growth, but there are more, less-formal initiatives you can take to develop your instructors' skills. Here are a few tactics that place an emphasis on learning:



### Peer-to-peer teaching

Set up a class observation rotation, or start a lunch-and-learn style series where instructors can research a topic and present their findings to the rest of the staff.



### Subsidize training

Approve and pay for a portion of your instructors' continuing education. This can encourage your staff to expand their skills, or learn entirely new ones.



### Field trips

The fitness community is extremely diverse, full of different fitness genres, studio types and teaching styles. Inspire your staff with a trip to a studio unlike your own.

Get more ideas about continuing education [here](#).

# 3

## Payment

Pick the right employment and pay structure for your studio.

Payment is a hot-button issue regardless of the industry you're in, so approach it carefully. When you're building a staff, you'll likely deal with both employees and contractors, as well as a variety of standard or more innovative payment models. Read up on the basics of staffing and payroll so you can tackle payment with the right foundation.

## Employees vs. Independent Contractors

One of the biggest questions you'll face in the staffing process is whether to hire employees or work with independent contractors. The literal distinction lies in tax status, but there's a more essential difference between the two that boils down to your level of control.

### Employees

With employees, you enter into an agreement that dictates the terms of their employment such as when they work, how they work and how much they make. Employees often work under non-competes, which means they can't do the same job for someone else. While these terms certainly offer you more control over their output, you're also accepting more

financial responsibility. You will be required to withhold taxes, as well as match employee social security and Medicare tax, pay unemployment tax and report all paid wages to the IRS. Depending on the scale of benefits packages you offer (see Chapter 4), you might also include health coverage and paid time off as part of their wages.

### Independent Contractors

Independent contractors can perform a service for you, but they are non-employees and you have far less control over how or when they work. Though you can enter into a contract that lays out certain terms, the IRS distinguishes these workers as largely autonomous.

You might have less control, but you also have less responsibility to the worker. Independent contractors are meant to take care of their own finances, so you don't have to worry about offering benefits or withholding taxes.

### **Pros and Cons**

If you choose the employment route, you'll trade more financial liability for more control. Employees guarantee you a solid roster of trusted workers, but the cost can often outweigh this benefit. On the flip side, independent contractors can save you money, but you can only expect so much out of them. It's not likely contractors will be as invested as standard employees, and you can't keep them from competing by working at other studios, either.

Read about [the pros and cons of each type of worker](#) to help you decide which one is right for your business.

## **Payment Models**

Lots of factors play into staff happiness, including studio environment, co-worker and management relationships and any kind of perks offered. But nothing affects morale like compensation. Think carefully about how you're going to pay your

staff and instructors, as there is more at stake than an easy-to-manage payroll.

### **Hourly Rate vs Class Rate**

These two flat-rate models are standard in the industry, helping you predict payroll and helping your staff stay on top of their earnings. An hourly rate is the traditional method of payment for employees, while class rates are typically used to pay independent contractors.

### **Pay-Per-Head Options**

Some studios choose to incentivize class attendance by paying instructors based on the number of clients that show up. While this can encourage instructors to recruit more clients to your studio, it can be a tricky model to manage. Not only is it difficult to stay on top of payroll projections, but it can also create an overly-competitive feeling between instructors and some resentment towards management if classes are underbooked.



# Retention

Great instructors are hard to find.  
Learn how to keep them around.

Once you've found a great staff, introduced them to your clients and invested in their careers, it's hard to believe that you could lose them. But turnaround is the harsh reality for many studio owners, especially those relying on independent contractors. If you want to hang on to your staff, adopt a retention strategy from the very beginning of their tenure.

### **Set Check-Ins**

Similar to the evaluation process, check-ins are a routine way of connecting with your staff. While the exact purpose of each check-in is up to you, the idea is to open up the lines of communication so that your employees feel comfortable talking to you about their performance, their career goals and their wants and needs in the workplace. Whether you opt for group lunches or one-on-ones, think of these sessions as a way to gauge the health of your studio.

These less formal conversations can help you learn interesting details that later become vital. Perhaps your yoga instructor is itching to get into aerials – is this an opportunity to invest in continuing education? Or maybe your popular cycling

instructor is feeling uninspired – is it time to let him experiment with a new class format? These open exchanges can not only help you make important retention decisions, but they can also be a retention exercise in themselves, as your employees will appreciate the open and empathetic management style.

### **Create Incentives**

Pay is likely your employees' number one concern (see Chapter 3), but you can offer additional incentives that help attract and retain employees. Depending on your staff employment status, you'll be able to offer two types of incentives: perks and benefits.

# There are incentives for small businesses choosing to subsidize health

## Benefits

Benefits are a form of compensation outside of regular wages, usually covering things that your staff would otherwise have to fund themselves. The big one is health insurance. Though it comes with a sizable price tag, there are incentives for small businesses choosing to subsidize health coverage, and it makes for an extremely competitive package to offer employees.

Another benefit to consider is paid time off. But before you offer two weeks of vacation days, think about a few factors. Do you have a large enough staff to cover classes when an instructor is out? How much advance notice will you need from your staff? What is your plan around popular holidays, when multiple employees might want the same days off? Develop a written time-off policy, and stick to it carefully.

## Perks

Perks encompass all the extras you can offer staff. They're discretionary, and you can get quite creative with them. Here are some commonly offered perks:

- Subsidized training and certifications
- Self-promotional opportunities, like a professional photo session

- Friends and family discounts
- Discounts on retail offered
- Discounts at partners in the health and wellness industry
- Snacks and beverages
- Paid-for group outings or retreats

Get more insight on benefits and perks from this article: [Should You Offer Benefits to Employees?](#)

## Support Career Progression

Be mindful of the career ladder. Everyone on your staff has unique career ambitions, and as their manager you are the gatekeeper to their success. This is why you want to lay out expectations through a thorough on-boarding, clear training schedules and promotion expectations, routine evaluations and feedback and regular check-ins. Let your staff know that there is room to grow at your studio.

Fitness studios are less hierarchical than many other business types, but that doesn't mean internal politics don't play a role. When one instructor gets promoted, another inevitably feels overlooked. It's your job to stay on top of,

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yet out of the fray of studio politics. How do you do this? The best defense is open and transparent communication.

When you make an HR or staffing decision, whether it's something big like a new hire, or something simple like new attire standards, you need to understand how the decision will play out amongst the entire staff. Then you can use communication as a tool to prepare your staff and mitigate negative effects.

[Read even more about keeping your employees happy.](#)



People management is one of the most difficult and simultaneously rewarding aspects of running a business. As a core function of your success, it's important to recruit, train and retain instructors so that you can build a thriving studio environment and offer dynamic services to your clients. You can invest in your staff in small ways, through gestures like casual check-ins and thoughtful perks like group outings. You can also invest in big ways, committing to growth-focused training and competitive packages. Make talent a top priority, and your business will benefit.



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