

So You Want to Be a *Personal Trainer?*

Advice on preparing for a career in strength and fitness training

If someone is serious about getting in shape and has some disposable income, they can have their pick of just about any personal trainer at a nearby gym. But because the industry is unregulated, they'll probably find that few of these trainers have any formal academic background in exercise science. Most do have certifications, and almost all have hard bodies, plenty of enthusiasm and good teeth. Personal training can be an extremely well-paying profession, and these trainers want to expand their client list – the question is, are they worthy of their clients' business?

Although the media loves to highlight former athletes who have become great coaches, consider that being an elite athlete or having a great body is not necessarily any indication that these individuals will be great trainers. In 2007 Shaquille O'Neal, whose academic degree is in business, was involved in *Shaq's Big Challenge*, a television series about Shaq's efforts to help six obese middle school children, ages 11 to 14, lose weight and pass the President's Physical Fitness Test. Shaq's methods brought criticism. Noted Martin Binks, PhD, a consulting professor in the Duke Department of

Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, "In *Shaq's Big Challenge*, we saw children coerced into emotional submission, humiliated in front of millions, and their struggle with weight turned into a public spectacle."

If you are interested in becoming an outstanding personal trainer, first get an academic degree in the field of exer-



BFS clinician Jeff Sellers teaching the Six Absolutes of Perfect Technique.

cise science. Then, increase your knowledge of the field of personal training by becoming certified. For the personal training market, some popular organizations that offer certifications are the National Strength and Conditioning Association, American College of Sports Medicine, American Council on Exercise, IDEA Health and Fitness Association, and the National Academy

of Sports Medicine. The magazines published by these organizations, such as *Fitness Journal* offered by IDEA, do an excellent job of providing trainers with practical information about the business side of personal training.

Unfortunately, not all certification organizations have high standards, and with more than 300 organizations certifying exercise instructors, it may be difficult to determine just how qualified a so-called certified trainer is. Further, few of these organizations require that their trainers demonstrate their skills in practical, hands-on examinations. Can you imagine using this standard in other professions, such as dentistry? Would you want someone working on your teeth if their training consisted of reading books and passing multiple-choice exams?

Even if your interest is in personal training for the average adult, non-athletic market, consider obtaining a strength coaching certification. One of the fastest growing markets in the personal training industry is working with children and young adults, and with a tight economy, being able to work with a larger population base helps provide job security.

We invite you to consider the strength coaching certification offered by BFS. We have over

36 years in the field of working with young athletes, and our certification has both a hands-on exam and a continuing education requirement.

In summary, if you want to become a personal trainer, start with formal academic classes and then continue your education with certifications in the field. After all, the more you learn, the more you earn! BFS

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