

Women as Personal Trainers: *Strategies for Success*

Overcoming challenges in a male-dominated field

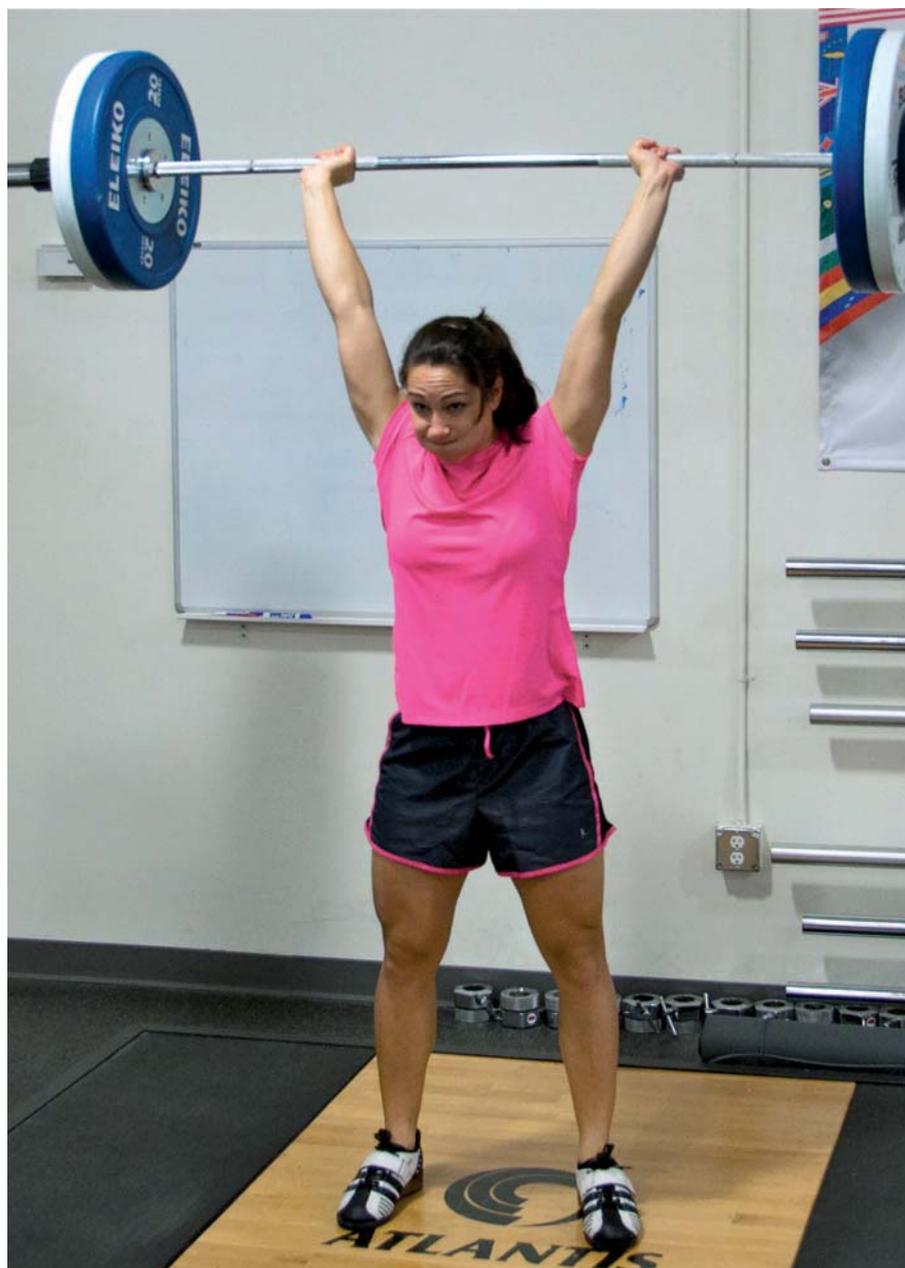
BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

Careers in fitness, physical education and coaching are some of the most satisfying and rewarding in the country today. They also are very fast-growing fields – the US Department of Labor projects there will be 24 percent more jobs for fitness workers and 30 percent more jobs for sports coaches by 2020. However, making a profitable career from coaching or training is not easy and typically requires long or odd hours, usually without employer-provided health insurance.

For example, the average salary for a fitness worker – the occupational category that includes personal trainers – was \$31,090 in 2010, which is \$10,000 less than the national average annual salary. Sport coaches earned \$28,340 on average. It's true that women have a lot of opportunities in both fields, but they also face a gender wage gap, not to mention the challenges relating to stereotypes about female trainers; in fact, men tend to dominate the upper echelons of the field. Despite these obstacles, if you have a passion for fitness, coaching or sports, you can achieve the success you want by making a plan to get the certifications and education you'll need for these fields.

The Market

A recent survey of hiring practices for personal trainers shows that more



Team BFS weightlifter Nikki Gnozzio is a collegiate strength coach who attributes much of her success to her commitment to formal academic education and continuing education through seminars.

than half of those who hire personal trainers are women. There is a slight trend of women preferring a female trainer, whereas men favor working with men. Women typically feel that a female trainer is more likely to be empathic and that they will be less self-conscious about their bodies than if they had a male trainer.

Female trainers are also thought to know how to train women so they won't "get too big." Many women fear that training with heavy weights will make them bulky, but this is not true. The reality is that heavy training will make women strong and a proper program may help them burn fat. This points to the importance of trainers knowing the physiological effects of weight training and having the skills to educate their clients.

Education

A college degree in the sciences is ideal for success as a personal trainer or coach. "A college education gives a general base of knowledge to enter the field, but it's not where you learn to be a good trainer," says Alexandra Bernardin, a trainer with more than a decade of experience in commercial gyms, strength and conditioning facilities, and training studios.

The best way to get practical experience is to train yourself, Bernardin says, and to do certifications that have practical, hands-on components, such as the BFS Total Program. Bernardin is certified through the Poliquin International Certification Program started by elite strength coach Charles Poliquin; it also has a hands-on practical component. A degree is necessary if you are interested in coaching in any school system, from elementary up through college, and with a bachelor's you will have greater career mobility.

Most clients tend to be unaware

of whether their personal trainer has a degree, but once they are attuned to a trainer's level of education, clients usually believe that a trainer with a degree will have a broader understanding of how to shape the body and prevent injury than a trainer without a degree.

Business and Interpersonal Skills

Although a bachelor's in kinesiology, exercise physiology, physical education, nutrition or even biology is ideal as a starter, business skills are also beneficial. Business skills give you more mobility because you'll know how to sell your services, which is necessary if you want to make any money in the private sector.

Sales skills allow you to build a clientele base, which will make you feel capable and gain confidence. By working with your clients you'll be able to actively hone your skills in program design, motivational style and interpersonal skills. Embracing the business and networking side of fitness can be difficult, and by taking a few business classes you can gain confidence in your ability to connect with and attract clients.

We in the business know that people prefer personal trainers who have strong interpersonal skills (the ability to listen and make friends), pay full attention to the client and actively document training progress. Clients of both genders want to feel special – this is an element of a personal trainer's job that differs somewhat from that of a strength coach.

Whether you are a trainer or coach, you will typically spend between two and four hours a week with each client or athlete. Most people don't spend this much quality time with anyone else, even their best friend, so you can understand how

critical it is to possess social skills and a friendly, motivating personality.

Continuing Education

Training seminars and conferences will help you expand your skill set and continually acquire knowledge. Seminars also allow you to meet and network with other trainers to generate business and new ideas. Nikki Gnozzio, a strength coach at Providence College, acknowledges that "it can be intimidating to be one of a handful of women out of hundreds of men at a training clinic, but the experience is critical and will forge the way for other women."

Although there are more female personal trainers than female strength coaches, training in the private sector is still very male dominated, particularly at the higher levels. The key to professional satisfaction and higher pay is to become educated in every sense of the word: school-based education with a degree, practical experience training oneself, and hands-on knowledge from internships and practical seminars.

Gnozzio explains that this comprehensive knowledge helps her break through barriers and change people's perceptions, and she suggests young trainers follow this model because it conveys capability and confidence. "I know I have a better chance of changing what I do than changing what other people do," says Gnozzio, so she reinforces the value of "getting the exact same training and education as men."

If you're thinking of becoming certified as a personal trainer or coach, BFS offers a variety of certifications that are targeted at high school coaches and physical education teachers. If you want to work with youth, we recommend the BFS Total Program certification as a good place to start. **BFS**



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SLC	UT	1/19/2013
Timonium	MD	2/2/2013
Perry	FL	2/9/2013
Simi Valley CA	CA	2/9/2013
Montgomery City	MO	2/11/2013
Jackson	MS	2/16/2013
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SLC	UT	3/9/2013
Manchester	MI	3/23/2013
Seattle	WA	3/23/2013
Ft. Branch	IN	4/6/2013
Lebanon	KY	4/27/2013
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