

BEYOND STAFF TRAINING... FAR BEYOND... FAR, FAR BEYOND

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Staff training is a hot topic and every gym and program has their own ideas of what works.

But change is a constant—times change, people change, and this article asks the question, “*Have we kept current in our staff education?*”

Can anyone relate to this? You give a brilliant staff training session, coughing up your hundred years of wisdom and experience for your new young puppies to hear, absorb and impact their teaching lives forever.

After, you’re secretly in awe of yourself. You feel good about the event (your ego does, anyway).

The next day, you see one or two (but not all) of the attendees trying some of your ideas. You think, “The rest will catch on soon.” But after

two weeks, they don’t. Everyone and everything is back to the way it was pre-training.

As a trainer and clinician, I’ve been confused the past five years at National and Regional Congresses. The presenters are providing attendees with such valuable information and sharing their vast experience. They’re committed to relaying new and vital insights, and yet, less than half of the people in the room are taking notes, typing on a device or recording the info in any way, shape or form.

How will they remember revolutionary ideas and enlightening thoughts gained through all of the weekend’s lectures? The specific wisdom that can change their teaching styles and benefit countless children.

And, what they do remember, how many more valuable details fade away by the time they return home?

Those of us who work hard on our training materials, who have decades of experience to pass on, want our listeners to get maximum benefit from our teachings.

Gym owners who spend hard earned money sending staff to Congress or bringing speakers into their gym, want to know the company and its culture are getting the greatest return from their investment of time, education and money.

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BEYOND STAFF TRAINING ...CONTINUED

▶ If you don't take the knowledge and apply or plan with it immediately, that fresh, new, gleaming insight tends quickly fade within 24 hours. It becomes a distant memory in 48 hours, and at 72 hours, it's usually put away in a pile, a file, a drawer or notebook not to be seen again for months or even years later.

HALF AND HALF

Remember, only half of training is presenting information, putting it in front of the hungry eyes of the trainee, teacher or coach.

What's the second half? *Getting that trainee, teacher or coach to use/apply/implement his/her newfound intelligence. Right away. Daily. From that point on.* That's where knowledge morphs into wisdom.

So how do we do it? The challenge becomes getting staff to use/ implement/apply the newfound enlightenment to their current skill set and, as the cherry-on-top, even pass it on to the next generation of young coaches.

WHAT'S A MILLENNIAL?

I advise that we humbly accept the fact that most of us are preaching to a different generation than our own.

We're well into a new century, but many of us are still clinging to learning attitudes of the past, which makes educating our people more frustrating.

So, now it's time to play *Meet the Millennials!* Millennials are the generation of humans born between 1982 and 2002. And as a Baby Boomer (1943-1960) or a Gen Xer (1961-1981), our leadership skills will be highly upgraded by learning about our Millennials, understanding them and respecting them.

On the subject of...

Training: Millennials expect it, but they want to be *involved* (not just lectured to).

Learning Styles: They're more receptive to collaborative and networked, less classroom type, learning.

Communication: More collaborative, less top-down, the-boss-rules style.

Problem solving: More team-oriented, less hierarchial.

Feedback: They want it often, not the no-news-is-good-news or once-a-year performance review models of the Flintstone era.

This list goes on but that should set the stage for our next phase: *What are the solutions?*

LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS?

Millennials want to be involved in their own education. We must be willing to review our established methods of staff training and adjust accordingly to fit this new generation of adults.

FLASH BACK— FLASH FORWARD

From 1980-2006, I owned a gym in Southern California, *Imagymnation Gymnastics Center*. Here are some free samples of our training systems:



1 STARTING WITH NEW STAFF ORIENTATION:

The Baby Boomer way would be telling them about key locations in your building during a sit-down meeting. The Millennial way is to hand them a map of your facility. Tell them they have one day to find all the bathrooms and circle them; the drinking fountains and star them; also, identify

the areas of the first aid kits; where to get ice; the emergency exits; the emergency equipment (flashlights, splints, life rafts, stun guns, etc.).

Now, sit back and watch out of the corner of your eye and listen out of the corner of your ear as they scamper around the gym in full "discovery mode." They ask questions, they meet other staff much sooner (networking, collaboration), and they sweat and wrestle with a challenge. That's when the real learning occurs.

Study their tenacity, their energy, their persistence. It's your crystal ball to their future in your organization.

The new staff members, who have true potential, love the "gamer-ness" of it. You'll also find those with less enthusiasm for the job tend to drag though the process, try to get one staff person to give them all the answers or see it as an annoyance. That's your first red flag. Pay close attention to it.



2 SELF-DIRECTED TRAINING

We also had a self-directed training system where each week for three months, new hires would be accountable for accomplishing a list of teaching responsibilities and skills. Each day, the sheet would be checked and discussed. Each successive week, the duties grew in complexity and responsibility.

Three months may be a lot to some, but the results were indisputable: It was producing incomparable teachers, even at age 16 or 17.

Those who self-directed their training sheets responsibly or even surpassed their weekly goals became amazing, motivating teachers of major league awesomeness. Those who just wanted "a job" or weren't



▶ passionate about teaching were flagged early within the first few weeks. If there was no subsequent improvement, we re-evaluated that person's position within our organization.

This system saved weeks, often months of payroll, not to mention frustration, time, morale and company image.

3 TEACHING COMMUNICATION

In one training unit, we'd discuss the raw power of a positive teaching vocabulary and how 90 percent of all teaching is *communication*. Watch the greatest coaches and teachers you admire. You'll very rarely, if ever, hear them start a sentence with "No" or "Don't," "You can't," "Stop" or other verbal punches.

Once we begin a dialogue with one of these strong words, it immediately creates a degree of tension between parties. Rather than nag our staff about not using negatives, teachers carried around a 3x5 index card. For a month, whenever their vocabulary veered toward negativity, they'd put a quick check mark on the card. This is a self-discovery exercise to make them aware of the societal negativity most of us sponge up and how serious educators realize how unnecessary it is.

4 EMERGENCY SCENARIOS

An idea we developed applicable to all gyms was "Emergency Scenarios." Depending on where you are on the map, you have your own menu of natural disasters. In California, earthquakes, fires and mud slides are among the common issues we faced.

In 1993, our earthquake procedure was one short paragraph buried deep

in the bowels of a staff manual. After the major 6.9 Northridge quake of 1994, our gym was badly damaged and had to be closed for a week. Our priorities changed along with most of our walls and furniture. Our earthquake procedure grew to four full pages, complete with illustrations and checklists.

That still didn't guarantee staff would read it. Along with the paper system, every six months we'd have a staff "disaster movie drill." All teachers and office people would be in their regular stations. Then, we would run through the disaster scenario as if it were happening in that moment. I would provide details to the coaches as to what was going on to see how they would react.

They would then kick into Superhero-Survival-Team mode and blast through our rehearsed drills. We'd get better each time and proceeded to create similar drills for major and minor injuries, power outages and other common gym occurrences. Whatever your local natural disasters may be, make sure that you and your staff are prepared to handle anything.

HAPPY TRAILS...

The key to effective staff training is involvement and collaboration.

We can no longer think that when throwing information at our employees, they'll be in awe of our infinite wisdom and be furiously scribbling down notes and laying awake at night in anticipation of using every sparkling jewel of knowledge we tried to impart on them. Or, that every word

and concept will be retained in their minds and used every teaching day.

It's up to us, the trainers, to create experiences, adventures and involvement—*exactly* like the most awesome instructors do for their students.

If you're not already training in this manner, start adapting. Today.

Just as we'd like the newer generations to use the knowledge we give them, will you now use/apply/implement your new knowledge to build better training programs and in turn, better people and a stronger culture?

I wish you luck, but more importantly, know there's much fun to be had in this project. Do it and you will completely change the game for your program.

