

CHANGE AGENTS

writer Laura Miller

Just as the human body is a living, changing organ, so too is the personal training industry. Right now, it's in such good shape that its appeal as a career has never been greater. Do you have what it takes to become a successful personal trainer?

How many people you know employ a personal trainer? No doubt more than a handful. Once strictly the domain of the rich and famous, today hiring someone to meet your individual fitness needs is becoming increasingly common – and feasible – what with options such as small group training sessions and online coaching available.

As the market for hiring personal trainers has grown, so too has the number of people wanting to become personal trainers. This has led to a vibrant industry constantly updating itself and spawning new trends at a rapid rate.

While some in the industry steer clear of new fads, tending towards the tried and true methods of old, others embrace new techniques – from Power Plates and Kettlebells to Foam Rollers and TRX, seeing their potential to engage clients as well as offer previously unstudied benefits. The beauty of personal training is, luckily, that it is personal. Not every training technique will suit every client, just as not every personal trainer will get on with every client. This is an industry built first and foremost around relationships, and secondly, for that relationship to prosper, around results. And, as the saying goes, different strokes for different folks: Personal trainers specializing in different

techniques are guaranteed to find clients looking for exactly those services.

It's obvious why hiring a personal trainer is becoming more and more popular: personal attention + tailored programmes + cost-induced motivation + an inspiring role model = results. And in this body conscious world we live in, results are all about looking good, feeling great and enjoying better health. But what's in it for the trainers themselves? The benefits of personal training as a career include being your own boss, flexible hours, keeping yourself in shape and helping others. It is also potentially a lucrative business – if you are successful – as those who can afford individual attention don't usually mind paying for it.

Are some people better suited to becoming personal trainers than others? Definitely, and personality is key. Do you have the desire to help others achieve their goals and the ability to motivate? Do you have the discipline to practice what you preach, walk the talk and look the part? There is perhaps no other industry in which these clichés can be applied so literally. A healthy self-image and confidence in your own body is crucial if you're even thinking of becoming a personal trainer.



Once you've determined that you've got what it takes to find your niche in the new age fitness training arena, how exactly do you go about doing this? Who better to tell you than Asia's leading personal trainers and wellness coaches through their own personal stories?

ANDREW COX



Meeting Andrew Cox in person, it is immediately obvious why this charismatic wellness coach and educator has had such an impact on the personal training community in Hong Kong. His energy is contagious, he is a fount of sports science knowledge and he clearly lives the lifestyle he advocates.

A regular contributor to publications in the Asia Pacific region in the fields of fitness and wellbeing, he is a master trainer and lecturer for the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM – www.nasm.org), a lecturer for PTA Global (www.ptaglobal.com) and Asia's only accredited Power Plate trainer through Hong Kong's Optimum Performance Studio (OPS – www.optimumperformancestudio.com). He is also a level two Kettlebell instructor and has many other certifications to his name including yoga, TRX and aquatics.

Fascinated by movement and the psychology of performance, Andrew draws on his experience as a sportsman and martial artist and combines that with the latest from the human movement sciences to deliver informative and entertaining workshops, group and one-on-one personal training sessions and swim schools through his company, Innate Fitness (www.innatefitnesshk.com).

What led you to become a personal trainer?

I grew up in Australia and from a very young age was into sports. I coached my first team at 12 by default as captain of the waterpolo team – we had an unreliable coach! My father was a coach in the sport rugby league and he was always lending me books on training and performance. From the age of 16 I was playing at a national level in sport, but while I was OK at all things physical, I wasn't as good as I wanted to be. I was around the great players but I wasn't one of them! I often reflect on that now and believe my inadequacies drove me to be interested in performance and gave me the ability to empathise, crucial in this industry. At 18, I broke my hand — a fortunate mishap as it allowed me to help out a famous rugby league player with his motivational sports clinics in schools. I discovered a love of working with kids that I still have today. I continued to play sport very competitively until the age of 24 – a great physical education. I only properly got into personal training after arriving in Hong Kong seven years ago after setting up swim coaching clinics for kids. Personal training was a natural evolution, and the next step was becoming a trainer of trainers.

Where is the personal training industry heading?

There are so many interesting directions in the industry today, no doubt because it is growing at such a rapid rate. It's not really surprising when you look at the need – the state of the human animal. Working with children is going to be increasingly important. We are at a stage in history where we're failing like never before – this is the first generation of children that are forecast to have a shorter lifespan than their parents according to Dr Dean Ornish.

I also believe that the spiritual and emotional elements of training are going to feature more prominently as time goes by. PTA Global offers tools for assessing a client's stress profile, and while stress is the stimulus for growth, it's very important not to overstress an already stressed system, as this might be a catalyst for breakdown – whether physical or emotional.

Nutrition is also becoming more intricately linked to personal training. If you boil nutrition down, you need to count nutrients not numbers, and personal trainers need to be aware of this. Paul Chek of the C.H.E.K Institute has phenomenal info on digestion, nutrition and movement, and he's a stickler on being a role model for your clients.

How important are a personal trainer's certifications?

Very important. From a litigation standpoint as well as from a professional standpoint, you need certifications. To be a successful personal trainer, you need the peaches and cream combo – sport and exercise experience (this gives you the ability to empathise) plus sport and exercise science so you know how to manage a client's energy correctly.

Which courses would you recommend in Asia?

In my opinion, NASM is a great place to start because it gives you a system you can apply to all your clients — whether a retiree or a professional athlete. A system is a coordinated body of methods that allows you to achieve reproducible results. This is the course I teach most frequently — in Singapore and Korea as well as in Hong Kong — through OPS. With NASM providing an excellent foundation, I'd then recommend PTA Global courses inspired by the likes of Paul Chek and Gary Gray (www.grayinstitute.com), masters of functional science training.

What do you need to make it as a personal trainer?

The first thing you need is empathy — this is what people are hiring you for, otherwise they might as well use one of the awesome online fitness programmes available on iPads and the like. You need to be able to feel what your client feels and move how they move to properly guide and inspire them. You also need to walk the talk and have the physical prowess to demonstrate what needs to be done. Humans are predisposed to mirror one another, so by providing a good example, your client is more likely to benefit.

BRYAN HOARE



The General Manager of MesaStila Wellness Retreat in Java, Indonesia (www.losaricoffeeplantation.com), Bryan Hoare is one of the most experienced fitness experts in Asia. He is renowned for his leadership in cutting-edge, creative and developmental fitness training, from designing and utilising Jungle Gyms and adventure training in the desert, on the beach and in the mountains, to extreme cycling and running, open-water swimming, functional training and human-powered water sports. He got started in the fitness industry aged 17 in 1987 — the Jane Fonda era — as an aerobics teacher and basketball coach, and later acquired two Masters Degrees, one in applied physiology (M.Sc. Exercise & Nutrition Science), the other an MBA in Leadership and Human Resources Development. In addition, he has worked on balancing physical fitness with emotional and intellectual development, personal and spatial awareness, problem solving and forms of mobile meditation. It is no wonder, then, that Bryan does not consider himself a personal trainer, but more a guide to lifestyle change and improved performance.

What called you to work in the fitness industry?

I grew up in Papua New Guinea, and while I wasn't great at the academic side of school, I always excelled in sports. I started coaching at a young age and later took a Bachelors Degree in Sports Science. This got me fixated on the human body and what it can do, how it can be trained to do ANYTHING, from running across a desert to lifting

enormous weights to developing immense skills like those required in golf or tennis. I enjoyed developing myself and especially gained satisfaction from helping others to achieve their goals and improve themselves through exercise. Exercise is a cure-all; with the right prescription (direction), exercise can treat depression, rehabilitate a broken body or help people see themselves in a different light because of the positive effect it has on the nervous system.

How important are your certifications in your success as a wellness consultant?

There are a lot of courses available, from two weeks to four years, and I did my fair share of them (too numerous to mention) between 1987 and now. These courses serve their purpose, but the essential element needed by personal trainers is the desire to help others and get satisfaction from seeing people develop their potential. Many people go into personal training because it's 'cool', but that soon wears off. To be a really good personal trainer requires time and commitment and the constant seeking of knowledge – to research what one reads in glossy magazines and really check out the science behind the facts and myths that are out there.

Who are your clients today and what are they looking for?

Having been in the fitness industry for nearly 25 years, I have seen enormous changes

over time. Today, people are more informed about fitness, but although they know more than they did in the 80s, it doesn't always equate to taking the necessary action. When it comes to participating in a guided lifestyle improvement programme, the people I work with are considering how to reduce their levels of stress, improve their self-confidence, train for a specialised sport or physical activity that they have set their sights on, reduce aches and pains, relax more effectively, lose fat, gain strength, recover from injury...the list is endless. What is absolutely fundamental with every person I work with is that my programme is personalised and flexible.

Where would you recommend studying to become a personal trainer in Asia?

Having a university degree is the best start, but there are many ways to be the best. Paul Chek's C.H.E.K Institute (www.chekinstitute.com) offers very in-depth programmes, and I like the insightful articles on up-to-the-minute scientific research that Peak Performance publishes (www.pponline.co.uk).

Some fitness clubs require specialised training certificates and that should be a consideration. I think that the ACSM, ACE, YMCA, NASM, AFPA, NCSF and NSCA certifications are all excellent, but I personally don't think that any course of less than 500 hours can offer enough background to train someone effectively



— but you've got to start somewhere. Courses that cover Pilates (Stott), yoga (Yoga Alliance), Group-Exercise (Les Mills) could be included in this. Courses should always offer both practical and theoretical elements and my suggestion would be to do as many as possible and to critically assess the strengths of each.

Are there any particular areas you'd recommend specialising in?

With anything new, it's always important to find the balance between offering something that is attractive (perhaps sensationalised) and ensuring its efficacy and integrity. Current areas of influence include: People Having Fun (e.g. Zumba); Endurance Training (eg. Ultra Running or Triathlon); Adventure Training (e.g. Trekking in the Himalayas or paddling kayaks in Alaska); Core Training (e.g. TRX or Pilates); Bootcamp (e.g. Being creative outdoors); Gym Workouts (e.g. Kinesis by Technogym); and Pain Management (e.g. Pressure Point Therapy or Myofascial Release). Ultimately, being creative and leading rather than simply following the trends will always stand one in good stead.

PATRICK REYNOLDS



The founder of the online Peak Condition Project (PCP – www.thepeakconditionproject.com), Patrick Reynolds is part fitness guru, part philosopher — a man with a very sane outlook on being healthy. In 2008, turning 29 and living in Yokohama, Japan, he met Chen Zhongtao, a kung fu master. Chen helped him design a fitness and eating plan



that ultimately, over a four-month period, helped Patrick achieve his personal goal of being as fit as his hero, Bruce Lee. His motivation? To go in the opposite direction to his peers whose jobs and responsibilities were gradually leading them to neglect their health.

Patrick kept an online diary of his efforts, and the response to his blog was impossible to ignore. "I felt an almost moral obligation to share this plan with others. But I knew just giving someone the diets and exercises would result in failure. PCP is a whole package. You have to have the social aspects in place: a hero to aim for and a community supporting you and holding you accountable."

Patrick's tailored 90-day online PCP programme has so far changed the lives (diets and shapes) of more than 500 individuals based all over the world.

What led you to become a personal trainer?

I started my career doing aid work in Central Asia and North Africa. The problems were immense, yet I noticed that most of the locals were on a day-to-day basis healthier and happier than their wealthy counterparts in the developed world. It got me thinking about how to bring this vibrancy to the modern urban environments we live in. I never planned to become a personal trainer. I got started teaching yoga and meditation, then found over the years that for myself and my students, the real benefits only kicked in when the body was in good condition. So I started learning and teaching the basics of nutrition and muscle building.

Have personal training accreditations been important to your career?

Aside from yoga and meditation certifications, I have no particular personal trainer accreditation. Everything I've learnt has come from independent study and thousands of clients over the last 10 years. Personally, I'm sceptical of the urge to stack up a pile of certifications. Some of the best teachers I've ever worked with had no accreditation at all, and some of the worst had a wall full of certificates.

How would you describe your views and methods of personal training?

You don't need to spend a lot of money to get in the best shape of your life. What you do need is much harder to come by – time, every day. My focus is on stripping away the unnecessary paraphernalia that has attached itself to fitness. No equipment, no machines, no supplements – just you, real food and gravity. If anything, I find myself aligning with the Shaolin fitness regimen. Just the basics – sit ups, lunges, squats, etc. As far as nutrition goes, my biggest influence has been Michael Pollan (www.michaelpollan.com).

Why is the online social element crucial to PCP's success?

Humans are social creatures. If other people know you've made a commitment to something and are watching your progress, you tend to stick with it. What we found is that this fundamental quality of humanity works just as well online. Telling your story on your blog and getting feedback and support from others entangles you in a social web. Even if you want to quit, the peer

pressure and fear of letting down the team will keep you going until your motivation picks up again. Without the logs and weekly photos, I'm convinced PCP wouldn't work at all.

How do you stay current?

I read everything fitness related, pore through anatomy books and read the latest scientific literature. My clients are some of my best teachers. They'll ask me about my thoughts on some new diet craze and I'll have to do the legwork to understand what that craze is about and how it may or may not be valid. But the key is to keep your core fitness philosophy throughout the torrent of data. You'll go crazy if you try to change your approach based on every new article or trend. For me, that philosophy is simple exercise and impeccable diet.

What trends are you seeing today and is there any particular market you'd recommend targeting?

As always, there's a constant churn of 'the next big thing'. Ten years ago it was power yoga, five years ago it was hip hop classes, two years ago it was Kaatsu training, and now everyone's flinging Kettlebells around. I don't recommend pursuing trends, but rather finding a system you like that works. In terms of target markets, office workers have the cash and the incentive to work hard and get in shape because they are sedentary for eight to 10 hours a day. Their bodies are literally falling apart underneath them and they can feel it. Plus, if you get one person in an office in great shape, you can bet the whole department will be dropping by their cubicle to ask how they did it!

What is the most important trait of a successful personal trainer?

You've got to be sincerely interested in both people and the human body. I meet lots of trainers who are good at just one of these. They'll get along great with their clients for example, but put no time into figuring out what actually works at the anatomical level. Or the other side of the coin, they'll know everything about the body but have cold and distant relationships with their clients. A deep understanding of both the human condition and the human body are key. 🌿

changing careers

Davide Butson, Kylie Fox and Sarah Robinson have all taken the leap of faith involved in changing careers to become personal trainers, and they all started out by getting their NASM 'Certified Personal Trainer' (CPT) certifications through OPS (www.optimumperformancestudio.com).



DAVIDE BUTSON

Davide was a successful graphic designer and fashion photographer who turned his own health around after meeting Dr Phil Maffetone (www.philmaffetone.com). He has since founded the phenomenally successful Circuit25 (www.circuit25.com) which offers personal circuit training in a small group dynamic.

What advice would you give someone wanting to become a personal trainer?

It's one of the fastest growing occupations in the world. The obesity epidemic is everywhere – even in Asia: 30 percent of Asian children are now obese. It is the perfect time to get into this profession, but you must bring more than knowledge if you want to get and retain clients. Functional training is a must for all personal trainers to know and understand. It's particularly useful for treating muscle imbalances and injuries.

What do you look for when hiring personal trainers?

They have to be encouraging, motivating and able to inspire – and get a crowd up and moving. My trainers have to be rock stars!



KYLIE FOX

Kylie was a professional dancer till the age of 27 when back pain led her to research personal training as a way to correct body imbalances and posture. She started working at the Hong Kong Golf Club after qualifying, and now looks after regular private clients.

What were the biggest challenges when you started out?

My biggest challenge was to realise that not everyone is after the same thing in a training session, and learning to read my clients. Some people want high intensity, some people want to cruise and have a chat, and it's easy to lose clients if you don't give them what they need. I usually sit down with a client in a fitness assessment and get them to clearly state their goals so you can work on them successfully together. I've also learnt that sometimes the chemistry just isn't there and not to take it personally. When I first started, I networked as much as I could. Once your name is out there, you can pick up clients easily. Networking really works in HK!



SARAH ROBINSON

After the birth of her daughter in 2011, Sarah struggled to find a post-natal fitness expert in the New Territories to help guide her back in to shape. She was also determined not to return to the finance world. Her research into postnatal exercise and her subsequent training is now being put into practice with the launch of Babyfit (www.babyfit.com.hk).

Why did you train through OPS and what did the NASM CPT course involve?

OPS is the crème de la crème of fitness studios in Hong Kong, and NASM personal training qualifications are recognised worldwide. The course was six weeks long and ran once a week on a Friday evening for three hours. It cost HKD 5,900. There was a vast amount of material provided along with study guides, DVDs, online resources and practice exams. To pass, you needed more than 70 percent on the final exam (100 multiple choice questions).

Why do you and your partner feel you have a recipe for success with Babyfit?

Our training concept is brand new to Hong Kong, and we know people in the city like to stay in shape. Babyfit offers mums a safe, effective, professionally guided post-natal group exercise programme incorporating cardio, strength, flexibility and resistance training. What's key is that it's social as well as physical, and they do it *with* their babies.