

Choosing a Personal Trainer

Many people are choosing to hire personal trainers to develop fitness programs to whip themselves into shape. This can be a smart thing for a person to do. After all, most people have a limited quantity of time. We all have busy lives and can't spend a lot of time researching and developing a program that yields no results. We need to maximize results while spending an appropriate amount of time doing so. So we go to someone whom we assume will have an expertise in this field: the personal fitness trainer. With this in mind then, how do you go about choosing someone to steer you through the labyrinth of fitness programs available? How do you find what's right for you? Following is some practical advice to help you with this.

1) What is the educational background of the trainer?

With the proliferation of the fitness industry, many fitness enthusiasts are touting themselves as trainers with little actual educational training. One of the first questions you should ask a potential trainer is what their educational credentials are. Obviously a university degree in kinesiology is best. This degree represents years of commitment and training in the fitness field as well as background knowledge in related fields. Next, find someone with some sort of certification in personal training. Keep in mind though, that some certifications are at an entry level of expertise into the field of fitness. Some certifications can be done in as little as 32 hours with a few hours practicum and participants can be as young as 16 years old. Remember that a person with absolutely no practical experience can 'purchase' these credentials. What this really means is a person can tout themselves a fitness expert after paying a fee, reading some material and passing a written test. Much like the Mexican plastic surgeons that acquired their credentials from overseas universities that don't exist.

It's very important to research what your personal trainer's background is. Your trainer needs the knowledge to guide you through a program with minimum risk of injury to you. Lack of progress in your regime is actually the least of your worries when you consider the potential risks a trainer takes on when developing your program. A trainer needs to have a solid knowledge base to be able to work with you in order to yield results without subjecting you to injury.

2) Clearly define your fitness goals.

Are you clear on what you want to achieve? If you are training for betterment in a particular sport, isn't it best that your trainer has some expertise in that particular field? Do you want to complete a marathon? Then go to someone whose knowledge is in marathon running. Do you want to improve aesthetics as well as achieve better health, as in increasing muscle mass and lowering body fat? Then find someone with a bodybuilding and nutrition background. Remember, if you need knee surgery, go to an orthopedic surgeon. Don't expect an oncologist to know how to repair an injured knee.

Let's assume that you have decided to train for the above stated reason. Ask your prospective trainer how long they have been involved in weight training. It's important to know that book smarts can't compare with someone who has a wealth of experience

with resistance training from years spent experimenting on themselves in the gym. There are many fitness zealots that feel that their love of fitness or sport is enough to make them a personal trainer, however, an enthusiast does not a trainer make. Look for a personal trainer that has education AND some life experience that you respect. Anyone can say that they've 'participated' in a fitness event. You need to decide what level of accomplishment is acceptable to you. It's reasonable to assume that a person who has ascended to a high level at the endeavor you are interested in, to have a vast amount of working knowledge in that field. As well, you may want to consider if the trainer is actually fit, muscular and lean him or herself. It seems odd to take advice from someone who doesn't practice or apply their advice to their own life. The old saying that 'the proof is in the pudding' says it all. Part of being a successful personal trainer is applying the knowledge they dispense. As a prospective client it should provide some reassurance that this person is not a snake oil salesman.

3) How much do they charge?

There is a fairly large disparity between fees for different trainers. This is a reflection of many things, including education and experience. For example, a trainer holding a four-year university degree would charge more than one with a weekend course. Or a marathon 'participant' would charge less as a trainer than a Boston Marathon winner. Keep this in mind when you are finding a trainer and recognize that it's true that you do *get what you pay for*.

3) What are the facilities like?

Some trainers will come to you, your home or your gym. Others will provide the venue. If the trainer is providing the equipment, keep quality and safety in mind. If your expert trainer has you training on a Weider multi-gym that looks as if it were purchased at a garage sale, you should be a little suspicious. You can tell much about the commitment of your trainer by the investment he has made in his business. You should be training on *commercial quality equipment* that undergoes regular safety inspections.

Is there a personal connection?

Part of a personal trainer's job is to motivate you and navigate your path to new personal fitness heights. You need to feel comfortable with the potential trainer. This chemistry is an intangible, but you should always trust your 'spider senses' when they tingle. Does he or she inspire you to adhere to your program? You need to ask yourself if a trainer will help you reach your goals even when you are feeling less likely to reach them.

Investing in yourself and your fitness is big business. There are many trainers that are willing to take your money without being accountable to you. Do the research and take the precautions to ensure that you find the right fit for you.

Shawna Kaminski

(Shawna is a long time personal trainer and teacher. She can help you develop the program you need. Check out how she's helping many with their fitness goals at: <http://members.shaw.ca/shawna.kaminski> . She does one-on-one personal training or she can work with you online by going to the 'online training' page on her website.)

