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FOR FITNESS PROFESSIONALS

MARKETING/MANAGEMENT

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TQM AND YOU Vault yourself into professional excellence by applying Total Quality Management principles to your fitness career.

By now, you have probably heard the phrase "Total Quality Management (TQM)" bandied about as a hot business trend. As a fitness instructor, a personal trainer, an aerobics coordinator, a program director or a facility manager or owner, you might be curious about how TQM can improve your services and make your business more profitable. Embarking on your personal TQM program will change the way you view your mission as a fitness professional, the way you do business and—most important—the way you view your clients and foster relationships with them.

TQM in a Nutshell: What Is It?

Total Quality Management is a mind-set you can adopt in all your business affairs and relationships. It means total commitment to improving your product or service. TQM is *not* a quick fix. It involves being conscious every day of the efforts you are making to offer your customers the finest products and services. It means proactively addressing customer challenges and complaints instead of just hoping they'll go away.

From a personal viewpoint, TQM is about improving the only thing you can improve in your life: yourself. As a human being, you can choose many of your actions, words, thoughts, and responses to other people and events. You can also choose the quality of what you produce or provide. By concentrating on improving, you strive to manage your behavior and attitudes so that you always put your best foot forward, personally and professionally.

Illustration: Tom Voss

Basic TQM Philosophies

TQM can be broken down into three areas: respecting your customers, striving for continuous self-improvement and building support teams.

Philosophy #1: Respecting Your Customers.

TQM means you show your customers a new attentiveness and are willing to be immediately responsive to their ideas and needs. For example, if you notice that several class members never seem to follow a certain choreography combination, that's something to look at. Maybe you

need to break down the sequence, try explaining it differently or throw it out (even if it is your personal favorite).

Philosophy #2: Striving for Continuous Self-Improvement.

TQM is also about career and self-development: By embracing TQM, you make a commitment to a lifetime of continuous study and training in technical product knowledge, customer service philosophies and relationship protocol.

According to Jeffrey E. Lickson, PhD, author of *The Continuously Improving Self*, three components are necessary for successful self-improvement:

Self-Awareness. You must be willing to honestly evaluate yourself and your values, beliefs and wants.

Self-Knowledge. You need to examine your past physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual

experiences to see how they have contributed to your world view and to the way you behave NOW.

Self-Discipline. This key component is critical to your TQM success. Your behavior must conform to your commitment to quality. For example, if you want to be a professional, it is important not to gossip. You won't want to spread rumors about coworkers or colleagues or complain to class members about facility management, however tempting this may be.

Philosophy #3: Building Support Teams.

With TQM you'll focus on the basics of teamwork, both with coworkers and with associates who can be helpful to you. Assess your own strengths, and then make sure you surround yourself with a team who can pick up where your assets leave off. For example, if

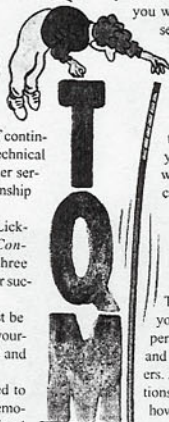
you work in a small facility that sells clothing and fitness goods and you aren't strong at retail sales or product knowledge, you'll want to make sure you have someone on staff who is skilled in these areas. Likewise, if you are a personal trainer, you will want to include a physical therapist and a nutritionist on your consulting team so you can refer your clients to these professionals.

TQM: Where to Start?

To start the process of TQM, you need to contemplate your personal feelings about quality and your way of relating to others. Answer the following questions about yourself, and notice how they affect your day-to-day interactions with customers:

IN BRIEF

TQM is about respecting your customers, striving for self-improvement and building support.



STARTING
New Guidelines
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