

ADD V.A.L.U.E TO YOUR PERSONAL TRAINING WITH AWARD-WINNING CUSTOMER SERVICE

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As a health and exercise psychologist in Melbourne, Elizabeth specialises in maximising an individual's wellbeing, holistically. She is a strong advocate for exercise within day-to-day wellbeing and addresses the motivational blocks people experience toward starting and maintaining a safe and effective exercise routine. She works with clients alongside their personal trainers to ensure that the physical and psychological needs of exercise are attended to. As a speaker/trainer, Elizabeth presents on this topic and the surrounding area of mental health. She has presented on these topics at FILEX and Network conventions. To contact Elizabeth e-mail eceli@netlink.com.au



As personal trainers, we know the value of what we offer. We love exercise, we love working out, testing out new techniques and challenging ourselves. That passion inspires us to share our knowledge and experience with clients who typically have motivational challenges preventing them from loving exercise the way that we do.

Our own motivation and energy, however, can be challenged by clients and members not valuing our one-on-one service as much as we do. If people with busy schedules have to cancel an appointment during their day, their training session is usually the first thing to go, making us wonder why we get up at 5am for early birds or hang around late at night for after hours clients. At times, finding our own energy and motivation can be a real challenge.

Exceptional customer service can increase the chances of retaining clients

over the long term. They will come back to you not only to reap the benefits of exercise, but also for your interpersonal skills and quality customer service.

If you achieve this, your own energy and motivation will be boosted by the realisation that your clients value you so highly that they want to train only with you, and will think twice before going to another personal trainer when you go on holiday.

Earlier this year, I realised the value of customer service skills when I received a Highly Recommended Australian Achiever Award. Until that point, I had no objective feedback telling me what my clients appreciated. It certainly gave me a rewarding reality check.

The process of receiving the Australian Achiever Award involves getting rated in key areas of customer service;

1. Time related service
2. Client needs
3. Care and attention

4. Value
5. Attitude
6. Communication
7. Referral
8. Overall perception

The feedback and ratings from my clients made me stop and think about how I delivered those customer service elements. This enormous insight helped me see that adding V.A.L.U.E to my one-on-one sessions made a big difference to clients receiving great customer service. So what exactly is V.A.L.U.E?

Value what you do as a personal trainer

Advise clients of your business policies

Listen to their needs, not just their goals

Unite those needs to the service you offer

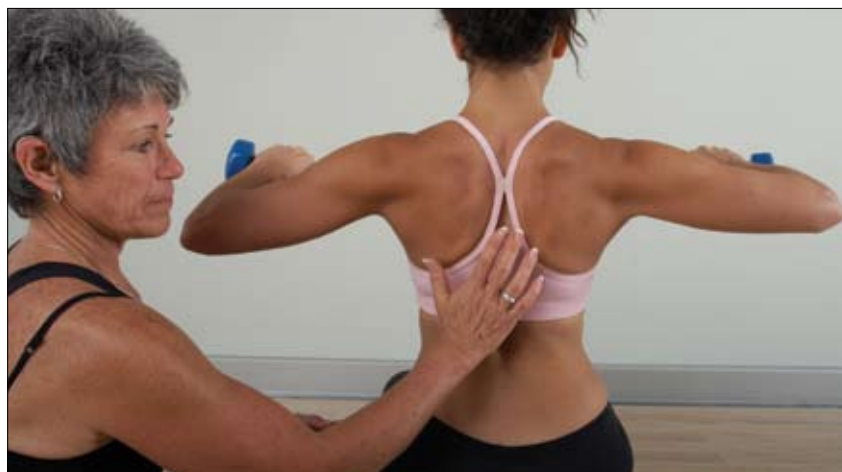
Expand your referral networks

VALUE WHAT YOU DO AS A PERSONAL TRAINER

The benefits of exercise are enormous. Table 1 lists just some of the benefits of exercise that we all know about.

(See Table 1 below)

With all of these benefits spanning our range of human functioning, we become more than simply personal trainers, we become health and lifestyle professionals. By reminding clients of these benefits, they will see more to the service you offer than the usual ‘Lose weight, tone up’, and it will give them more of a reason to turn up to a 6am session.



ADVISE CLIENTS OF THE POLICIES THAT MAKE YOUR SERVICE DELIVERY VALUABLE AND EFFICIENT

This requires you to set some professional boundaries in how you conduct your business. While there’s obviously more to building business acumen, this is a good way to increase professionalism around your personal training. A couple of tools I use include;

THE PERSONAL TRAINING AGREEMENT

This covers important details about what the client will get out of their personal training, the philosophy of working in partnership with their trainer, what they need to keep their trainer updated on, and the all important Terms and Conditions.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Timing policy – we start and finish on time, in the interests of both parties, and in fairness to other clients booked in after them. I stick to this 99 per cent of the time!

Payment policy – clients receive a package of session options and prices to choose from. They are informed of payment terms (typically upfront or instalment deadlines) and how best to make payment (cash, cheque, direct debit etc). If you are uncomfortable talking about money, remind yourself of the ‘V’ of V.A.L.U.E so it helps you build confidence and practice!

Cancellation policy – Unless it was a personal/medical emergency, personal training sessions cancelled within 24 hours of their scheduled time

are paid sessions. It is vital in making sure clients understand that you value both your time and theirs. After all, you couldn’t offer that timeslot to another client because it was put aside for *them*.

Placing these points into a formal document communicates to clients that you mean business. While I found it nerve-racking to enforce at first, the frustration of having unreliable clients made me persevere. It got easier and became a standard. Consider the professional companies that you choose to have dealings with; you wouldn’t expect to be able to break a contract with them at the very last minute without incurring some sort of penalty, because they need to ‘insure’ their quality and time. If you are not seen to be professionally valuing the service you offer, your clients will not either.

LISTEN TO CLIENTS’ NEEDS AND GOALS

The more you can uncover about why clients’ goals are important to them, the more you can target your service to their *needs*, not just their goals. By understanding client’s needs you can build better rapport. Good sales training can help you develop these listening and reflecting skills.

Listening to your client’s needs and goals, combined with the next point, creates a powerful customer service that builds rapport, loyalty and a personalised service with your clients.

UNITE CLIENTS’ NEEDS WITH YOUR SERVICE. ARTICULATE IT, EDUCATE THEM.

You know how your skills as a personal trainer are used to help clients meet

Table 1. Benefits of exercise

Medical Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces risk of cardiovascular disease, like blood pressure and cholesterol • Regulates blood sugar levels/type II diabetes control
Physiological Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops a stronger immune system • Develops muscular strength and improved metabolism
Physical Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases muscle strength • Increases bone density • Improves joint function and stability • Enhances flexibility
Psychological Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves stress • Relieves physical tension with stretching
Wellbeing benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more satisfying quality of sleep • Social interaction and confidence
Daily Lifestyle Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘ME’ time! – very important • Increased stamina and energy • Reduced risk of injury from falls/lack of co-ordination

their goals. In uniting your service to their *needs*, you take it beyond the usual 'lose weight, tone up'. These needs usually go beyond the physical benefits of exercise and into their lifestyle and world of wellbeing.

When clients lose sight of this big picture and the long-term benefits, motivational blocks arise and hinder progress toward their goals. For instance, they may switch their focus to calories and grams on the scales, which can quickly de-motivate, especially if their broader lifestyle needs and improvements go unacknowledged.

As a personal trainer, you can consistently make a point of articulating the added wellbeing and lifestyle benefits, which unites your service to your client's needs. This adds more value to the personal training that you offer. For example, if they report having difficulty sleeping, highlight how consistent exercise can help to improve sleep patterns over time. This, in turn,

will make them feel more energised and able to enjoy life.

The ethical element of uniting clients' needs with your service requires you to be clear about your professional competency. For example, as fitness professionals we learn a lot about knee injuries and nutritional guidelines, but it doesn't mean that we're qualified to give out advice that goes beyond our level of competency. Therefore, expanding your referral networks becomes important.

EXPAND YOUR REFERRAL NETWORKS

Clients present with a variety of ailments and conditions that go beyond the scope of a fitness professional. Having a chiropractor, physiotherapist, nutritionist, GP, osteopath and other health professionals within your referral network is vital to enhance the service you offer your customers.

An important area of health which

is neglected within many personal trainers' referral networks though, is mental health. Depression and anxiety affects 1 in 5 Australians. As a psychologist I see the great benefits exercise can bring to sufferers who are recovering with professional treatment. I also see how the symptoms of depression can negatively influence their exercise habits. It is advisable, therefore, to expand your referral network to include a psychologist with whom you have established a good working relationship.

Adding V.A.L.U.E to your service can enhance the professional customer service and business acumen of your personal training business. Professional customer service ensures that the lifestyle and wellbeing benefits of exercise and personal training are recognised and reinforced. This ultimately leads to clients valuing your personal training skills, and your award-winning customer service. [N](#)