

PERSONAL TRAINING. IS IT RIGHT FOR ME?

AN IN DEPTH LOOK AT EXPECTATIONS AND THE ROLE OF A
CERTIFIED PERSONAL FITNESS TRAINER

GET THE FACTS



National Federation of
PROFESSIONAL TRAINERS



BEING A PERSONAL TRAINER
HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL

GETTING CERTIFIED TO BE A TRAINER
HOW TO GET STARTED

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IS PERSONAL TRAINING RIGHT FOR ME?

Overview

A personal fitness trainer is a health and fitness professional who possesses the **knowledge, skills and abilities** to conduct safe and effective exercise that is **personal to the client's fitness goals**. A personal fitness trainer develops goal-oriented fitness programs, instructs and coaches, mentors and assists people in their desire to reach and sustain an improved level of fitness.

The personal training industry has been impacted in many ways over the recent years. It has more recently been popularized through increased exposure and fitness trainer fame on TV and social media. This is mostly a good thing because it demonstrates the importance of accountability and reminds people that there are trainers available to them who are dedicated to supporting their fitness goals; but, this exposure can also come with a price. The price of over-exposure and unrealistic expectations of what a trainer looks like and what a trainer does every day can impact people's decision to enter the field, for better or worse. The next best personal trainer could be swayed not to join this great industry because they're not rock hard and don't carry a megaphone. **Do not let reality shows or imagery of 'perfection' fool you into thinking that you're not (or that you are) qualified to be a great personal trainer.** Successful personal trainers are more than hard bodies, a lot more. It is crucially important to your impending success that you look at the many facets of personal training.

Now, before we ask the important questions that every up-and-coming trainer should ask themselves, let's note the way that the fitness industry and personal training can be impacted by changes in our environment. During the unprecedented impact of a viral pandemic, where almost every industry was negatively affected, quick calls to action and life-supporting safety measures were immediate. We, as fitness enthusiasts, personal trainers and educators, had to cease operating in social settings and re-think how to continue serving clients in a way that maintained social distancing and government **guidelines to ensure a new level of exercise safety**. The response was to take fitness online. Many trainers were already hybrid, offering one-on-one sessions as well as online home-based training with their clients. But a global pandemic meant that the **online training setting** was all that was available for a time. This had many trainers in a hurry to take the leap and/or to grow what they had already been doing online.

So, when you ask yourself, “*what does it take to become a certified personal trainer?*”, start with thinking through how you will put this to practice in a successful way. Look at what time and experience teaches us. With time, technology progresses and with it the way we do things will progress too. We can learn from our own, and from others’, experiences. We can thrive from being stretched and challenged; and when we have a passion for something, we get it done!

It does not matter the trends in tech or equipment or environments, one thing will always stay the same – **fitness is a way of life, it is not a trend, it is not going anywhere.** So how can you put your fitness to practice?

First things first, a good balance in the personal trainer industry looks at each of the most important aspects of it before diving in. Strike a balance and avoid burnout by first asking yourself these questions:

- 🔥 Do I love the benefits of working out?
- 🔥 Is health and fitness a part of the way that I live?
- 🔥 Have I ‘lived your fitness’ for more than 2 years?
- 🔥 Am I a people-person?
- 🔥 Do I like helping people reach their own personal fitness goals?
- 🔥 Am I intrigued by the human body and the way it works?



If you answered yes to these, then you’re right to be considering a career in personal training. If you can easily add to this list with your own personal passions, successes and experiences, then you’re definitely in the right state of mind and in the right place to be considering personal training as a career.

Simply put, the purpose of this paper is to give you information to help you decide if the personal training industry is the right place for you to be. There’s a lot to think about. Exercise and fitness are passions shared by millions, but being a personal trainer demands so much more than passion for fitness. You have to have a passion for people too.

Personal training requires patience and dedication, thought and research. It requires realistic expectations of income and knowing what it takes to get paying clients with smart marketing.

Sounds like a lot to digest! This is where we come in! With this guide, *“Is Personal Training Right for Me?”*, we’ll help answer the questions that you’ve had, and the ones you haven’t. First things first, plan to succeed. Planning is the first step to success in any type of work. Our hope is that we help you think through your plan and the steps to progress through it.



We’ll start by addressing the most pressing concerns that people have about the industry and the day-to-day expectations for being a certified personal trainer. This will include discussions of **the ways that you can work as a CPT**, i.e. virtual training vs. traditional on-site training or a hybrid of both. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, an evolution of the fitness industry had to occur in order to, first, survive a

nationwide quarantine and, then, to maintain safe social distancing while also serving a demographic who may always be uncomfortable with crowded workout spaces.

Necessity being the mother of invention, the demand for a new way of training meant ‘inventing’ styles and settings that would accommodate a new normal. An emphasis on in-home training using video conferencing platforms was required to successfully navigate shutdown orders. Of course, to some extent, this was already a service that many personal fitness trainers had incorporated into their business models. These trainers had a head start on the shift towards an entirely online training model. However, this did not leave out trainers who had never done this before because it is a learned skill and an addition to business that anyone can do, from anywhere. Even as gyms started to re-open, many trainers continued offering virtual workout services. This virtual style training, compared to in-person, can equally be as successfully implemented on its own. Or, consider **a hybrid style of training where you schedule both in-person and virtual sessions.**

Before we dive in to what a hybrid training business can look like, we’ll first cover the whole personal trainer picture with an umbrella of knowledge that will keep you covered in a storm and help you to make informed decisions in your training business.

In the sections to follow, you'll find relevant and real-world information on these topics:

- 🔥 a personal trainer's scope of practice
- 🔥 getting *and keeping* clients
- 🔥 how much time you can expect to dedicate to the profession
- 🔥 different ways to work in the industry
- 🔥 running a successful personal training business
- 🔥 average salary and growth expectations
- 🔥 the advantages of self-employment versus outside employment
- 🔥 effective marketing strategies
- 🔥 gaining expertise that can open doors

We've included case studies on actively working personal trainers who've approached their profession in different ways.

They tell about their paths, pitfalls, and the truth about getting started with practical, solid advice that is good to know before entering the field. *No sugar-coating.*

You'll also find ideas and additional resources to help further your knowledge if you decide you're up to the challenges and rewards of becoming a personal trainer.

Let's get started!



What it Means to be a Personal Trainer

Personal trainers wear many hats and play many roles. You won't just be designing fitness programs. Other skill set areas for successful personal training include organizational skills, ability to managing clients and schedules, marketing yourself by example and through multiple online and on-site channels, and maybe the biggest one of all...**maintaining accountability** (for yourself and your clients).

Clients pay trainers to make them accountable to their program, it's part of the job and it's part of why the client continues to come back. If the client had the will, drive and discipline to work out on their own and see the same results, they might not come back and trainers would be in less demand. Bottom line, **trainers are in high demand** and most people need a trainer to motivate and teach them how to effectively self-discipline for greater fitness. For most clients, it is the accountability that you bring as their **coach, mentor and encourager**, that keeps them connected and coming back to you and the program.

There is also accountability to actual results. Yes, your client's lifestyle and eating habits will have a lot to do with this, but there is professional accountability in how they are progressing and how you, their trainer, can help them to do it better. You may text them an encouraging reminder, or send them an email, or, better yet, a handwritten letter. There are methods for **encouraging accountability** that won't take a lot of time but that will yield a good return.

It is also important to be accountable to yourself and your actions. Like in any professional workplace, it is important to maintain conduct and character that exceeds expectations. Express yourself in a way that is inspiring and uplifting. 'Wear' your purpose and express yourself with professionalism in your day-to-day interactions. We are not perfect people, not one. But every day is new and every day can be viewed as **an opportunity to be better than the day before**. So, where you feel an area may be challenging for you (for example, 'patience' is a common challenge), you can work on getting better in this area purposely with each new day and recognize that it does not keep you from being a great personal trainer... becoming a great trainer is a work in progress which first starts with **recognizing areas that you can work on and then dedicating yourself to growing**.

Trainers motivate clients to stick to something that might be difficult. Early on in this profession, it will be clear that **passion for your work and effective people skills** come into play, every day.

It's true that a love of fitness and being a people-person are fairly mandatory requirements, but there's more to consider. There must be!

Many trainers leave the profession within a few short years because they didn't realize what it took early on, or because they had unrealistic expectations of how quickly they'd rise to the top. Reasons vary, but unrealistic expectations play a major part in not being prepared to stay the



course. There are also time commitments outside of actual training, which will include continuing education requirements for recertification. These are more easily managed if you know what to expect going in. **Have a clear understanding of what a personal trainer does, what a personal trainer may face, and what kind of commitment it takes to be a successful personal trainer.** Then, come into the profession with eyes wide open and ready to tackle the challenges and create the successes that come with this worthwhile and potentially lucrative profession. **It will give to you what you give to it.**

Giving of yourself to others as a personal trainer can be tough work, **it's just as mental as physical.** Not many people, including trainers, wake up each morning doing cartwheels

out of bed and ready to work out – but clients tend to think they do. As a trainer, as a person, you have to push yourself every day to stay **disciplined and consistent.** You may even find that you have less time to work out because you are constantly focused on other people and *their* workouts. You'll have a daily responsibility to clients to **respond, motivate and communicate.**

Like many professions that stretch us (and they all do, especially the one's worth having anyway) you will be forced to see your flaws and work through them with practical goals and processes for making improvements to yourself and to your business. **Nothing worth having is easy.** Now, are you still wanting to read on? You know this won't be easy, but it's definitely not impossible, and NFPT will make it as 'easy' as possible on your wallet and your time.

But, first, ask yourself, ***“why do I want to be a trainer?”***

The most common answers to this question are:

- 🔥 To help people.
- 🔥 To have career flexibility.
- 🔥 To create my own earning potential.
- 🔥 To be independent as I develop my knowledge and position.

First, let's cover the 'meat and potatoes' expectations defined by the Scope of Practice of the Certified Personal Trainer.

Scope of Practice

As we've discussed so far, personal trainers have many roles. Some of these roles are outside the scope of exercise programming. But our starting place should be the defined scope of practice for the profession. For NFPT-CPTs, specifically, **NFPT certified personal trainers are qualified to design and implement fitness training programs for apparently healthy individuals in one-on-one or small group settings**. An apparently healthy individual includes those with no significant disease or physical condition or impairment which prevents them from engaging in physical fitness activity. If/when you decide to work with the medical fitness population (i.e. clients with chronic disease or medical condition), it is important to have your foundational CPT credential first and then research advanced level specialty certificate programs for working with special populations of your choice.

Trainers are responsible for maintaining the scope of practice for their profession and within the confines of their certification. NFPT Certified Personal Trainers (CPT) have been assessed for **these specific skill sets** and are expected to maintain this scope of practice:

- 🔥 Having and maintaining a **working knowledge of human anatomy** and the concepts of functional exercise, **basic nutrition** and fundamental principles of **exercise science**
- 🔥 An ability to **design** and execute individual and small group exercise **fitness programs**, tailored to the needs and attainable goals of the individual, apparently healthy client, in a safe and effective way
- 🔥 An understanding for the need and importance of **screening and client assessment**; proficiency in conducting these evaluations initially and progressively
- 🔥 A desire to **help clients** reach their health and **fitness goals** through appropriate cardiovascular, flexibility and resistance exercise
- 🔥 An ability to **motivate** others in an **encouraging** and **uplifting** way towards improving their overall fitness and health
- 🔥 A dedication to maintaining **personal integrity**, client confidentiality and professional standards for best practice
- 🔥 A dedication to self-improvement, self-awareness, continuous learning, **personal growth and development** with regard to personal health, fitness and mental capacity

So, what else is there to think so carefully about before diving into the world of personal training? It seems like a lot to juggle! But there's few other careers that give you the opportunity to live your fitness every day and see results in others that creates a butterfly effect for you, for them, and for their families. **Personal training is a very rewarding career choice.**

Learn what to DO and NOT TO DO as a Personal Trainer. [See more Scope of Practice Info >>](#)

To give a realistic picture of the personal training profession, we've included real talk from three trainers in the field who've all approached their careers in different ways. They've spoken candidly about their experiences and what they wish they'd known before starting.

Let's meet them!



Matthew Hirschberg is chief operations officer and co-owner of Body Renew Fitness, a health club and family sports center that has two locations with over 200 staff in Winchester, Virginia.

He manages staffing, training, marketing, and just about everything that goes into running a successful health club franchise.

Several life obstacles, including a 100 lb. weight gain ultimately led him to a new career in fitness. Working hard to drop the weight gave him appreciation for the life-changing potential of exercise.

After years of working in the fitness industry, he's noticed a pattern. He finds that many who join a gym don't reach their goals because they need help with accountability. Because of that, his health clubs specialize in one-on-one personal training to give members the direction they need to be successful.



TJ Coakley is a fourth-degree black belt. He acknowledges martial arts as a specialty and considers it the foundation for why he chose to leave his 27-year corporate career and go into fitness full-time.

Martial arts helped him understand how the basic elements of fitness can fit into everyday training. Exercises such as jumping jacks, pushups, and other basic calisthenics that can be done almost anywhere and yet are effective in maintaining or improving the body.

Also among his specialties is static interval training. He's developed specific workout plans to aid clients suffering from fibromyalgia. TJ offers one-on-one training in-person and online; his clients choose their preferred method of training and he is their coach and accountability partner whether he meets them online or in his studio.



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Tammy Holsonback became a full-time independent contractor (IC) after a serious health crisis forced her on the path to fitness.

In a year that included eight surgeries, she had to start and re-start her exercise routines. She discovered a love for healthy living and exercise, but starting over after each healing was no easy task. That is what inspired her to become an instructor.

She works with beginners who are “just getting off the couch,” or are overcoming health difficulties of their own. Their goals vary. Some of the goals include gaining the ability to bend over to tie shoes or using stairs without holding a rail.

Tammy also discovered a love of endurance training and has added obstacle-course race training to her specialties.

Having experienced how it felt to begin a daunting routine motivates her to share her own experiences and to help others.

As you see from these profiles, there is no one path to becoming a trainer, no one reason to train, and no single way to practice. That’s good news for you!

Tammy, Matt, and TJ each use their practice to focus on different challenges. As we get into the topics of time and money, start thinking about **your fitness passions**. Whatever it is, there is a way to **apply it to a personal training career**.

How Much Money Can I Make?

We’re jumping right in with the big one and laying out how well personal training pays the bills.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Payscale.com, the average annual income for full-time personal trainers and instructors with less than 5 years experience is between \$36,160 and \$38,698. The median annual salary across the board is \$56,875. Hourly rates can range from \$10 to \$50 an hour. Taking a closer look, we find that the lowest-earning 10% pull in around \$20,000. But, on the other hand, the highest-earning 10% make over \$70,000.

That’s quite a range! But, there are several factors that come into play when determining where you’re most likely to fall within that range. Mainly, they are:

- 🔥 Geographical location
- 🔥 Experience
- 🔥 Whether you’re an IC or an employee

Let's take an individual look at each factor that can affect your income as a CPT.

Geographical location:

The city and state where you work will play a larger role in your income than you may realize.

Keeping the national pay average for personal trainers in mind, a trainer in New York is likely to earn 68% *above* that average. A trainer in Atlanta lands at around 3% below average, and a trainer in Austin earns about 20% above.

That may be a little hard to digest, but it's important to look at average-wage statistics as just that. An average. It will take hard work and planning to reach that average and above. It is important to decide first on the amount of pay that will sustain your living, what is your salary need going in? Then, think about how much you would like and need to increase on that each year to get to your earning goal. Remember that you will most likely never start out in any profession, especially if new at it, earning exactly what you want in the long run. It takes time and dedication to the craft.

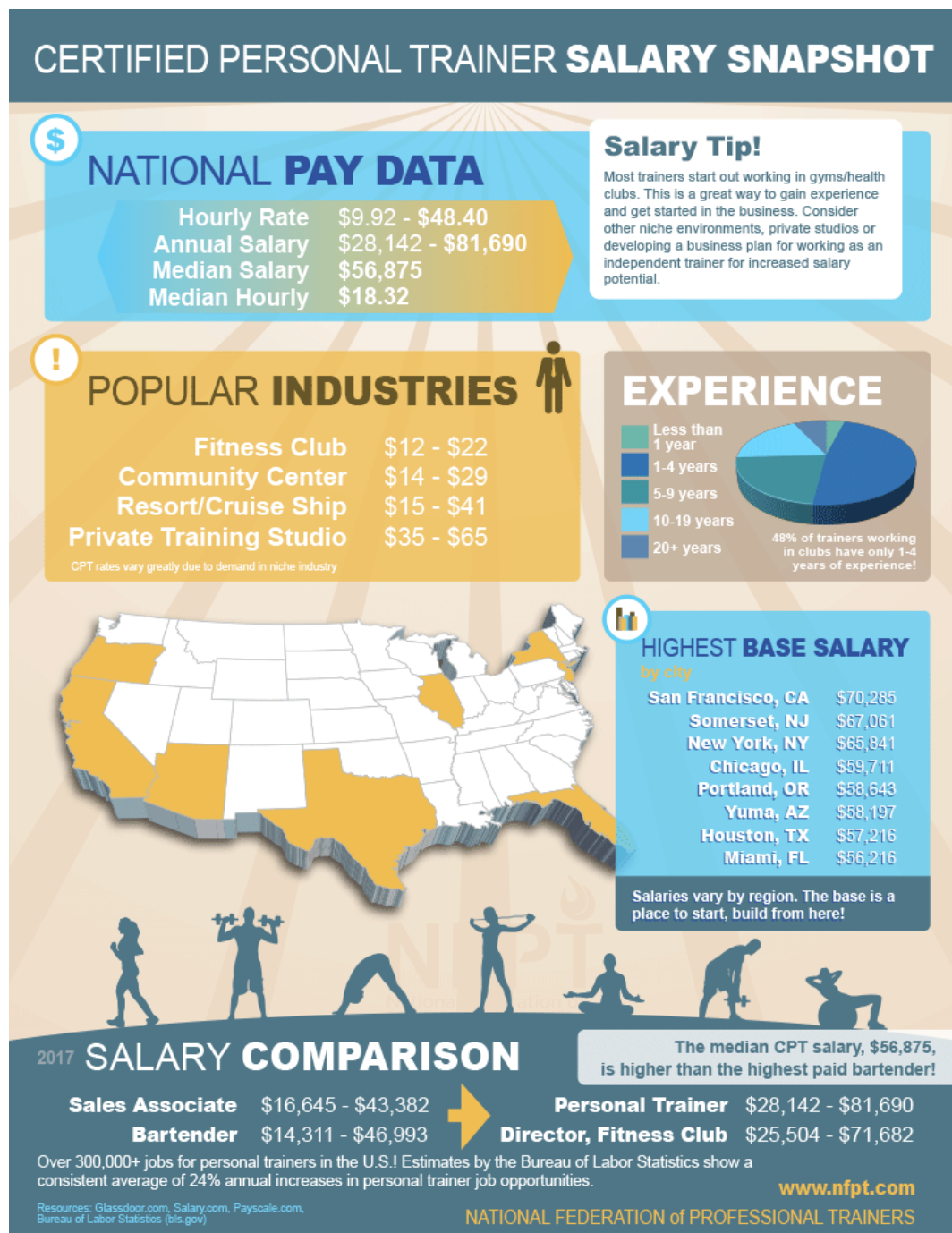
Also, like any profession, it is important to save for struggle and roll with the tide. A pandemic is a good reminder of this. Things can quickly change across the board. It is in your best interest to save a little each month with a minimum goal of 3 months' worth of bill paying money in your savings. Even if it's \$10 a week, or a month, it is something that, saved up over time, can help to support you if the unexpected should happen.

Though trainer income potential remained consistently steady as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, the biggest negative impact was a decreased demand and lacking accessibility. Quarantines and gym closures left trainers unable to conduct in-person sessions. This reinforces the need to stay flexible and available online. You can still be the accountability partner that your clients need and still earn income while working from home.

In the article '*Fitness Economics*' we look at **a few simple rules of economics that help you become a better, and more profitable, fitness professional.**



Other resources to find your geologically-specific salary information are [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com) or the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov). This salary projection snapshot depicts general U.S. averages and comparisons:



Experience:

Naturally, your experience will be a factor in your income. On average, less than five years of experience lands a trainer just at the national pay average. 5-10 years of experience typically brings in \$50-\$55,000. But keep in mind that these averages are just that, averages. Above average is a goal you should set. Consider your salary expectations for the long term, plan for success. Realize that, with more experience, comes more monetary gain.

You may gain experience first by starting out working for a local club (and, of course, your pay will vary based on part-time or full-time commitment). Generally speaking, club salaries pay less but the experience is very valuable. As a club trainer, you can gain real-world experience and make a name for yourself in the community. Also, if you are skilled in the area of online training and can proficiently set up and professionally conduct these online sessions, then you become increasingly valuable to the club and its members. It is possible that you can become a growth partner with the club that you work for when you bring something new and valuable to the table.

Working in a club will garner more valuable experience, even with less bring-home pay, than attempting to operate your own private studio out of the gate. There may be more earning potential in a private studio setting, but you should first put more value on laying your foundation through experience to create long term success. Creating a business plan, for example, is a step in the process of planning to run your own business that you can't ignore.

Don't jump into owning your own business until you really know what it takes and how to run it. Starting a venture like this too soon can be a set up to failure, so be careful to plan to be ready for when the timing is right. Working for a club is a great way to learn, wait and watch as you gain more experience not only on the gym floor but as you observe the needs of the training business. You may find that stepping out on your own is too costly and that you can make more money by sticking with the club and growing in a position of leadership. Or, conversely, you could be observing the ways in which the business side is lacking and how you can take what you know and make it better. Either way, these decisions and actionable steps do not come right away. **Decision making is a process of knowledge through experience.**

Once you're very experienced, say 10-20 years in the field, the income growth becomes less significant because trainers are typically in a career position at this point. We can assume that you have made the decision to work as an employee, IC or studio owner. You can expect at least \$60-\$65,000. Beyond 20 years, income tends to plateau and, when you're doing it successfully, can be sustained.

IC or employee:

The two previous factors, where you live and your years of experience, may be out of your control. Becoming an Independent Contractor (IC) or an employee at a fitness facility is a career aspect you can more easily influence or change.

Typically, being an employee pays less than what you could earn as an IC. That makes the choice simple, right?

Not so fast.

Consider these reasons to work as an employee.

- 🔥 You benefit from a ready-made clientele. The club does the marketing, and they bring in the people. While it's true that you will most likely still be responsible for recruiting new clients by "working the floor," you'll have a captive audience who is interested in fitness.
- 🔥 You'll watch other trainers in action. You'll have the opportunity to see what's working for them and borrow their success tips.
- 🔥 You'll be able to take full advantage of the fact that you are on the inside of a fitness business. Work as closely as possible with those who have business-administrative and marketing duties. That way you can gain an understanding of what it takes to be successful in business. It's knowledge you can take with you if you become an IC.
- 🔥 You'll have taxes and, possibly, benefits taken care of for you.
- 🔥 You'll have the opportunity to work with a variety of clients with unique challenges. These experiences can help you decide if there is a specialty or special population you'd like to focus on in your career.
- 🔥 There is typically more stability in an employee setup. Ultimately, this will be contingent on the agreement you reach with your place of employment. That will determine if you are commission only, or hourly. It will also determine the percentage, if any, of the client's fee you yourself will pocket.

The largest complaint about being an employee is the pay and, sometimes, the inflexibility of scheduling. Still, even if your ultimate goal is to work for yourself, getting a jumpstart at a club is recommended. If nothing else, it gives you time to get your feet wet in the industry and to work on building your own clientele. And you may work for a club that values your training position and will provide salary increases and promotion incentives that will keep you working for them.

Working as an IC also has a list of attractive perks to take into consideration.

- 🔥 Higher income potential tops the list. You collect all of the fees for any training you do. Also, there are ways to charge higher fees. Specialization and taking your training mobile are just a couple ways.
- 🔥 You create your own schedule. Many ICs admit that flexibility and accommodating clients is of utmost importance when first starting out. However, as you become more established, you'll have more opportunity to pick the days and times you want to work.
- 🔥 You create your own brand. That's major! Instead of fitting into a prewritten mission statement, you get to create one that fits with your vision and the ways you want to make a difference.

All of this freedom comes with its own set of challenges. You will be responsible for your own marketing, any overhead, and for finding enough clients to earn the income you need for your lifestyle.

You will also need a good business plan and the ability to keep records for your federal and state taxes. NFPT-CPT program participants are provided a sample business plan to use as a guide for developing their own custom plan for salary needs and expectations.

If it sounds like a big responsibility, that's because it is. However, there are tens of thousands of successful ICs. And, with most trainers operating some level of business via the web, you are not limited by geographic location when working as an IC; being your own boss has its perks.

With the right preparation you can run a business in the industry you love, and love your career.

Here's some additional resources that might help when starting off as a paid employee:

[A job board to check for openings in your area >>](#)

[9 Places Outside the Club that Trainers Work >>](#)

Here's an additional resource that might help when you're ready to think through being your own boss:

[Personal Trainer Business >>](#)

What Do I Need to Know to Be Successful?

Since we're talking preparation, there are subjects you will need to be prepare to be proficient in, in order to be a good trainer. We'll take a look at several of them and why they are important to a career in personal training. There are 'soft skills', defined as *personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people*, like those that we've talked about regarding accountability, conduct and communication. But then there are the 'hard skills', defined as *the specific knowledge, abilities and quantifiable skills that are required for success in your job*. As a personal trainer these skills range from understanding the interworking of the



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human body and how to effectively implement goal-oriented exercise programming that will make the biggest positive impact, in a safe way.

Here are ‘hard skills’ that are part of the assessment for achieving your personal trainer certification. All of these are covered in great length and detail, with supplemental forms and instructions, in the NFPT Personal Trainer Manual:

Human Anatomy and Physiology:

To be qualified, you will need at least a basic understanding of the human body and how it functions. This includes knowing about the important systems of the body, such as muscular, skeletal, circulatory, respiratory, nervous, digestive, and the immune and endocrine systems.

Wellness:

In order to help others achieve fitness, you’ll need to know the concepts and components of general health and wellness. Once you understand these concepts, you will be able to identify the ways your clients compromise their health and wellness, including mental and emotional issues, and direct them to a more beneficial lifestyle.

Client Programming:

The ability to formulate your own style of doing business, such as coming up with policies and scheduling, will be important. You’ll also need to be sure each client understands those policies, and agrees with them, before you enter a contract or begin training. This helps in the long run by setting expectations in the right direction, and it lets both parties know if you are a good match for a professional relationship.

Professional & Legal Practices:

Among other things, this area covers the differences between Informed Consent and the Waiver of Liability, plus the correct time and method to deliver each to the client.

This area also includes imperative information on good record keeping, which will go a long way in keeping you and your business safe in the event of claims or lawsuits (a rare occurrence but it is better to protect yourself and your business than to risk it all). NFPT partners with a discounted liability insurance provider for low rates for NFPT-CPTs who are ICs and business owners.

Injury Management & Emergency Medical Plan:

You need to know the risk factors for injury and how to take injury-prevention measures. Understanding each client’s level of risk requires you to perform a proper initial screening.

You’ll also need to understand the steps to take in order to create a plan for medical emergencies, because, as we all know, exercise comes with the risk of injury. In addition, you will need to become CPR and AED certified to ensure your readiness should this ever be required.

Client Assessment & Exercise Program Implementation:

This is where the rubber meets the road. Assessing and implementing the exercise program is the first opportunity you have to give great client services. In order to do the initial assessment properly, you need to know what questions to ask during that first consultation. It will help you identify any issues that would prevent your client from exercising at that time, or any situations that could limit their performance level. [More on Client Screening and Consultation >>](#)

An accurate assessment is what helps guide you in designing an exercise program that take in to account any limitations the client has, yet leads them on the path to their goals.

Most clubs require their trainers to demonstrate, or show proof of, this knowledge, before they hire. Some will offer intern or mentor programs to help you along the way to learn these ropes. Often times, clubs have difficulty finding and keeping good trainers, so if you show them that you have potential, they are likely to give you a shot (even if you are just starting out), they'll want to work with you to help refine your skills.

Understanding these concepts and how they apply is an opportunity to set yourself apart to your clients, and/or to your employer. But don't be daunted by all the things you need to know. Mastering these areas takes time and will ultimately set you apart as a professional and give you the confidence you need to address clients' unique concerns. Remember, **every personal trainer started out as a fitness enthusiast** who had to learn these skills during the course of their study and practical experience. **Every expert was once a beginner!**

Must I Be Good at Sales?

The reality of marketing and sales sends a lot of talented trainers running for the hills before their careers have a chance to take off.

But the fact is, people are more experienced at sales than they realize. Sales is something we all engage in every day. If you've ever interviewed for a job, convinced a friend to see a movie or to eat at your favorite restaurant, congratulations. You have a foundation in sales. The art of convincing someone that something is worth it, no matter how small, is something that you can do and that you practice every day without even realizing it.

All you have to do now is **hone those skills to suit your career goals**.

Sales is about relating to people, understanding their buying motives, and informing them how your services meet those motives. It's that simple.

You don't have to come off as a stereotype to sell yourself. Your actions can speak louder than your words. Your referrals can bring more business than your business card.

Selling doesn't require you to be loud or pushy to be convincing. You're selling you and your value with every conversation and with every client that gets results.

It comes into play in the most important aspects of building your clientele. You will need to be comfortable with:

- 🔥 informing potential clients about your expertise and services
- 🔥 asking for business
- 🔥 following up
- 🔥 asking for referrals

Luckily, you can bench the old stereotypes because technology is now on your side. Furthermore, there are several methods you can chose from to successfully promote yourself.

Let's find out what works for our three trainers:

Tammy prefers to build her clientele through word-of-mouth and referrals. Of course this will work better for you after you've been working for some time. But, be in the mindset of generating referrals from day one. Here's how:

Do a bang-up job so that people feel good referring you. That almost goes without saying, but it can be easy to forget that a 30-minute session can continue to bring income even after the session is over...if clients are raving to their friends about you.

In other words, always think past the present moment.

Tammy's clients tell her how much they appreciate her mixing up their routines and keeping them fresh and exciting. Her success secret is that she customizes all fitness plans to help clients achieve specific goals. Because of that, her clients rave to friends and family about the personalization of her service and send new clients her way.

Offer free workouts whether you're an IC or an employee. Tammy has gotten some of her best clients this way. She uses it as a chance to demonstrate her value to someone who might not otherwise have been interested in working with a personal trainer.

She notes that people find it refreshing to receive something of value with no strings attached. It pulls them into the situation feeling relaxed and receptive.

TJ draws from his corporate experience in customer service when it comes to marketing. He is already accustomed to engaging people.

But here's what's interesting. Although he is comfortable with marketing, he acknowledges that as a newbie in fitness, he was timid having to sell himself in a new arena where he was still building his skills.

What does this mean? It means that it's normal to feel nervous...even if you have 27 years of experience backing you up. The key is to be patient with yourself and find methods that work for you.

Among other methods, TJ uses the online service, thumbtack.com to find new clients. People looking for personal trainers visit the site and submit a write-up on what they want in a fitness program. This is one example of how existing social platforms and various apps can help you to promote your services, and when offering your services online, as a hybrid training service in addition to your in-person client sessions, you can market yourself to anyone, anywhere.

The [Thumbtack](https://thumbtack.com) example is a platform that gives fitness professionals a chance to respond with a bid. The site is ultra-competitive, but TJ gains a lot of new business through the service.

He advises that it's also a great way to grab those first few clients if you're still working up the courage to sell your services face-to-face or just learning the nuances of online virtual training and how to market it. There are many online services and resources like this too. Seek and find sites that you can be a part of, where you can connect with potential clients.

Matt's strategy requires a marketing budget. The most successful tool he uses is direct mail. Just think of the little postcards and letters you get in your mailbox. It may seem 'old school' but he swears by it. He is very aggressive in his marketing approach. Though the economy fluctuates, Matt says the marketing budget always remains untouched. Why? *"When people decide they want to join a gym,"* he explains. *"I want them to think of ours first."* Though direct mail gives him the best return on investment, he also uses radio and networking groups. He also puts social media to use as part of his multi-faceted campaign.

That's quite a list of ideas! There's something there for every level of marketer and every level of budget. One fact remains the same, however. Marketing, sales, and talking yourself up is a must. There is no other way to put it.

Use these examples to springboard for your own ideas. Don't forget to use family and friends to help you put the word out when you're ready to get started.

Additional tips on getting comfortable with marketing and sales

- 🔥 In-depth information can often be found in university textbooks. You don't have to be enrolled in a university to use the resources to your advantage. Look on Amazon.com for hundreds of choices of textbooks for rent for a fraction of the purchase cost. It's worth checking out what they have available in marketing and speech. Remember that 'speech' is one of the most important parts of communication and, as a personal trainer, you will have a lot of great information to communicate. Practicing simple speech techniques will

add confidence and value to your trainer skill set, and may be more valuable to you than you realize.

- 🔥 Learn public speaking to get comfortable with presenting. This can be done in a beginner-friendly environment. Check your city for public speaking clubs like Toast Masters International (toastmasters.org) that meet regularly, offer tips and guidance on presenting in a low-pressure environment to practice giving speeches.
- 🔥 There is a wealth of information offered on iTunes, and it's often free. Go into iTunes and search for iTunes University. Narrow your search to sales, marketing, or public speaking. You'll find podcasts, some from actual university course lectures, that you can download and listen to at your convenience.

Those are just a few things to get you started and move your wheels turning towards how to market yourself and why communications skills are so important when doing so. Whatever you decide, don't downplay the importance of getting your name out there.

How Much Time Do I Have to Commit to My Career?

Be honest with yourself about the amount of time you'd like to spend working and the duties you're willing to wholeheartedly perform. It will help you narrow your choices on how you want to work in the industry.

For instance, working at a gym part-time requires less time overall than if you are a full-time IC.

Taking it a step further, both of those options could take less time and require fewer duties than running your own gym.

Instead of listing speculative hours-per-week, let's have a look at our three trainers' real-life schedules.

We'll start with Tammy who is a full-time trainer working as an IC.

- 8am: Starts the day with 30 mins. to hour-long sessions
- 9:30am: Quick snack
- 10:00am: Travels to another location for sessions
- 10:30am - 3:00pm: Sessions with clients at gym, Lunch, More sessions at gym
- 3:30pm - 6:00pm: Travels to a local school for afterschool sessions with teachers
- 6:00pm: Tammy's personal workout session if there are no clients during that time
- 7pm: Goes home

Although she starts her training days at 8am, Tammy emphasizes that when starting out in the business, it's important to be flexible. A lot of people want to get their workout done around 6am, before work.

As she's grown her business, she can honestly say that 6am is not when she's at her best to be able to encourage others. Because she's built a solid list of clients, she can now choose which times work best for her personality and preferences.

Now let's take a look at what Matt does in taking care of day-to-day operations for two gym locations.

- 7:00am – Starts day with administrative tasks, i.e. email, discussions with staff, follow ups on projects, quality control checks, etc.
- 10:00am – Travels to second locations to do quality control tasks (i.e. listen/help with phone calls/member needs, organizes monthly front-desk training, facilitates operations where needed, including picking up personal training sessions)
- Lunch
- 1:00pm – Gets in a workout
- Helps clean and wipe down fitness equipment and does a walk through for cleanliness
- Helps oversee and teach Body University, a weekly event for the personal training staff. It covers anatomy, programming, sales, and client retention.
- 6:00 – 8:00pm – Goes home

Right off the bat, Matt gives a disclaimer that in his world there are no cookie cutter days. At his gyms, the focus is on one-on-one training. There are dedicated personal training rooms, and every new client gets a “jump start” package that includes a consultation and 3 training sessions.

Matt calls himself a systems guy. He and his business partner plan to open several locations. Matt won't be able to be in all places, so one of his goals is to have curriculum and systems in place for staff to follow.

Now, we'll take a look at a day in the life of TJ

- 5:00am - Starts day with coffee and television
- 6:30am - Teaches morning group classes, and then kickboxing
- 8:30am - Individual client sessions
- Individual client make-up sessions
- Looks at Thumbtack and answers quotes, goes over the business' books
- Lunch and Personal errand running
- Tuesdays – Travels for mobile training practice which includes areas within a 15-mile radius of his home
- 9:30pm – Last class or client session ends

As you see, there can be a lot of flexibility in a personal training career and the tasks you handle.

Keep in mind that while these schedules look wonderfully full and profitable, it will take time to get to that point.

As an independent contractor, you'll want to figure in at least 8 -12 months of hard work and serious marketing before you have a full roster of paying sessions.

Success Tips and Advice

This is a bonus section to give you a bit of extra insight and help you succeed as a personal trainer *and* as a business person. Think of it as a quick chat with a group of mentors.

Advice for full-time trainers from Tammy Holsonback:

"You have to be willing to put yourself out there. Attend civic organizations, churches, and get that word-of-mouth. If you aren't flexible as a full-time, you're going to break. You have to be willing to go out in those uncomfortable zones. Learn public speaking so you can tell organizations what you do. That's how your word-of-mouth starts.

Understand that there are different personalities. There are some people you just won't click with. Or they'll want to do something that's not in your specialty.

You have to get out there, find what you enjoy, and concentrate on that versus trying to do everything. You're not going to be great at everything. For instance, let's say you enjoy high-impact, low-impact. But, someone comes in and wants to be in a body-building competition...you may not be the one who can give them that energy.

Don't let it take too long before you learn this. Be willing to refer them to another trainer. You'd rather have someone speak highly of you than to say, "oh, I hired them for this competition, and I came in last place!" That kind of word-of-mouth won't do you any good.

Get to know other trainers and their specialties, and let them know yours. When you give referrals, you will get referrals. The bodybuilder trainer that you send referrals to may just send you their endurance athletes.

One more thing. Be sure you're having fun. If you're not having fun, it's just a job and you won't last. Remember why you started doing this in the first place and hold on to that passion. You'll have good days and bad, we all do. But you get to do what you love for a living, and that's awesome!"

Matt Hirschberg on the biggest limiting factor for trainers, and running a successful business:

"The biggest surprise to most trainers that come on board at our company is the business and sales end of it. It's the biggest limiting factor I see in growth potential for trainers. They've never considered that they're going to have to sell the services. And for some of them, it's a deal breaker. The good trainers are proving their worth in the work and results, and always wanting to learn more. They can get people to pay for the service because the 'proof is in the pudding'.

As far as running the businesses, I'm big on advisors and seeking input from others who've been there and done it. To this day, we still work with a business coach.

One thing I know about personal trainers is that most get into the industry because they're passionate about fitness. But, that doesn't necessarily make them good business people. So if you're a trainer who's not good at that, work with a business coach or a mentor and get that education. Don't try to be a business person at the jump. Take advantage of employment opportunities in your local gyms to get some experience under your belt. You'll get there if you start at step 1 and not try to start at step 100."

TJ Coakley on building a successful business and what he wishes he'd known beforehand:

"I wish I'd known how competitive the market is. I wish I'd known there would be a pandemic. I wish I'd known to get online sooner. I wish I'd had a crystal ball. Maybe I would have marketed more aggressively or in different ways using more direct messaging. I have an educational background in marketing and know all the concepts. But I can't predict the future. So, I don't know what I would or could have changed besides my expectations on how long it would take to ramp my business up.

If you're just starting out and set on starting your own business, then you really need to have a plan. Know how you're going to recruit, market, pay for equipment. Know where you're going to practice, how you're going to practice. And going mobile is really important. Be ready to take your show on the road. It really doesn't take much. I take exercise bands, occasionally battle ropes, medicine balls. I use karate principles. I can train in basements, family rooms, just anywhere I can hook up my resistance bands. And when I started more of the virtual training, I still use some of these same pieces of equipment and ask that my clients purchase these as well to have for our sessions.

If you're not a people-person, or can't at least fake it, don't bother. You have to be ready for clients who want to succeed, but don't have the time, motivation or willpower on their own to follow the plan. I will not promise a client something that I can't do. I want to give them a sustainable lifestyle.

I had a client who wanted to lose 60 lbs. in two months. I told him I could safely get him maybe 15-20, but it would be hard work and he'd have to be super-compliant. He didn't want to hear it.

But another trainer had promised him the 60 in two months time (totally unrealistic and something I wasn't about to promise). I saw him around town later. It hadn't happened. He lost his money.

Here's something else. If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. A lot of trainers just starting out will take a new class and try to make that fit for every client. Realize that people are different and they have different goals and different ways of being motivated."

See NFPT's series '[What I Wish I Knew: My 1st Year as a Personal Trainer](#)' for more great trainer advice and tips for pursuing this career.

Also check out [NFPT Trainer Spotlights](#) for more advice and real-life stories from real-life trainers, including how NFPT CPTs navigated the pandemic and made changes in order to keep working and moving forward.



Take and use advice from your NFPT fitness mentors who work it every day!

Summary

You now have an insider's perspective on what it is to be a personal trainer. You also now have an idea of what it takes to be not only successful, but to become successful faster. Things like:

- 🔥 Knowing how to create safe, individualized fitness programs
- 🔥 Creating a marketing plan to get your name out there
- 🔥 Setting realistic goals and timeframes
- 🔥 Specializing in areas of interest
- 🔥 Seeking out education and experience in a variety of ways

Without a doubt this requires commitment and hard work on your part. If you have what it takes to become a personal trainer, your first step is to get educated about the human body, nutrition, and exercise science. This knowledge component will be the very foundation of your new career. It's what you will use each time you open a dialogue with a potential client, a gym manager, and also when you network.

The best way to gain the knowledge you need and *prove* to potential clients that you have what it takes, is to pass an accredited personal training certification program.

Certification doesn't make you *you*. But it gives you the education and qualification that most gyms look for in a trainer, it set you on the path to greatness! Most clients, and all clubs, will expect that you achieve and maintain your personal trainer certification before they hire you.

Look for this criteria in a certification program:

- 🔥 Support and community
- 🔥 Opportunities to refresh your knowledge
- 🔥 A variety of certification packages to meet your specific needs
- 🔥 Ongoing education

These features are key in helping you reach your potential and achieving long term success. We hope that you will consider partnering with us at NFPT and choosing our accredited certification program. We look forward to serving your certification needs and supporting your growth in this journey.

Here is a Snapshot of NFPT CERTIFICATION PACKAGES

Pick the Best Personal Training Certification Package for You

What You Get	CPT Exam Only	Standard Package	Premier Package
Exam Content Outline ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
Home Exam for Certification ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
1 Exam Attempt ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
Personal Trainer Manual (digital) ⓘ		✓	✓
Personal Trainer Manual (hardcopy book)			✓
Workbook (digital) ⓘ		✓	✓
Chapter Quizzes (online) ⓘ		✓	✓
How To's for Online Training ⓘ		✓	✓
Essential FitPro Forms & Docs ⓘ		✓	✓
Practice Tests (2) ⓘ			✓
Exercise Demo Animations ⓘ			✓
Client Assessment Videos ⓘ			✓
Access to Education Help ⓘ			✓



About our Company

National Federation of Professional Trainers (NFPT) is a family owned and operated organization. We've certified personal trainers since 1988 with our mission to promote fitness and tackle the impact that sedentary lifestyles have on our collective potential, worldwide.

Our organization was founded by a personal trainer, and is for the personal trainer. We are a family of trainers who support one another and who know what it's like to be passionate about fitness and desire to make it our purpose. We have a long and unique history which sets us apart from other certifiers, we hope you will read more [About Us](#).

We understand the importance of giving ongoing support throughout our trainers' careers, and have created a full package to assist both before and after the certification process.

We're always looking for new, passionate people to join our trainer family and to be a part of the positive impact that, together, we can make in an industry that we share a love for. We know that the first step on the path to becoming a successful trainer is to commit to, and work through, the certification process. We want to help you achieve that goal and get started on your path.

The NFPT certification program is designed for beginners and provides the knowledge and foundation needed to be confident in a new career. We're here to support that mission and work alongside you.

Aspiring trainers can get in-person instruction from master trainers at workshops available nationwide, or schedule time with a NFPT trainer expert and mentor. You can opt for a workshop and/or independent home study via distance learning with one of our certification packages, all done online at your convenience. Choose from the Standard or Premier Certification package depending on what is best for you (the Standard package has the basic exam prep resources, and the Premier package has all the resources for now and future needs).

Available tools include an online learning portal where members can access practice tests, exercise animations, screening and consultation forms, liability and informed consent waivers, specialty tests for additional certificates, and all course-related materials.

We offer post-certification specialization courses to help you follow your areas of interest and increase your income. Several of these courses come with membership in the Medical Fitness Network (MFN) so that you can be connected with medical fitness clients in your community.

Plus, on the marketing end, NFPT trainers are eligible to make use of our Certified Trainer Listing to help potential clients and employers easily verify certification and view the profile and information you choose to make available. In addition, our blog, authored by experienced fitness industry insiders, offers field-tested tips and advice on business marketing.

If you're ready to choose a Certification Package that is right for you:

www.nfpt.com/certification



For more information on NFPT, or for more help in your career decision-making process, check out these additional resources:

[Why Certification Matters](#)

[The Certification Process](#)

[Why Choose an NFPT Certification](#)

Contact us with questions or if there is any way that we can help get you started



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