ACE Personal Trainer Manual, 4th edition

Chapter 3: Communication and Teaching Techniques

Learning Objectives

- Based on Chapter 3 of the *ACE Personal Trainer Manual,* 4th ed., this session describes the various stages of the client–trainer relationship, as well as methods of establishing and maintaining relationships with clients.

- After completing this session, you will have a better understanding of:

  - The stages of the client–trainer relationship: rapport, investigation, planning, and action

  - Strategies for effective communication

  - How cultural competence increases both empathy and rapport, and how they, in turn, enhance adherence

  - The stages of learning and their application to the client–trainer relationship

  - How to incorporate effective communication and teaching techniques into daily interactions with clients

- Successful personal trainers demonstrate excellent communication and teaching techniques.

- Fitness professionals who excel in exercise science will be ineffective if they cannot establish positive relationships with their clients.

  – These relationships are based on good communication and teaching techniques.

- The early days of the client–trainer relationship consists of four stages:

  - The rapport stage begins with first impressions.

  - During the investigation stage, personal trainers review any client data.

  - In the planning stage, the trainer designs an exercise program in partnership with the client.

  - Next, clients are ready to begin working out, signaling the beginning of the action stage.

- While these stages describe the traditional progression, they often overlap and recur.

Rapport Stage

- During the rapport stage, the personal trainer sets the scene for establishing understanding and trust.

- Influences include the personal trainer's:
    - Physical appearance
    - Facial expression
    - Attire
    - Self-confidence

- Rapport continues to develop through verbal and nonverbal communication.
    - Personal trainers must work to create a climate of respect and trust.

First Impressions

- Clients' first impressions are based on many controllable factors, as listed on the following slide.

- Personal trainers should always conduct themselves appropriately since opportunities to meet future clients may unexpectedly arise.

- During the first meeting with clients, personal trainers should convey their:
  - Education
  - Training
  - Certifications
  - Qualifications
  - Work experience

Positive Client–Trainer Experiences

Characteristics of Positive Client–Trainer Experiences

Environment

- The facility is neat and clean.
- Offices and staff have a well-organized appearance.

Appearance of the Personal Trainer

- The personal trainer wears professional attire.
- The personal trainer's appearance is fit, neat, and clean.
- The personal trainer is friendly and interested in the client.
- The personal trainer shows a warm, positive attitude.
- The personal trainer makes a positive first impression.

Interactions With the Personal Trainer

- Clients have confidence in the trainer's qualifications, training, experience, and skills.
- Clients have enough time to express their concerns.
- The personal trainer listens carefully and tries to understand the client's concerns.
- Clients believe that the personal trainer is genuinely interested in what clients have to say.
- Clients perceive an unconditional positive regard from the personal trainer.
- Clients believe that the personal trainer respects them and their opinions.
- Clients trust that the personal trainer will maintain their confidentiality and has their best interests at heart.
- Instructions are clearly explained and clients' questions are answered.

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Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- People seek to verify verbal content by evaluating the speaker's:
  - Appearance
  - Facial expressions
  - Body language
  - Tone of voice

- Personal trainers should speak clearly and use language that is easily understood by clients, without talking down to them.

- Verbal content can be enhanced with visual information that illustrates concepts.
  - Exercise demonstrations may accompany verbal explanations.

Nonverbal Communication

- Nonverbal communication has many components, including:

  – Voice quality

  – Eye contact

  – Facial expression

  – Hand gestures

  – Body position

- A weak voice does not inspire client confidence.

- On the other hand, a loud, tense voice tends to make people nervous.

- Personal trainers should use a voice that is firm and confident to communicate professionalism.

- Some people end their sentences with a higher pitch, as though asking a question.

  - This communicates indecisiveness and can be distracting.

- Direct, friendly eye contact shows clients they are the focus.

  – When a listener looks away, the speaker feels as though he or she is not being heard.

- Similarly, when a speaker looks away, the listener does not feel important.

  – The speaker does not seem to care about the listener's reaction.

- Facial expressions convey emotion, but work best when the emotion is sincere.

- Most clients can sense an artificial smile.

- As personal trainers work with clients, their faces should display:
  - Genuine concern
  - Thoughtfulness
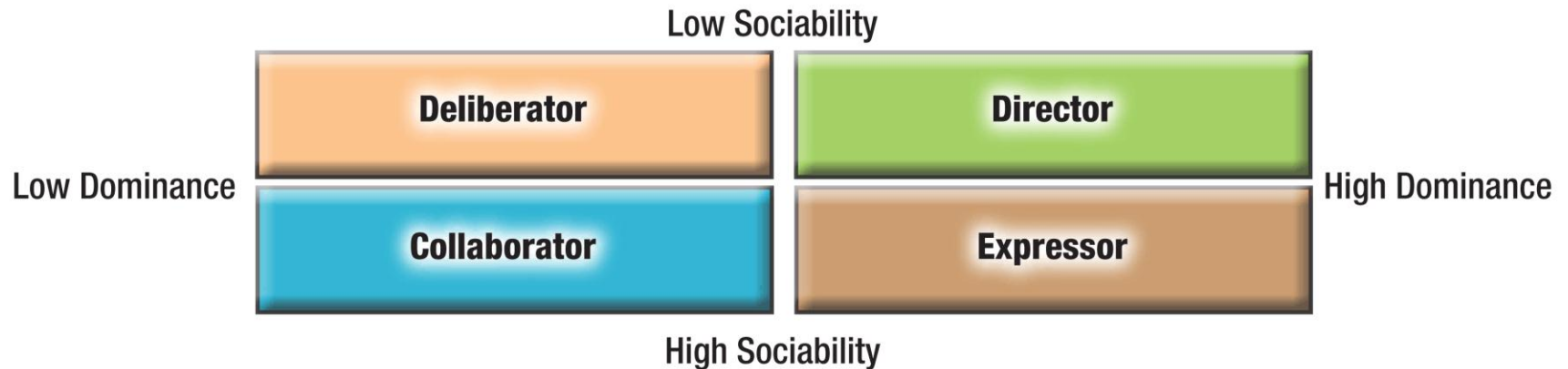 - Enjoyment

Nonverbal Communication: Hand Gestures

- Use of hand gestures varies from culture to culture.

- People are most comfortable when a speaker uses relaxed, fluid hand gestures.

  – When listening, a personal trainer's hands should be quiet.

- The following hand motions may be distracting to clients:

  – Fidgeting

  – Clenched fists

  – Abrupt gestures

  – Finger pointing

- An open body position communicates confidence.

- Good posture is especially important for personal trainers.

  – Their bodies serve as symbols of their professional expertise and models for their clients.

- Poor posture suggests

  – Fatigue

  – Boredom

  – Poor physical fitness

- A rigid, hands-on-hips stance may be interpreted as aggressive.

- While seated, the personal trainer should look attentive by leaning slightly forward and keeping the arms uncrossed.

Personality Styles

- Personality style is an individual's characteristics, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and coping mechanisms.

- Scales exist for analyzing and categorizing personality styles.

- People can be classified based on whether they score low or high on the dominance and sociability scales.

- The figure below illustrates the four personality styles that are described in this model.

Low Sociability

Deliberator	Director
Collaborator	Expressor

Low Dominance ... **High Dominance**

High Sociability

Traits of Personality Styles

Personality Style	General Traits
Deliberators Low sociability Low dominance	• More cognitive (thinking), less affective (emotion) • Ask-oriented (collect information before making decisions) • Methodical, favoring logic, objectivity, analysis, and accuracy • Problem-solvers, working alone or in small groups • Careful planners, interested in reducing the risk of the unknown • Appear rigid, formal, and cautious • Highly creative, but thorough and detail-oriented • Emotionally reserved initially, opening up once strong relationships are forged • Appear distant (less trusting) and uninterested in social interaction
Directors Low sociability High dominance	• More cognitive (thinking), less affective (emotion) • Action-oriented, competitive, take-charge, dominant personalities • Resourceful and tell-oriented, favoring teamwork where they can define problems, identify solutions, formulate plans and goals, and delegate to others to achieve results • Appear insensitive, impatient, direct, and unafraid to voice opinions • Poor listeners, as they proactively think ahead to problem solving • Appear unapproachable, unyielding, inflexible, and blunt • Emotionally reserved, valuing time over relationships
Collaborators High sociability Low dominance	• More affective (emotion), less cognitive (thinking) • Emotionally open, relationship-oriented, favor relationships over results • Amiable, warm, trusting and honest, sociable, easy-going, supportive, and non-dominant • Avoid unnecessary risks, slow to decide, non-confrontational, and sometimes exploited • Team- and ask-oriented, gather information to reach consensus over conflict
Expressors High sociability High dominance	• More affective (emotion), less cognitive (thinking) • Strong communicators, highly motivational and persuasive, but impatient • Overly ambitious, more risk-driven, favor incentives and rewards • Impulsive and lack discipline in completing projects • Dominant, tell-orientated visionaries who thrive on excitement, challenge, and creativity

- Personal trainers can benefit from assessing their own personality styles.

- Identifying personality styles can help trainers understand how their clients:

  – Communicate

  – Behave

  – Want to be treated

Working With Different Personality Styles

- A personal trainer should never assume that what works with one client works for everyone.

- This table provides guidelines for adapting rapport-building strategies to a client's personality style.

Deliberators	Directors
• Supply information to support their need for detail • Appeal to their need to be right, believing that actions were clearly planned in detail • Establish credibility with research and supporting facts • Help secure clients' decisions by illustrating successful outcomes • Provide consistent, accurate follow-ups • Be well-prepared, detail-oriented, and organized • Avoid being too casual or informal, being vague or too general, and relying on intuition	• Minimize social aspects and desire to foster relationships • Appeal to clients' need for action and problem-solving • When planning, focus on facts, exploring solutions and possible outcomes • Be clear, concise, and business-like, and results- and goal-oriented • Avoid being overly personal or casual, vague or too general, and careless with facts • Avoid being too directive or forceful, as clients might become argumentative
Collaborators	**Expressors**
• Build trust and confidence through personal support and concern • Move carefully into the planning and action stages, informing clients that all possible options have been explored and risks minimized • Be candid, open and patient, personally interested and supportive, and goal-directed • Avoid being impatient, forceful and pressing for rapid decisions, aloof or too formal, or disengaged	• Offer incentives and rewards • Share clients' visions and enthusiasm and show support for their goals by stressing the exciting facets of their visions • Be stimulating and positive and provide adequate information; support ideas without overwhelming these clients with details, as they are not detail-oriented • Try to appear supportive of clients' ideas • Stimulate clients' thoughts and provoke ideas • Demonstrate commitment • Avoid being directive, unyielding, inflexible or too structured, too restrained or conservative, and indecisive or wavering

Investigation Stage

- Rapport continues to build during the investigation stage, as personal trainers gather information from their clients.

- Much of this information is very personal in nature, including:

  - Medical concerns

  - Fitness assessment results

  - Body weight

  - Exercise history

- Clients who sense that the personal trainer is a professional will be more honest and comfortable.

Gathering Information

- Personal trainers should use the investigation stage to understand a client's exercise likes and dislikes.

- What has worked (or not worked) in previous exercise programs may work (or not work) again.

- Careful attention can help personal trainers:

  – Read between the lines of fitness forms

  – Understand the emotions behind the stories that clients tell

Demonstrating Effective Listening

- Effective listening:

  - Means listening carefully to the words and the emotions behind the speaker's words

  - Takes a great deal of attention and energy

- Instead of listening carefully, the listener is often busy:

  - Formulating arguments

  - Forming judgments about the speaker

  - Thinking about what to say next

  - Being preoccupied with their own thoughts

- Effective listening occurs when the personal trainer listens to a client empathetically, and with an open mind.

- Communication occurs most effectively in quiet, private spaces that limit distraction.

Methods of Effective Listening

- **Encouraging**
  - The personal trainer may use short words or phrases such as "I see," "Yes," and "I know what you mean."

- **Paraphrasing**
  - The personal trainer can demonstrate understanding by restating in a clear and concise way the essence of what the client has been saying.

- **Questioning**
  - Open-ended questions provide an opportunity to demonstrate good listening skills and encourage the client to share relevant information.

- **Reflecting**
  - The personal trainer can demonstrate understanding or seek clarification by trying to restate the main points and feelings in the client's communication.

- **Summarizing**
  - At appropriate points in the conversation, the personal trainer should try to summarize key points that have a bearing on exercise program design.

Self-disclosure

- Personal trainers can also use a limited amount of self-disclosure.

- These self-disclosures should be limited, keeping the focus on the client.

- For example, a personal trainer might say:

  – "I think I know what you mean. When I moved to a new city last year, I didn't exercise for several weeks either. What did you do then?"

Responding to Difficult Disclosures

- Personal trainers are sometimes unsure of how to respond when clients share sad information.

  – Often, a short response is all that is required, such as "I'm so sorry," or "That must have been very hard."

- If the situation affects program design, the trainer can turn the conversation back to the practical details.

- If clients reveal new medical information, they should be referred to their healthcare providers.

Planning Stage

- Personal trainers must continue to listen to clients' responses to their ideas and suggestions.

- Client adherence is better when clients help take responsibility for exercise program design.

- The planning stage generally moves through the following steps:

  – Setting goals

  – Generating and discussing alternatives

  – Formulating a plan

  – Evaluating the exercise program

Setting Goals

- The personal trainer should help clients define goals in specific and measurable terms so that progress can be evaluated.

- Effective goals are SMART goals, which means they are:
  - Specific: clear statement of what is to be accomplished
  - Measurable: must be able to measure and track progress
  - Attainable: must be realistically achievable in the available time
  - Relevant: important to the client
  - Time-bound: must have estimated time of completion

Realistic Goals

- The personal trainer should err on the conservative side of goal setting.

- Lofty goals feel good and sound inspirational, but clients are soon disappointed when progress is slow.

- Fitness indicators that may demonstrate change include those listed on the following slide.

Fitness Indicators for SMART Goal Setting

Emotional health indicators: Clients may have measurable improvements in mood, energy level, and sleep quality, and fewer feelings of stress and irritability following exercise.

Resting heart rate: Clients new to exercise often experience a decrease in resting heart rate after a few months of exercise.

Heart rate for a given submaximal workload: Clients performing aerobic exercise are also likely to experience a decrease in exercise heart rate during exercise performed at a standard workload.

Muscular strength and endurance: Gains in muscular strength and endurance occur fairly quickly during the first few months of an exercise program and are easily measured.

Walking test: Measuring fitness improvement with some sort of timed walking test usually yields positive results if clients have been walking as part of their exercise programs for several weeks.

Flexibility: Flexibility is very slow to improve and should only be included in the assessment if the exercise program includes regular stretching.

Balance: Balance measures show the most improvement for adults participating in some sort of balance-training program.

Skill level: Clients participating in an activity that requires skill (e.g., rock climbing, tennis, golf) will see improvements in their motor-skill levels.

Medical indicators, such as resting blood pressure, blood lipid levels, or blood sugar levels: If any of these are the focus of the client's exercise programs, clients should have these measured at regular intervals by their healthcare providers.

Body weight: Clients should work for slow and consistent weight loss, which is more likely to yield long-term weight loss.

Body size: Clients who are only slightly overweight may not see much change in scale weight. Lean tissue, because of its greater density, takes up less space than fat tissue.

Body composition: If body composition is measured, the same test should be used consistently. Changes in these measures may be indicative of fat loss or increase in muscle size.

Process Versus Product Goals

- The personal trainer should be sure to include process goals as well as product goals.

- Process goal
  - Something a client does, such as completes a certain number of workouts per week

- Product goal
  - Something achieved, like weight loss

- Clients typically achieve process goals before product goals.

- More suggestions for setting goals are presented on the following slide.

Setting Goals for Long-term Adherence

How to Set Health and Fitness Goals That Motivate Clients for Long-term Adherence

- Listen carefully to understand what clients hope to accomplish with an exercise program.
- Help them define specific, measurable goals.
- Suggest additional goals that clients may not have thought of, such as feeling more energetic and less stressed.
- Break large goals (reachable in six months or more) into small goals (reachable in about eight to 10 weeks) and even weekly goals (such as completing a certain number of exercise sessions).
- Include many process goals, such as the completion of exercise sessions. In other words, simply completing workouts accomplishes a goal.
- Record goals and set up a record-keeping system to record workouts and track progress toward goals.
- Be sure clients understand what types of exercise will help them reach their health and fitness goals.
- Reevaluate and revise goals and exercise recommendations periodically to prevent discouragement if large goals are not being met.

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- The ultimate goal for every client is adherence to the exercise program.

- A number of variables influence client adherence.

  – One cause of exercise dropout is that clients perceive the program as too time-consuming.

  – The trainer should encourage a modest exercise program rather than an ambitious program that is never performed.

- The personal trainer should encourage the client to take the lead in what seems realistic.

Formulating a Plan

- Once an exercise program is decided upon, it should be written down and given to the client.

- The plan should include all the information needed to get started, such as:

    - Advice on what to wear

    - Where to go

    - Any tips on facility etiquette and customs that might help the client feel more comfortable
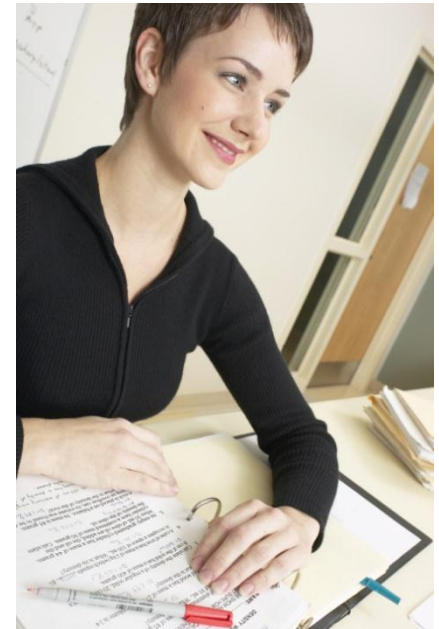
Evaluating the Exercise Program

- Exercise program evaluation occurs regularly.

  – The personal trainer and client should review exercise records and discuss what is working and what needs to change.

- Clients should also be reassessed periodically to measure progress.

- The exercise program should be evaluated both in terms of exercise challenge and adherence.

  – If adherence is faltering, the personal trainer and client should discuss what is causing problems.

  – The program should be revised as necessary.

- Motivational interviewing motivates people to make a decision to change their behavior.

- The personal trainer's goal is to create awareness that a sedentary lifestyle will likely cause health problems.

- Using direct questions, the personal trainer can convey that:

  – Good health is important

  – A sedentary lifestyle is actually dangerous to their health and well-being

- Personal trainers who use motivational interviewing will be most successful if they:

  - Ask probing questions

  - Listen effectively

  - Provide educational information

  - Keep the conversation friendly

  - Build self-confidence

  - Encourage clients to generate ideas

- The personal trainer's job in a motivational interview is to:

  - Be supportive of the client

  - Challenge sedentary behavior

Action Stage

- Once the exercise program design is complete, the client is ready to begin exercising.

- Typically, the program is a combination of:
  - Exercise completed by clients on their own
  - Exercise performed with the personal trainer instructing and supervising

- The personal trainer can enhance client success in many ways during the action stage.

Setting Up Self-monitoring Systems

- The personal trainer should give the client a system for recording exercise sessions.

- Self-monitoring is one of the most effective ways to support behavior change.

- Self-monitoring systems help in two ways:

  – They increase client self-awareness.

  – They enhance client–trainer communication by leading to productive discussions.

Individualizing Teaching Techniques

- Understanding how people learn can help personal trainers provide sound instruction.

- People gather information through their senses, primarily:

  - Visual

  - Auditory

  - Kinesthetic

- While people usually prefer one pathway over others, most people use a combination of pathways.

- All three techniques may be used to introduce a new skill, but a trainer should emphasize the client's preferred learning style.

- The personal trainer can identify which pathway a client prefers by watching for clues in language, as presented on the following slide.

Preferred Learning Style Indicators

Preferred Learning Style Indicators			
	Visual	**Auditory**	**Kinesthetic**
Client actions	Watches intently Prefers reading	Listens carefully Prefers hearing	Touches or holds Prefers to be spotted
Client statement	"Oh, I see" "Let me see that again"	"Yeah, I hear you" "Say that one more time"	"I feel that" "This does not feel right"
Strategy	Demonstrations	Question and answer	Hands-on supervision

"Tell, Show, Do"

- Motor learning is the process of acquiring and improving motor skills.

- "Tell, show, do" illustrates a good way to introduce a new skill.

- Allow clients the opportunity for focused practice.

Providing Feedback

- Once a client has tried a skill, the personal trainer should give helpful feedback.

- Feedback should do three things:
  - Provide reinforcement for what was done well
  - Correct errors
  - Motivate clients to continue practicing and improving

- Correcting errors should be sandwiched between reinforcement and motivation.

- Feedback should be limited to a few simple points.

- Feedback should be phrased positively, pointing out what the client should do.

Providing Physical Feedback

- Personal trainers can provide helpful feedback by touching clients to:
  - Indicate where they are supposed to feel the movement
  - Help them achieve the correct body position
- Some clients are uncomfortable being touched or may misinterpret physical contact.
  - Personal trainers should explain the purpose of any physical contact, and ask clients for permission for this contact.

Using Effective Modeling

- Personal trainers should model the healthful lifestyle advice they are giving to their clients.

- Personal trainers should also model good attitudes, such as exercising for positive reasons.

  - People are more likely to adopt exercise if they believe exercise improves quality of life.

  - Trainers should be especially diligent about modeling healthy attitudes around young people.

  - Young people may have a tendency to develop problems with body image.

Behavior Contracts

- Behavior contracts spell out the behavior the client is expected to perform and a reward that will be given upon successful achievement.

- Contracts may be problematic if the behavioral expectations are set too high.

- Behavior-change contracts offer extrinsic motivation for exercise.

- People who exercise regularly for extended periods of time often do so because of intrinsic motivation.

- Most people exercise for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons.

- Process goals work better than product goals, since they are more predictable and controllable.

Cultural Competence

- Cultural competence is the ability to communicate and work effectively with people from different cultures.

- Personal trainers can develop cultural competence by taking time to learn about clients' beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles.

- Personal trainers can increase their own cultural competence by:

  – Acknowledging their own biases regarding people of other backgrounds

  – Learning about clients' beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles

  – Being careful not to form new stereotypes

- Building rapport can take more effort when clients are:

    – Reluctant to begin exercising

    – Afraid of getting injured

    – Depressed and anxious about their health

- Personal trainers who encounter resistance should ask questions and promote productive discussion.

- Personal trainers should display their credentials and mention continuing education opportunities they pursue.

Empathy and Rapport Enhance Adherence

- Establishing a good working relationship enhances adherence to behavior-change programs.

- Personal trainers develop empathy with a client when they put themselves in the client's position.

- Personal trainers' attempts to understand are conveyed through effective listening with an open, nonjudgmental mind.

Professional Boundaries

- When personal trainers and clients work together for an extended period of time, it is normal for each to experience a feeling of friendliness toward the other.

- The professional effectiveness of personal trainers is undermined when they become too personally involved with their clients.

- What is the difference between empathy and personal involvement?
  - Empathy occurs when the trainer demonstrates understanding and acceptance toward the client.
  - Personal involvement occurs when the trainer becomes friends with the client or enters into an intimate relationship.

- The client–trainer relationship should cease immediately if an intimate relationship develops.

- When clients talk about intimate issues, trainers should not feel compelled to show understanding or even a strong interest.

Stages of Motor Learning

- Cognitive
  - Clients try to understand a new skill.
  - Movements are often uncoordinated and jerky.
  - Personal trainers should use the "tell, show, do" technique and provide ample opportunity for practice.

- Associative
  - Clients begin to master the basics and are ready for specific feedback.
  - Personal trainers must find the balance between giving appropriate feedback and giving too much feedback.

- Autonomous
  - Clients are performing motor skills effectively and naturally.
  - The personal trainer is doing less teaching and more monitoring.

- Once skills are learned, the personal trainer may decide to introduce new exercises or routines.

Incorporating Effective Communication and Teaching

- Personal trainers should prepare for each session by preparing to:
    - Listen effectively
    - Put fresh energy into each personal-training session
- Personal trainers should ask clients for feedback on their own performance.
- Personal trainers should use electronic communication channels with discretion.
- Personal trainers who allow clients access to their Internet pages should maintain such pages in a professional manner.
- Personal trainers should try to make training fun.

Summary

- Successful personal trainers consistently demonstrate excellent communication and teaching techniques.

- Personal trainers must provide helpful direction through all the stages of learning and incorporate effective communication and teaching techniques.

- This session covered:

  – Stages of the client–trainer relationship

  – Strategies for effective communication

  – Stages of learning and their application to the client–trainer relationship

  – How to incorporate effective communication and teaching techniques into daily interactions with clients