



# Firing up the front desk

■ FIA FLAME JUDGE TORY BRETTELL LOOKS AT THE CUSTOMER'S FIRST PORT OF CALL – THE FRONT DESK – AND HOW THIS FIRST EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTS THE DELIVERY OF OUR SERVICE.

Everyone knows that the reason our attrition rates are so high is that we over-promise and under-deliver when it comes to customer service. Loads gets written about instructor interaction (or the lack of it) but my contention is that we are missing a trick long before anyone reaches the gym.

In the last issue of *Fitpro Business* Phil Dourado talked about the fact that bookending a customer's visit with a bright start and ending on an "uptick" significantly enhances the experience. This being the case, why aren't we spending much more time on getting things right at the first port of call – the front desk?

## EXPERIENCE

In my experience, it is perfectly possible to swipe your card without getting any communication at all from the reception staff, but let's assume that some kind of intercourse does transpire: is that exchange usually of the positive kind or the perfunctory kind? Are we – albeit

fleetingly – made to feel that dragging our sorry rear ends to the gym (when it would have been much easier to stay in bed or go home to a glass of red and blockbuster episode of *Corrie*) was worth it? Does anyone ever bother to look at the screen that has just been brought to life by a cunningly disguised chip and actually use our name?

Creating a great first impression is simple, if not easy: smile at the customer (that's every customer), say something positive and use the customer's name if you have access to it.

Why this isn't just basic standard operating procedure for gym front desks around the world is beyond me.

## SMILEY FACES

Actually, I lie; it isn't beyond me at all. It doesn't happen for one of two reasons: either we hire the wrong people – smiley faces should be mandatory – or we fail to manage and measure the process.

There are a lot of front desk staff who don't actually realise that a BIG part of their job is to be polite, meet and greet and make the members' journey a great and memorable experience. This is because either no-one ever told them, or someone did tell them but then did nothing about teaching them how, or

if they did teach them they never got round to measuring their performance, or if they did measure their performance they failed to reward the behaviour they were trying to encourage. Or, in really bad cases, all of the above.

## BRAND

Entire rainforests have been sacrificed to produce mission and vision statements and millions are spent every year on trying to build memorable brands. Forget the logos, colour schemes and letterhead, branding is about everything you say and everything you do. If you say that the customer is at the heart of your business and then ignore them from the moment they walk in the door, your precious brand is worth diddly squat.

Here's my thinking on this: set high standards for your front desk, teach them how to deliver what you expect, audit the process, reward the behaviour you want to encourage, et voila.

OK, I know it isn't that easy but I really do feel that this is one stage of the customer's journey that we can and should get right. fb

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