

EMPOWER EVERY STEP: FROM MARATHON TRAINING TO FITNESS FACILITY INCLUSIVITY & MEMBER ACQUISITION

by Rick Muhr

During my thirty years of experience as a running coach, I've honed the skill of bringing together diverse groups of individuals with a shared goal. These goals include completing the physical and mental demands involved in long-distance events such as the prestigious Boston Marathon. While some of the people I've worked with were comfortable with challenging exercise, others were just beginning to embrace an active lifestyle, much like the diversity of people walking into your fitness facilities. As the health and wellness expert at your facility, you can use some of the same techniques I did to build a supportive exercise environment that focuses on progress over perfection.

Transforming Doubt into Belief

Many of the runners I work with are embarking on their first marathon, a challenge that can be daunting. My primary objective is to acknowledge their fears and uncertainties, reassuring them that I will be there every step of the way, providing unwavering support. As they commit themselves to this journey with dedication and perseverance, they quickly shift their focus from doubt to belief in their capabilities. This experience is not that different from the experience of a newcomer at a fitness facility. Early in their journey, it's crucial for you and your staff to address their apprehensions through messages of encouragement and inclusivity. Part of your role is to confirm that your facility supports movement for all, because some new members are nervous about how they'll fit in.

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Easing Anxiety with Body Diversity

Images of ideal bodies can be found all over the fitness industry and on social media. Naturally, these idealized forms impact the body image of people everywhere in ways that influence the frequency of their fitness facility visits. In fact, research indicates that fitness imagery of lean exercisers increases social physique anxiety and self-doubt, which can be a barrier to getting to the facility. Although many people join fitness facilities to develop a more positive body image, their sense of belonging can be reduced if facility imagery is narrow and idealized. Make sure your facility is depicting a range of body types in its signage and promotional materials.

A Personal Touch

As one new fitness facility members explains, "It's rather an atmosphere of feeling uneasy because you have to overcome yourself and go, and you think 'please, please no-one watch me.'" It's essential to not let the people you serve feel this way, and just a moment of your staff's time can relieve this anxiety. Be sure to introduce yourself and start building a real relationship with everyone who enters your building. On return visits, remind them that you're happy to see them again. By forming supportive relationships with the people in your fitness facility, you can help them view the exercise process as a transformative journey toward self-improvement that's shared and valued by all the members of your staff.

Support for Every Body

As fitness professionals, it's crucial for us to promote inclusive representation. We can foster a welcoming atmosphere for all the different people we serve, recognizing their courage to step outside their comfort zone. Together, we can create a fitness culture where every individual, regardless of their capabilities, understands that they belong and that their progress is truly supported.

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Rick Muhr
MARATHON COACH AND
MATRIX BRAND AMBASSADOR

As a brand ambassador, Muhr delivers on the Matrix total solutions promise by strengthening connections via motivational speaking engagements and creating expert content applicable to health club owners, trainers and members. In addition, Muhr consults with the development teams at Matrix to bring his coaching methodology and experience to our products and solutions.