

Top 10 things to look for when hiring a personal trainer

So personal trainers don't come cheap. Many people willingly hand over hundreds to thousands of dollars a year on personal training services to individuals who call themselves personal trainers. Thing is, anyone anywhere can call themselves a personal trainer. There is NO regulation or law stopping anyone with absolutely no experience from referring to themselves as a personal trainer.

One of the largest fitness club chains in Canada owns the largest certifying organization in Canada, Can Fit Pro and they just keep churning out new trainers left, right and centre. It is in their best interest to make money on both ends: being paid to certify their potential trainers and then earning an income from people who pay to train with the people they certified. Smart business. It is no stretch of the truth to say there are plenty of trainers who can't support themselves with their training income alone and there are some trainers making six figures. But kicker is, the Can Fit Pro course takes 3 days to complete. And these 3 days in no way prepare you to be a great trainer. So who are the good trainers and how do you find one?

In an almost completely unregulated industry, it is up to the consumer to discriminate and sort through the good, the bad, and the ugly. So I've decided to create a mini guide on how to shop for a trainer worth his/her weight in gold. I've had loads of experience interviewing and managing trainers over the years coming from a variety of backgrounds and levels of formal education. Let me help you not waste your hard earned bucks.

Here goes:

1) If you're looking for help losing weight and changing your eating habits, can your potential trainer deliver you advice in a thong? That is, if you want help losing weight why hire someone who can't manage their own weight and get the body they want for themselves? (I ripped this one off one of the biggest fitness gurus in North America, Paul Chek I believe).

2) Choose a trainer with good posture. If you hire a trainer with bad posture, they aren't going to fix yours and you're never going to work out structural imbalances that create poor posture. And as you get older your posture is only going to get worse if you don't work on it.

3) When you meet with a potential trainer for the first time, look for good people skills. Do they talk most of the time or ask you open ended questions and listen? During a consultation, a trainer should listen 80% of the time and talk 20% of the time. If a trainer doesn't get where you're coming from they won't be able to address the issues that have brought you to them in the first place. And do you really want to spend precious time with someone with poor people skills?

4) Does your trainer look healthy? Do they seem over-stressed, scattered, under-slept? Do they have big bags under their eyes? You want someone who can coach you towards living a balanced lifestyle. If someone can't get their shit together than can they really inspire you to change?

5) Obviously someone with more education than a three day course is desirable. But even post secondary education in a health and wellness discipline doesn't necessarily mean a trainer is 'better'. Does your potential trainer invest in education every year? Fitness and health information is constantly changing. You want someone who stays current, constantly educates, reads and stays inspired. Find out how your potential trainer stays current. Ask them how they would describe their training philosophy. Is it about shoving you on a machine and counting or is there a method behind their madness?

6) If you have an injury or a medical condition, find out if your potential trainer has experience dealing with your issue(s). You want someone who can truly help you. If you have any serious medical concerns you probably want to find a trainer with specialty education and training. A chiropractor who can treat an injury and prescribe exercises to rehab your injury is quite the combo. You just want to avoid hiring someone who thinks they can diagnose and treat injuries without any formal education. (i.e. QUACK!). A trainer not qualified to diagnose and treat should be dealing directly with a health professional who has treated you already and then follow their lead in designing a strength training program.

7) Someone you're paying on average \$70 per hour should be able to help you change your fitness from the inside out. Are they just going to work you out for an hour or are they going to help you make changes outside your training session to support your efforts in the gym. A good trainer should talk to you about sleep, stress management and nutrition. If they aren't interested in helping you on these fronts, then you're likely not hiring a trainer truly, madly and deeply committed to health and wellness.

8) Listen for bullshit. If you ask your potential trainer a question and they don't know the answer but instead bullshit around it, run away. You don't want to work with someone who won't go and research your questions and you don't want to work with someone you can't trust. And someone truly confident will admit to not knowing something and instead look at your question as an opportunity to learn something new.

9) Ask yourself how you felt after your initial meeting. Did you feel a personal connection with your potential trainer? Did you feel understood? Did you laugh a little or at least leave feeling a little buoyant, inspired or excited about seeing them again? Or did you leave feeling intimidated. I see some of my clients more than they see some of their friends and family. There has to be a special connection between you and a trainer to make the match fruitful.

10) If you have the opportunity to watch your trainer in action, see if they're using

a cookie cutter approach to training and just popping people on machines and counting or are they truly challenging their clients with movements that require much focus and effort. What do their clients look like? Are their clients working hard? Do they talk on their cell phone, pay close attention to their client, look bored, put a lot of effort into correcting form and technique? Do they look like they enjoy training? There are loads of trainers to choose from. Don't settle for someone who doesn't love what they do.

It can be very hard to find trainers who meet the above requirements. Good thing is, all you have to do is sign up for a free personal training sampler at Urbanfitt to meet one.

Best of luck,

Jane Clapp