

## When Clients Disappear

By Gregory Florez

Occasionally, personal trainers have clients who sign up for training packages, and then for whatever reason end up not using the sessions, and seem to, well, disappear.

You call them, repeatedly, and follow up by e-mail, but somehow your connection is lost. Although these situations are not the norm, you probably have had an experience like this—a losing proposition for both you and the client.

Unfortunately, this scenario is becoming more common than any of us working in the industry would like to admit. Today's clients face more challenges than ever before: Time-constraints, too much work, or such life-changing events as starting a new job or caring for a sick relative. Your challenge is to find ways to stay in contact with these clients, get them back on track and help them navigate through barriers to exercise, without becoming a nuisance.



Re-engaging clients who "have gone missing" can be more of an art than a science. But over the years we have identified multiple ways to help you minimize the risk of losing touch with clients. The key, we have found, is to identify or communicate potential barriers, early on.

Use the initial consultation to inquire about upcoming events, including extended vacations, pending family or job changes, and any other issues that may derail clients. Ask specific questions, but also use intuition to identify a client's pattern, such as starting, then stopping a training program, and try to develop strategies to prevent this from happening again. Plan ahead for upcoming events with your clients. Don't leave these conversations open-ended. Rather, determine a strategy for scheduling and supporting them around these issues.

Be proactive. Generally, you will know early on, if you have a client who fits this profile. Here are some proven tips our trainers have used to keep clients engaged:

Send reminder e-mails or call them to confirm appointments. Know in advance what type of communication is most effective with each client.

Always make sure that you have several phone numbers for each client.

Get to know the administrative assistants of executive clients to enlist their assistance when business appointments get in the way of training.

Create reminders for yourself to contact inactive clients at least once a week, so they know you are continuing to support them.

Be creative, sincere, and positive in your follow-up. Get to know your clients well. Don't use guilt or other negative persuasive techniques. Let them know that you miss working with them and want to figure out a way to work through disruptions in their schedules.

Don't give up. Many trainers, including ours, have had clients disappear from their schedules, but succeeded in winning them back within a year's time. In the end, every client thanked us for being persistent, and not giving up on them.

As personal trainers, we have the responsibility to be good facilitators for our clients' health and well-being, but we also need to help them overcome the many challenges that can sabotage their best efforts to maintain an active lifestyle.