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How to Gracefully End a Client Relationship

By Gregory Florez

One of the toughest issues facing trainers is working with clients, who for various reasons are just not reaching their potential.

This can be a very complex situation and have many causes: Tough schedules affecting their consistency to exercise, having personal issues outside the scope of your expertise, all of which make it very difficult to implement a successful training plan.

It is inevitable that at times you will find yourself in situations where it won't serve you nor your clients well to continue a professional relationship.

In our practice, we have found this among the most delicate situations trainers can face.

On one hand, these clients often benefit the most from professional training. But for a variety of reasons, many of which are out of your control, these clients often sabotage themselves by not being able to adhere to a program.

Among the issues we've encountered with these types of clients are:

Addictions to food, alcohol, and other destructive behaviors

Overbooked schedules that keep them from making their health a priority

Feeling like they are victims in all areas of life, which makes it impossible for them to take accountability for their behaviors

Believing that you will "fix them" while they take no responsibility

Difficulty in their personal relationships preventing them to care for themselves

Working in an all-consuming job

These and other issues can run very deep and warrant interventions outside the scope of personal trainers. You are in this profession because you want to make a difference, but you must be able to step back and have the courage and integrity to know when to end a client relationship. These are among the toughest conversations you can have with a client. But ultimately, they will serve you and your client's best interest.

Unlike exercise programming, handling these situations requires more art than science.

We have found the following tips useful to gracefully end an ineffective client-trainer relationship:

Track and log behaviors and problems with a client.

Be specific in your notes to yourself. This will provide you with concrete examples to help your client see what needs to change.

Develop a network of allied professionals and organizations, such as Weight Watchers, Overeaters Anonymous, time-planning seminar providers, physicians, and psychiatrists, among other healthcare professionals. Get to know them, study their work and professional philosophies. Attend a group meeting to see how support groups work

Set up a meeting outside of a scheduled training session with your clients to discuss barriers to success

Provide specific examples of what is not working.

Never blame the client. Rather take responsibility where appropriate. State facts in a non-threatening manner.

Give them time and space to respond to your comments.

Expect defensiveness and possibly anger, but don't react. Simply listen.

Offer suggestions for alternative interventions that you believe will appropriately support them.

Offer your client the opportunity to meet with another professional to answer questions and give support.

Finally, make it clear to your clients that you don't believe you are providing them with the right support at the present time. Assure them that you want to support them and will continue to stay in touch. This conversation must be direct. You must be clear that you feel it is in "their" best interest to discontinue training with you. Having these integrity-based conversations will gain you the respect of your clients, and provide piece of mind when you have exhausted your



resources with an unsuccessful client.

Mr. Florez is the founder and CEO of First Fitness, Inc., a personal training and fitness consulting company that has been in business since 1988. Read his full bio [here](#).

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