David Gschneidner - Personal Training Communication Skills And Habits To Drive More Sales, Referrals, And Retention

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"The better our client understands the WHY of what they're doing the more likely they are going to stick around."

~ David Gschneidner

1. Introduction

David Gschneidner is the VP of Operations at Discover Strength based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Discover Strength's four personal training facilities are among the highest volume/revenue high intensity training facilities in the country.

Discover Strength's smallest studio (900 Sq Ft exercise floor) generates $1.6M USD per year!

The purpose of this checklist is to give you (business owner, executive, manager or trainer) the means to communicate effectively with clients before, during, and after personal training sessions to generate more sales, referrals, and retention.

Discover Strength use a proven framework, which you can use as a template or guide to maximise results for your clients and business.

1. Teaching Focus

Discover Strength use a long list of coaching points that are kept in a shared Google Doc. Only one coaching point is used with clients before a workout.

The purpose of these coaching points is to improve the client's understanding of WHY they are doing what they're doing to improve buy-in, results, and retention.

Currently, Discover Strength have a list of about fifteen coaching points. These have been determined by client feedback, relevance to HIT, and misconceptions in health and fitness.

For example:

• Why we move slowly and try and eliminate momentum in each repetition.

• Protein recommendations to optimise changes in muscle mass.

• Why should you have a post exercise snack?

• Why do we do one set of exercise to momentary muscular failure?

• The fallacy of high reps vs low reps.

These coaching points are recycled throughout the year.

Each Discover Strength trainer starts off a session with the weekly teaching/ coaching focus, which is the same across every location. Luke Carlson (CEO) sends out the teaching focus every week for the entire business via Slack (internal messaging tool). The teaching focus forms part of Discover Strength's "Fiver Pillars of a World Class Workout", which is expanded on in section three.

Every member of staff attends a weekly meeting at each location led by the location manager. During the meeting, trainers role play the teaching focus as well

as other aspects of their role. Each trainer will role play with another trainer and managers will listen and provide feedback to improve the delivery of the teaching point. Role play must be realistic to be effective. Trainers should create a realistic scenario and challenge the other trainer by asking questions and demonstrating skepticism.

The value of role playing real life scenarios is incredibly important and effective for real world delivery and results.

2. Promotional Focus

Discover Strength have a number of promotions they offer throughout the year. Twenty five percent of training sessions do not include a promotional focus since there is nothing to promote at that time.

Examples of promotions might be seminars, body comp challenge, bring a friend week, or Black Friday (members get ~25% off). Some of the promotions are recycled throughout the year and some are brand new.

The promotional focus of any given week is addressed in the weekly meeting, the same time the teaching focus is also addressed. Discover Strength's VP of Marketing, Amy Jordan, has a calendar of promotions over the course of the year and communicates this to location managers ahead of the weekly meeting. Amy and Hannah (Director of Sales) will allocate time for a new promotional focus to be role played in the weekly meetings.

The secret is to tailor that week's promotional focus to the client in hand. For example, let's say you are holding a seminar on the importance of protein ingestion

for people over 65. You can make this applicable to a 40 year old person by explaining how protein consumption is important in holding onto muscle mass as you age. Let the client know how the promotion will benefit them.

Another example could be a body comp challenge promotion. You could say to the client that if they bring a friend to do a body comp challenge, they (the current client) will get 25% off next month's auto-pay and a great deal on their own body comp challenge.

The point is to tailor the promotion to the client's wants and needs and not be robotic or awkward in the delivery.

On a quarterly basis, Discover Strength's promotional focus is to encourage clients to give reviews on Google. Discover Strength have found that this increases the number of new prospects that find their website and book introductory workouts.

During this promotional focus, trainers will ask clients if they would be willing to provide a review on Google. They do not ask for a specific rating (this is important). If the client says yes, the trainer will tell them to expect an email with a link to post a review and/or provide the client with a slip of paper with the web link. The concierge team will email the link to the client after the workout.

3. The Five Pillars of a World Class Workout

These are the five pillars that the Discover Strength personal training team keep front of mind during every client workout. Whilst these appear somewhat sequential, the focus should be on keeping the workout feeling natural to the client and thus it might make sense to think of these pillars like principles rather than a chronological process.

1. Excited to Serve

Discover Strength expect trainers to give what they call a "warm welcome and a fine farewell". This means trainers must always use the clients first name and welcome them with energy and charisma. If working with a group training, this also means gathering the group in a huddle before the workout starts. This is used to set expectations and introduce members of the group to one another.

The second part of "Excited to Serve" is for trainers to provide pre-exercise instruction, which is where the trainer will describe how the client will train and what they should think about and aim for in terms of cadence, performance, technique, muscle focus during specific exercises, etc.

The third and final part of "Excited to Serve" is to ensure the trainer creates a fun and positive atmosphere, and brings a lot of energy to the client experience.

2. Actively listen

Before the workout, the trainer will check in with the clients status and ask questions like:

- How is your body feeling?
- How are you feeling since the last workout?
- Have you had any aches and pains since your last workout?
- Do you feel like you're well rested coming in?

The answers to the above will give the trainer context and determine how the trainer may modify the client's workout for that day. For example, if the client has an injury and can't perform a certain exercise, the trainer will probably remove that exercise and potentially replace it with something more appropriate. This fact finding exercise also enables the trainer to appropriately check in with the client during the workout.

Trainers must give good eye contact and show good body language throughout the *entire* client workout. If a trainer looks less engaged, even if they are behind the client during an exercise, other clients will notice and will not want to work with that particular trainer in the future. If you're looking to scale your business, this is problematic since it's not ideal for clients to rely and work with only one or, in some cases, a few trainers.

During conversation with the client, the trainer should make an effort to enable the client to talk more than them and direct the conversation about the client rather than the trainer. It's okay for the trainer to give their opinion or tell their story to the client a little, but the focus should be on the client. Discover Strength summarise this pointer with: "When the client talks you win, when you talk you lose."

Lastly, they should use some of the time with the client to provide that week's teaching focus and promotional focus ("This week I wanted to make you aware of …..") in a succinct and tailored fashion. With enough role play, this should flow naturally.

3. Read and Respond

This is arguably the most difficult pillar of a world class workout. The ability to coach clients effectively through a workout is highly nuanced and how much is nurture vs nature is debated. Needless to say, it takes a lot of experience for most trainers to get really good at this.

Firstly, the trainer will need to adjust the seat appropriately for the client and select the weights. Discover Strength use an exercise menu to help trainers setup clients and ensure a consistent standard across the personal training business. Again, there is some nuance to selecting the right settings and resistance, which improves with practice. If the client reports any pain during "Actively Listen" the trainer should modify the workout accordingly.

The trainer must cultivate the ability to motivate the client and help them get the most out of their workout. Once again, this is a very nuanced and complex skill set, which takes time to learn. As David explained, it requires "pure empathy", the ability to put yourself in the clients shoes for the entire workout. Next comes

finding the appropriate intensity and pushing the client to the level of fatigue they need and want. The trainer should be focused on individualising the experience and doing things during the workout that are aligned with the clients needs and wants.

David suggested that a experienced trainer might say to a client "we know that if you work at a higher degree of intensity and push yourself harder, chances are you're going to get better results, so how can I design your workout program to avoid exercises that you feel like you're going to mentally quit on and start to bring on exercises you can reach a higher level of intensity with?"

4. Feedback

Providing effective feedback to clients during a workout takes practice. Discover Strength trainers focus on providing true, specific, and positive feedback, which includes real time feedback on technique, and exercise mechanics such as correcting poor form or movement speed.

It's important to provide the client with performance related feedback during and after the workout. If the client has made a breakthrough, such as exceeding their previous total number of repetitions on a given exercise or increased their strength by 25%, it is highly motivating for the client to learn that. Moreover, the trainer should praise the client. These factors combine to provide a positive experience for the client that will lead to increased retention and frequency.

Before the workout, and to increase the likelihood that the client will perform well, the trainer might tell the client about their pervious performance and suggest a higher target in terms of repetitions or time-under-load for today's workout. The trainer might set a goal like "you've got ten exercises today, I want you to focus on improving on seven exercises".

5. Excellence at Failure

In order to optimise a clients workout, a trainer should know when to salt in a variety of advanced overload techniques, including forced repetitions, drop-sets, rest-pause, etc.

A trainer should always be with a client at failure or have a pre-determined failure/plan during both 1-on-1 and group sessions. This is important for two reasons. It provides the motivation necessary to push the client to their desired and required level of fatigue and enables the trainer to help the client if they can't get out of a machine or exercise safely without help after set completion.
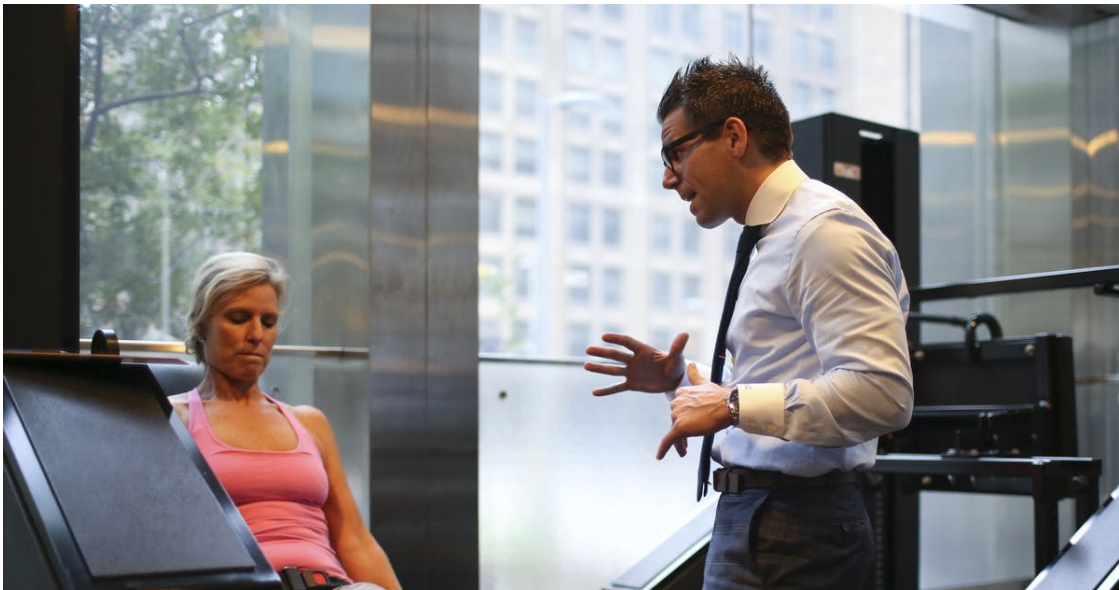
To meet all of the aforementioned principles during group workouts, trainers must cultivate a high level of awareness and will literally need to have their head on a swivel throughout the session to continuously observe the entire group.

At Discover Strength, every manager will have these five points to hand when watching trainers with clients. The managers take notes on how the trainer

performed on all five and gives feedback to trainers to ensure they continue to improve.

4. Internal Client Communications

It's very important that new information about a client and their status is communicated effectively between personal trainers. This means that each trainer is aware of a client's injuries or limitations, which must be taken into account when programming their workout.

Discover Strength use a client issues document for 1-on-1 clients. Trainers can make notes on the client's workout card, which other trainers will see. For group workouts, trainers make a note on the group workout card regarding any pertinent points like injuries and limitations. They use MINDBODY scheduling software to store notes from workout cards for all trainers to see.

Discover Strength use a "headlines" document to capture key issues related to client workouts, such as questions regarding a specific workout protocol that is used across the board. This document is reviewed in the weekly meetings. They use a Google Doc to track "big client events", which are then broken down into months. These are reviewed in the weekly meetings. The team will then decide who is going to hand write a card for said client regarding said event and who is able to attend the event. For example, Discover Strength sent a handful of trainers to cheer on clients during a marathon and to support a clients' church choir group. This means A LOT to clients, and will further contribute to client retention, frequency, and referrals.

At Discover Strength, trainers use Slack to communicate client issues to a particular location or trainer who's training said client in their next appointment.

They use Slack for all internal communications and email for external communications. This cuts down the use of email internally to boost productivity.

For more content on Operations Management, please go here.

5. The Importance of Upserving

Upselling is continually asking the customer to add extras or to buy items that they don't necessarily need. Upselling is about the need of the sales person to sell more. Upserving is about putting the customer first -- meeting their needs and wants.

To Upserve successfully, a trainer must understand their clients goals, which should be ascertained during their introductory workout and teased out further during client sessions as per the "Five Pillars of a World Class Workout".

For example, let's suggest a client is looking to compete in a body builder competition and is interested in optimising their training results. Having learnt this, the trainer might suggest modifying the client's existing exercise prescription to align with their goals. This might mean increasing their training frequency, Bod Pod services to measure changes to body composition, protein shakes, or a nutrition program, etc.

Again, the act of Upserving is role played on a weekly basis in the weekly meetings at each location. The importance of role play cannot be overstated. Practicing for these situations, means that trainers will come across natural, polished, and sell much more effectively.

Discover Strength create client avatars to role play against. This presents specific and realistic scenarios for trainers to tackle. For example, let's say a group training client has recently incurred an injury (outside high intensity training obviously!), the trainer might suggest a 1-on-1 session(s) and write a prescription based around the injury.

Cultivating the desire and skill to Upserve is highly effective at generating more sales and it alleviates the aversion that personal trainers often have to selling. Upserving shouldn't feel like selling.

All Discover Strength, personal trainers have the responsibility to Upserve and promote new offers, but NEW client acquisition is ONLY performed by a specific team within the business. This change of strategy has led to an enormous increase in introductory workout conversions to paid clients.

I hope this was helpful! Start a private coaching thread to tell me what else you need help with HERE