



## What I learned at the gym

**L**ife's lessons come in the strangest of places. Some of you might remember what I learned playing softball ([tinyurl.com/6tj7sct](http://tinyurl.com/6tj7sct)). Here are a few lessons I picked up at the health club.

**1 Some people don't follow the rules.** The gym is filled with all sorts of exercise equipment and weight machines designed to induce sweating. Signs posted around the facility remind members to wipe down the equipment as a courtesy to the next user. Most people abide by the rules, but I've seen too many folks either give the machine a cursory swipe with their sweaty towel or simply walk away, completely disregarding the rules. Just explaining the rules isn't enough. Some of your employees are going to look for ways to cut corners.

**2 Some people make up their own rules.** The pool has limited space, which often requires swimmers to share lanes. Longtime participants develop routines and rituals they don't like disturbed. Sometimes those traditions are bad habits no one has bothered to correct. Your longtime crewmembers might have their own bad habits. Rule enforcement must come from higher up.

**3 Groups take coordination.** My wife convinced me to take a group class (until recently, I was the only guy). The class is 60 minutes of pure torture. I'm convinced our instructor spends her week thinking up new ways to inflict pain. But she does keep the class flowing. And meeting the needs of 20 people at 20 different skill levels requires talent.

**4 Changing the size of a group also changes the group dynamic.** As I mentioned, sometimes each lane in the pool is filled with two, three or even four swimmers. When there are two, each can swim at his or her own pace and on their own side of the lane. Add a third person and to make it work, swimmers must travel in a circular pattern. It's not a

huge change, but it's key to success. Add a new person to any group and it changes the way that group interacts. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it is something you need to know.

**5 Encouragement helps.** Starting an exercise regimen is easy — I've done it dozens of times. The first week is easy and then something comes up. I miss a day and then another and another. So much for that plan. My latest attempt has lasted a year in large part because my wife has been encouraging and pushing me. Everyone has a bad day; regular encouragement and support are keys to ensuring your employees follow the plan. Marci is there when I need her to keep me on track. Who does that for your employees?

**6 Change it up.** My usual routine includes the elliptical machine followed by weights. But doing the same thing every day gets boring. Sometimes I'll use the treadmill or take a dip in the pool. There's comfort and value (efficiency and productivity) in having a familiar mode of operation. Employees become experts and are able to do their jobs that much better, but if it's needed, employees should have an opportunity to switch gears.

**7 It's important to show up.** I can't say I've made it to the gym every day in the past year, but I've averaged 4-5 days a week. And the results are apparent. My weight has dropped considerably and all those numbers doctors like to check have improved. Clients and employees appreciate consistency.

**8 It's important to treat yourself.** As dedicated as I am to getting my health back on track (see December 2011's column: [tinyurl.com/6wgg9cn](http://tinyurl.com/6wgg9cn)), never treating myself to something sweet (sugar-free, of course) would make the process exponentially more difficult. No matter what the business climate is, remember to have some fun. Your employees work hard for you. Reward them now and then.