



# THE COMPONENTS THAT MAKE A TRAINER SUCCESSFUL

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**P**rofessional personal trainers have been working in the fitness industry for many years, but the first certified personal trainer (CPT) certification offered to fitness professionals did not come until the late 1980s. This new certification brought with it more justification as a legitimate profession for personal trainers, even though these trainers had been training clients as a part-time profession for well over 50 years with no guidelines or certifications. During that time, many different stereotypes of fitness professionals evolved, but two types emerged as the most typical.

The first group of professionals typically talks a great game, over-charges for their services, and makes a good living doing so. These trainers talk like salesmen, produce minimal physical results with their clients, and often do not know a whole lot about how the human body works. But, they have a good following of clients because they are so personable, motivating, and inviting. Professionals in the second group invest their own time and money into learning more about the science of training. Education is typically their primary focus and they spend countless hours learning about program design, training techniques, and assessment strategies. In their eagerness to train clients, they may either under-charge for their service or give it away at no cost. Though not as personable, they have a loyal following of clients and make a decent living financially.

Both of these groups of professionals are capable of developing successful careers despite their different approaches, and have done so over the years. However, in recent years, fitness professionals have started combining the best attributes of both personality types to create an elite fitness professional. This merger has brought a higher level of education and a desire to learn, and mixed it with a personable and motivated personality to create a new standard for fitness professionals with very successful career paths. These career-driven individuals share some specific key components that have assisted them in upholding this new high standard.

## **EARNING AND MAINTAINING AN ACCREDITED CERTIFICATION**

Obtaining and maintaining a legitimate certification is an important component for the fitness professional, yet many personal trainers do not possess a certification. As of January 1, 2013, it is estimated that over 254,000 personal trainers claim to be employed in the fitness industry. However, the accredited certifying agencies that are recognized by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) do not recognize that many personal trainers as “certified.” This leaves thousands of trainers currently working in the field who are classified as “uncertified.”

## **PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE**

Many CPTs practice their trade without obtaining professional liability insurance, which leaves them unprotected if any legal issues should arise. Most companies cover their CPTs under their insurance policies, although there are some that do not. CPTs should both obtain liability insurance as a professional standard and as a preventative measure.

## **THOROUGH ASSESSMENTS**

There are some CPTs in the fitness industry that do not assess their clients or perform a health history review and physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) prior to training. Assessments (including body measurements and movement screens) can provide the opportunity for CPTs to learn about their clients’ physical limitations and training goals as well as to establish clients’ baseline physical statuses. This process provides the trainer the information needed to decide if the clients are both willing and able to participate in fitness programs. Potentially, it is negligent on the trainer’s part not to assess a client prior to participation since the risk for injury is greatly increased if a baseline of physical status is not established.

## CONSTANT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

The fitness industry is growing so quickly that some information thought to be correct as recently as five years ago is now being researched and found to be unsupported. There are many great minds working diligently within the fitness industry and their findings are available to fitness professionals. Conferences, clinics, seminars, webinars, online educational courses, books, journals, and self-studies are some of the many ways CPTs can increase their education. Continuing education is not only needed to maintain a certification, but it is also helpful in providing the CPTs' clients with the most up-to-date, scientific information available.

CPTs can also continue their education by studying for and earning secondary certifications. Not only do secondary certifications bring increased knowledge of specific subjects, but potentially a higher income as well. According to a 2010 study conducted by the American Council on Education, a secondary certification will earn, on average, an extra \$2,000-2,500 per year for part-time and/or full-time CPTs (1). These earnings are believed to be on an upward trend as the era of increased demand for high quality fitness professionals has begun.

These key components may seem rather basic, because they are. The problem in the past was that fitness professionals did not do them, or failed to do them consistently. However, things have changed dramatically over the last decade or so. The desire of trainers to be seen as reputable and of a high standard of quality has increased with this new generation of CPTs. They are committed to improving, keeping their certifications current, and taking the proper steps to not only protect themselves

professionally, but to assess their clients' abilities and help them reach their goals.

The consistent practice of all of these key components is vital to the success of fitness professionals entering the field today. Not only will these high standards improve the quality of professionals working within the fitness industry, but possibly their annual income as well. At one time, this was a part-time job that included a free gym membership, but it has now developed into a highly productive, successful, and financially vibrant career path. It is now up to the new generation of CPTs to uphold these standards, improve the quality of the service they provide, and become successful personal trainers.

## REFERENCES

1. American Council on Exercise. ACE's 2010 fitness salary survey results. 2010. Retrieved January 2014 from <https://www.acefitness.org/certifiednews/images/article/pdfs/SalarySurvey.pdf>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Robert Linkul is the National Strength and Conditioning Associations (NSCA) 2012 Personal Trainer of the Year and is a volunteer with the NSCA as their Southwest Regional Coordinator and committee chairman for the Personal Trainers Special Interest Group (SIG). Linkul has written for a number of fitness publications including Personal Fitness Professional, Healthy Living Magazine, OnFitness Magazine, and the NSCA's Performance Training Journal. Linkul is an international continued education presenter within the fitness industry and a career development instructor for the National Institute of Personal Training (NPTI).*

**TABLE 1. AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME FOR PERSONAL TRAINERS (1)**

	PART-TIME ANNUAL INCOME	FULL-TIME ANNUAL INCOME
<b>Certified Personal Trainer</b>	\$18,650	\$53,322
NCCA Accredited	(\$25.14 per hour)	(\$25.71 per hour)
<b>Secondary Certifications</b>	\$20,588	\$55,771
Tactical Strength and Conditioning	(\$26.23 per hour)	(\$26.74 per hour)
Olympic Lifting		
Suspension		
<b>Health &amp; Fitness Specialist</b>	\$25,470	\$47,163
Corrective Exercise		
Special Populations		
Weight Management		
<b>Elite Certified Personal Trainers</b>	\$60,000+	\$100,000+
Attained Secondary Certification		
Attained Specialist Certification		