

A SIMPLE SYSTEM FOR MANAGING QUALITY IN SMALL AND MEDIUM FITNESS CENTERS

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Small and medium fitness centers (SMFCs) often operate with limited staff, informal procedures, and minimal documentation. While this approach may feel efficient day-to-day, it can create serious problems when something goes wrong. Inconsistent records, unclear processes, and ad hoc decision-making can compromise client safety, weaken legal defense, and erode trust—even in well-intentioned facilities.

The challenge is not a lack of professionalism or expertise, but the absence of a simple, structured system for managing quality and risk. Many SMFCs rely heavily on personal trainers' experience rather than standardized processes, leading to inconsistent service delivery and increased liability exposure (11,15).

This article addresses that gap by introducing a Mini Quality System (MQS)—a practical, scaled-down quality management framework inspired by ISO 9001 and designed specifically for SMFCs. Rather than requiring full certification or extensive resources, the MQS focuses on applying core quality management principles in a way that is realistic and actionable for smaller facilities. By reading this article, personal trainers and facility owners will learn:

- Why quality management systems matter, even in small operations
- How ISO 9001 principles can be adapted to everyday fitness practice
- What essential processes and documents form an effective MQS
- How tools such as internal audits, document control, and client feedback can improve consistency, safety, and accountability

Ultimately, this article provides a clear roadmap for improving service quality, reducing risk, and strengthening long-term business sustainability—without overwhelming staff or budgets.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF ISO 9001

ISO 9001:2015 is a global standard for quality management used by over one million organizations worldwide, with the goal of ensuring operations are client-focused, measurable, and continuously improving. While commonly associated with manufacturing, ISO 9001 principles are also widely applied in healthcare and service-based industries (3). Rather than prescribing specific tools, ISO 9001 encourages organizations to define, monitor, and improve processes that consistently meet client needs (7).

THE SEVEN QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

ISO 9001:2015 defines seven core principles (8):

1. **Customer Focus** – Prioritize client needs and satisfaction
2. **Leadership** – Establish clear quality goals and accountability
3. **Engagement of People** – Involve all staff in quality efforts
4. **Process Approach** – Standardize and manage key workflows
5. **Improvement** – Promote continuous enhancement
6. **Evidence-Based Decision Making** – Use reliable data to guide decisions
7. **Relationship Management** – Foster partnerships with clients and stakeholders

Although risk management is not listed as a standalone principle, risk-based thinking underpins all ISO 9001 principles. This approach requires organizations to proactively identify and mitigate potential failures.

APPLYING A MQS IN SMFCs

Achieving full ISO 9001 certification requires substantial investment in documentation, staffing, and financial resources—often beyond the reach of SMFCs. However, even without certification, applying ISO 9001 principles can significantly enhance quality, safety, and operational sustainability (4). The MQS integrates ISO 9001 principles with the authors' applied experience. It includes both:

- Service processes (e.g., client onboarding, program delivery, feedback collection)
- Quality management processes (e.g., internal audits, document control)

This article outlines the key processes needed to build an MQS, designed primarily from a customer-oriented perspective and adaptable to each SMFC's size, services, and risk profile.

TRANSLATING ISO 9001 PRINCIPLES INTO FITNESS PRACTICE

Designing an effective MQS requires translating ISO 9001 principles into daily operational practice. Table 1 illustrates how these principles can be interpreted within the context of fitness center operations.

TABLE 1. TRANSFER ISO 9001 PRINCIPLES TO FITNESS PRACTICE

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS	PRACTICE FOCUS
Customer Focus	Understand and meet client needs	Smart goals Legal management Health professional referrals Tailored programs Satisfaction tracking
Leadership	Lead with clear quality objectives	Promote service quality culture Safety and risk management
Engagement of People	Empower and involve staff	Maintain valid certifications Encourage continual education Promote teamwork
Process Approach	Manage steps as interrelated processes	Standardized process and documentation Monitor process
Improvement	Continuous service enhancement	Conduct internal audits Review performance Track satisfaction
Evidence-Based Decisions	Collect and use reliable data	Analysis assessment method Data-driven program design Maintain session log
Relationship Management	Build strong partnerships	Scope of practice Handle complaint Engage community

DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL MQS PROCESSES AND DOCUMENTS

Once ISO 9001 principles are understood, the next step is identifying the essential documents that support daily operations.

The MQS follows a logical sequence, beginning with:

1. Client onboarding
2. Health screening
3. Program implementation
4. Feedback collection
5. Quality review

Table 2 outlines the core documents aligned with each stage of this process, reflecting both ISO 9001 principles and the authors' practical experience.

All MQS documents should be customized based on:

- Business size
- Client population
- Staff composition

Additionally, documents must align with local laws, policies, and cultural considerations. Legal counsel is recommended during document development.

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TABLE 2. ESSENTIAL MQS DOCUMENTS ALIGNED WITH OPERATIONAL PROCESS FLOW

DOCUMENTS	WHEN TO USE	PURPOSE	STORAGE	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	RESOURCES	ISO 9001 PRINCIPLE
Documents Master List (Table 3)	Ongoing updates as needed	Standardized processes and documentation	Digital/paper	Management	Authors' experience	Process approach/ leadership/ improvement
Client Goal Form	Initial consultation	Define SMART goals	Digital/paper	Staff	(1)	Customer focus
Service Contract/ Agreement	Prior to screening	Formalized service terms	Digital/paper	Management	(14)	Customer focus
PAR-Q+	Prior to assessments	Medical clearance screening	Digital/paper	Staff	(2)	Customer focus
Health Risk Questionnaire	Prior to assessments	Identify cardiovascular and health risks	Digital/paper	Staff	(14)	Customer focus
Liability Waiver	Prior to assessments	Manage legal risk	Digital/paper	Staff	(14)	Customer focus
Physician Referral Form	As needed	Collaborating with medical professional	Paper only	Staff/ management	(14)	Customer focus/ relationship management
Fitness Assessment Form	Prior to program design	Establish baseline, track progress	Digital/paper	Staff	(14)	Customer focus/ evidence-based decisions
Training Plan and Session Log	During program implementation	Record training data, monitor performance	Digital/paper	Staff	(1)	Customer focus/ evidence-based decisions
Safety and Facility Maintenance Checklist	Regular intervals	Ensure facility and equipment safety	Digital/paper	Management	(1)	Process approach
Policies and Emergency Procedures	Regular intervals	Standardized emergency response	Paper/post	Management	(14)	Process approach
Internal Audit (Table 4)	Monthly to annually	Verify implementation and improvement	Digital/paper	Management	Authors' experience	Leadership/ improvement
Certification and Validity List (Table 5)	Regular intervals	Track expiry dates of certifications	Digital	Management	Authors' experience	Engagement of people
Satisfaction Survey (Table 6)	Monthly or end of program	Measure client feedback	Digital survey/ paper form	Management	Authors' experience	Leadership/ improvement/ relationship management

FILLING GAPS IN PRACTICE: MQS OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Although the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) and other professional organizations provide general recommendations for professional conduct, training safety, and facility operations, they often fall short in addressing quality management systems.

To close these gaps, the MQS introduces several operational tools tailored to the unique challenges of SMFCs. These tools function as practical mechanisms to:

- Monitor service quality
- Reduce operational risk
- Support staff development
- Manage processes and documentation

MQS DOCUMENT CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

All quality management system documents should be organized within a version-controlled master list to prevent outdated

materials from being used. Table 3 presents a recommended structure for document control.

INTERNAL AUDITS

According to ISO 9001, internal audits are essential for verifying process adherence, ensuring documentation accuracy, and supporting continuous improvement (7). While ISO-certified organizations typically conduct full audits semiannually or annually, this frequency may be unrealistic for SMFCs during early MQS implementation. A more practical approach is to conduct monthly partial audits, each focusing on a specific process.

Once operational consistency is achieved, audit frequency can be reduced to balance quality oversight with limited staffing resources. Regardless of frequency, internal audits should:

- Be led by the facility owner or a designated supervisor
- Actively involve all staff members

TABLE 3. EXAMPLE OF MQS DOCUMENTS MASTER LIST

DOCUMENTS NAME	VERSION	UPDATE HISTORY
Client Goal Form	V1	
Service Contract/Agreement	V1	
PAR-Q+	V2	Update to 2023 PAR-Q+ (May 10, 2023)
Health Risk Questionnaire	V1	
Liability Waiver	V3	Update per legal counsel (Jan 17, 2025)
Physician Referral Form	V1	
Fitness Assessment Form	V1	
Training Plan and Session Log	V1	
Satisfaction Survey	V1	
Safety and Facility Maintenance Checklist	V2	Update for new equipment (Aug 2, 2024)
Policies and Emergency Procedures	V1	
Internal Audit Checklist	V1	
Certification and Validity List	V6	Annual update

TABLE 4. SAMPLE SIMPLIFIED INTERNAL AUDIT CHECKLIST

AUDIT DATE	AUDITOR NAME		
NO.	AUDIT ITEM	OBSERVATIONS	REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS
1	Client health screening		
2	Trainer certifications valid		
3	Training records complete		
4	Client satisfaction tracking implemented		
5	Facility and equipment inspections documented		
6	Emergency procedures available and updated		
7	Corrective actions tracked and closed		

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This inclusive approach encourages open discussion, improves staff engagement, and reinforces a culture of continuous improvement. Table 4 provides a sample internal audit checklist.

CERTIFICATION VALIDATION TRACKING

Tracking certification validity is essential for legal compliance and professional credibility. While many facilities display certifications publicly, this approach complicates renewal tracking. The authors recommend using an electronic certification tracking system with automated reminders—especially for staff holding multiple certifications from different organizations. A sample tracking format is provided in Table 5.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Customer satisfaction serves as a key performance indicator (KPI) within the MQS framework. Regular surveys—conducted electronically or on paper—provide measurable insights to guide improvement efforts. To promote honest feedback, anonymous responses may be used. Table 6 includes a sample customer satisfaction survey.

FLEXIBLE APPLICATIONS OF THE MQS

Beyond the framework presented here, SMFC owners may adapt the MQS based on their specific operational needs, including:

- Client demographics
- Legal and regulatory requirements
- Unique safety or risk considerations

EXAMPLE: RISK-FOCUSED MQS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

As an example, the authors present an MQS framework developed for a facility serving older adults and special populations.

In this setting:

- All participants were medically approved
- Exercise programs were reviewed by healthcare professionals

This ISO 9001-aligned framework emphasizes risk and safety management and may serve as a reference for similar facilities (Table 7).

TABLE 5. EXAMPLE OF STAFF CERTIFICATION AND VALIDITY TRACKING

STAFF NAME	CERTIFICATION	VALID UNTIL
Xiao Ren	CSCS,*D, NSCA-CPT,*D TSAC-F,*D	Dec 31, 2026
Xiao Ren	CPR+AED	May 2, 2026
Mina Chong	NSCA-CPT	Dec 31, 2026
Mina Chong	CPR+AED	May 2, 2026
Daniel Yang	ACE-CPT	April 3, 2026
Daniel Yang	CPR+AED	March 2, 2026

TABLE 6. EXAMPLE OF SATISFACTION SURVEY

SATISFACTION	RANK (1 = EXCELLENT, 3 = POOR)	COMMENTS
Service Quality		
Trainer Professionalism		
Facility Cleanliness		
Achievement of Personal Goals		
Overall Satisfaction		

TABLE 7. RISK- AND SAFETY-ORIENTED MQS EXAMPLE

RISK AND SAFETY ITEM	SCENARIO	POTENTIAL IMPACT	MQS DOCUMENTS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
Falls and Injuries	Participant loses balance	High	Staff training records	Clean all areas before and after training lessons
			Safety and facility checklist	Inspect all equipment daily, including chairs
				Check restroom floor hourly to ensure dryness
Medical Emergency	Red flag symptoms during exercise	High	Emergency response plan	Conduct emergency drills every 6 months
			Staff CPR+AED training records	Retrain staff in CPR/AED every 6 months, even if certified
				Check emergency medicine before and after sessions and clearly label with client names
Equipment Malfunction	Treadmill stops abruptly	Medium	Safety and facility checklist	Increase equipment maintenance frequency from annually to quarterly
				Check all safety features (e.g., safety key, belt) before and after each session
Alzheimer's Patient Lost	Client leaves facility unattended	Medium	Staff training records	Count participants before and after exercise lessons
			Safety and facility checklist	Disable automatic door sensors before exercise lessons
Major Disaster	Earthquake	Medium	Emergency response plan	Protect all participation from immediate danger
	Fire alarm			Follow evacuation procedures to designated safe areas
	Electric power outage			

CONCLUSION

Quality management does not require formal certification to be effective. The MQS offers a practical way for SMFCs. Personal trainers can adapt it to their own needs, whether focusing on needs, risk management, or alignment with other standards (e.g., ISO 45001 or ISO 22000). Keeping simple, usable documentation and reviewing and improving it regularly can help reduce risk, strengthen client trust, and support long-term sustainability.

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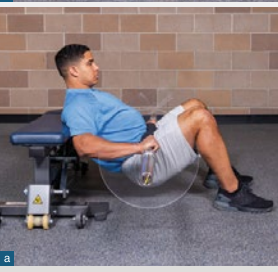
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THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE AVAILABLE FOR PERSONAL TRAINING

Chapter 13 Resistance Exercise Technique 331

WOODCHOP
Start behind the cable machine, with the feet positioned

Primary Muscles Trained
Internal and external obliques, transversus abdominis, rectus abdominis.

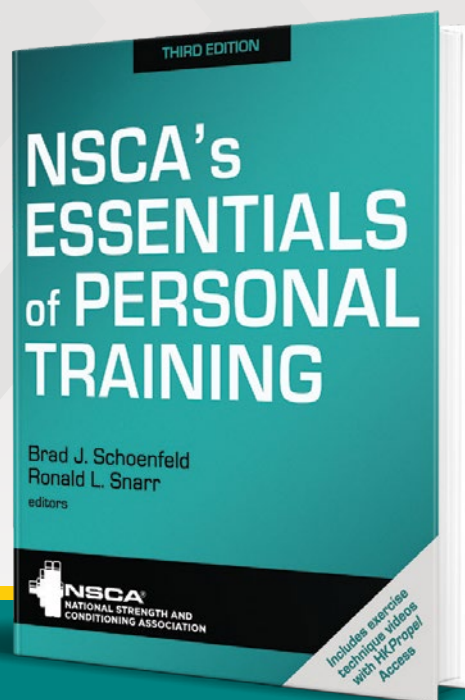
ABDOMEN AND CORE

CURL-UP
Starting Position
Assume a supine position on a floor mat. Flex the knees to bring the heels near the buttocks. Fold the arms across the chest or abdomen.
Upward Movement Phase
Flex the neck to tuck the chin toward the chest. Keeping the feet, buttocks, and lower back stationary on the mat, with arms folded across the chest, curl the torso toward the thighs and the upper back is off the mat.
Downward Movement Phase
Allow the torso, then the neck, to uncurl and extend back to the starting position.
Keep the feet, buttocks, lower back, and arms in the same position.
Common Errors
• Raising the feet off the mat during the upward movement phase.
• Raising the hips off the mat during the downward movement phase.

MACHINE ABDOMINAL CRUNCH
There are a variety of machine configurations for this exercise; the hand points describe the machine shown in the photos.
Starting Position
Sit in the machine with the upper arms pressed against the arm pads, feet under the ankle roller pads, and hands grasping the handles with a crossed grip.
Upward Movement Phase
Flex the hips and use the torso forward to curl the lower body and the upper body toward each other. Keep the upper arms and ankles pressed against their respective pads during the movement.
Downward Movement Phase
Join the feet and torso to uncurl and extend back to the starting position while keeping the feet, legs, buttocks, and arms stationary.
Keep the buttocks and back pressed against the seat and back pad and keep a firm grip on the handles.
Common Errors
• Raising the buttocks off the seat during the movement.
• Overreaching a pad with the legs or hands to help curl the torso.

Primary Muscle Trained
Rectus abdominis

Primary Muscles Trained
Erector spinae



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