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**6 Questions To Ask Before Hiring A Personal Trainer**

**By Jon Gestl**

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Once reserved only for the rich and famous, personal fitness training has hit the mainstream. A personal trainer is now as common as a pair of good cross trainers and a water bottle.

But unlike your hair stylist, your fitness trainer doesn't need to be tested and licensed by a state licensing board. Someone with little more than a great body—but no experience—can print business cards, call themselves a personal trainer, and take your money.

So if you're looking for a trainer, you're on your own. Here are six questions to ask trainers either in person or by phone before hiring them.

1. Can I have references?

This is the best way to get honest information. A prospective trainer should be more than happy to give you a list of at least three clients whom you can contact. Ask the references if they achieved their goals, how the trainer helped them to do so, and what they liked best about the trainer.

If the trainer refuses to give references or acts as though it is a major inconvenience, look elsewhere.

2. Through what organization are you certified?

Certification is a credential given by an agency or institution with its own educational and testing procedures. Quality credentialing agencies require a thorough, and often expensive, process of certifying trainers. Usually this includes written, oral and practical exam components. Other agencies will literally "sell" a certification as long as the check clears.

Current popular and reputable certification associations include the National Strength & Conditioning Association (NSCA), the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), and American Council on

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Exercise (ACE). Certification from any of these organizations doesn't guarantee trainer excellence but shows only that the person successfully passed the minimum requirements for certification. While important, certification is a factor that should be used in combination with all of the other information that you are collecting.

The trainer also should also be certified in CPR/First Aid and be able to show you the credentials.

### 3. What is your training/exercise philosophy?

A credible trainer should be able to explain a philosophy of exercise training. You don't need a doctoral dissertation here, only a description of how they help clients reach their goals. How do they train clients? How do they motivate them? Is there an assessment process? Find out as much as you can about how they work with clients to achieve goals.

What you are looking for here is a reflection of trainer credibility. If the trainer says something like "I kick my clients' butts...No pain, no gain, dude," thank them for their time and move on. Be an intelligent consumer. Ask for specifics and clarification if you don't understand something. This person is going to tell you how to exercise, give you lifestyle information and hold very heavy weights over your head.

### 3. How much do you charge and how do you expect payment?

Prices for personal fitness instruction vary widely based on where you live and trainer qualification and experience. As with everything else, you usually get what you pay for, but there's no guarantee that the most expensive trainer will be the best suited for you and your goals.

Talk to other people who have used fitness trainers. Or call health clubs near you to determine the average rate in your area. If the trainer is meeting you at your home, expect to pay slightly more than average. If you are meeting at a health club, prepare to cover the cost of a guest fee if there is one.

Get specifics on all fees and how payment is to be made. Some trainers charge on a per session basis, while others offer packages and discounted rates for a given number of pre-paid sessions. Some accept only cash. Others accept checks and credit cards. Most fitness trainers have some sort of cancellation policy. Agree on all financial obligations before the first session and insist that both parties sign a billing contract.

Avoid at all costs the trainer who responds to a question about fees with statements like "How much can you afford?" or "How much are you looking to spend?" This is someone who has their wallet—not your fitness goals—in mind.

### 5. How do they look?

You should never base your selection solely on physical appearance. A person with a flawless-looking body may not know the first thing about safely teaching you how to achieve your own goals. This is especially true if they have achieved their own results through things like drugs, eating disorders or

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exercise obsession.

The person you hire will be teaching you skills and lifestyle habits and doesn't need to look like a model in a fitness magazine. But trainers do need to practice what they preach. Let's face it. Are you really going to respect someone's opinion if you're in better shape than they are? Probably not.

6. What's your comfort level?

Above all, make sure you choose a trainer with whom you feel comfortable and whether their personality is a good match with yours. Above all, trust your instincts. Hiring someone with superior training knowledge is worthless if you don't feel comfortable. You need to trust, respect and feel at ease with them.

You wouldn't buy a pair of exercise shoes without at least trying them on to see if they're comfortable. The same concept holds for hiring a personal fitness trainer. Set up an interview, ask the right questions, and follow your instincts for the perfect fit.

Jon Gestl, CSCS, is a personal fitness trainer and instructor in Chicago specializing in in-home and in-office fitness training. He is a United States National Aerobic Champion silver and bronze medalist and world-ranked sportaerobic competitor. He can be contacted at

## How To Choose A Dog Trainer

By Chris Geldof

With so many dog trainers out there, it can be hard trying to choose the best one for your dog. Trying to determine which dog trainer is the best qualified to train your dog can be a difficult task.

The American Dog Trainers Network recommends the following criteria for choosing a dog trainer for your dog:

**Reputation:** Recommendations from your vet, other reputable trainers, friends that have had their dogs trained, etc. can help a lot in deciding which trainer to go with.

**Experience:** You should look into each potential trainer's background before deciding on your dog's trainer. Years of experience and areas of expertise are just a couple of things to look for. A good, professional dog trainer won't hesitate to answer your questions, so be prepared to ask a lot of them. Afterall, your dog is part of your family.

**Training methodology:** Reputable dog trainers care about every dog's welfare. They will know that harsh or abusive handling methods are counter-productive and not good for the dog in general.

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**Love for dogs:** The best dog trainers have a general love for dogs, or they wouldn't and shouldn't be involved in that line of work. You'll know a great trainer by his or her joy of living and working with dogs.

**Extensive behavioral knowledge:** Dedicated trainers keep up-to-date on all of the latest training methods by attending dog training and animal behavioral courses, conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. whenever possible. Make sure you inquire about any recent educational courses that the trainer has attended.

**Teaching and communication skills:** Dog trainers that have good teaching and communication skills make the learning process easier, quicker and more enjoyable for the dogs.

**Affiliation with reputable organizations:** You can always tell a good dog trainer by the organizations, associations and clubs that he or she is affiliated with.

**Ethics or profit?:** You should find out what motivates a potential dog trainer. Is he or she in it strictly for the money, or for their love of dogs?

Unless a dog trainer comes recommended by one or more reputable source, it really is a case of buyer beware. Anyone can call themselves a dog trainer. Do your homework when choosing a dog trainer for your dog. Your dog is part of your family, so you should put as much effort into choosing a trainer as you would in choosing your dentist. The wrong kind of training could damage your dog for life.

Chris Geldof is a dog lover and owns a dog-related website. Visit

for more information on dog obedience and dog training.

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